CHEAP AND Safe

The recent release of the new Airbus 20-year market forecast shows how resilient the airline industry is. After yet another decline in world traffic, the third since the early 1990s, airlines once again can expect growth and expansion at least as robust as before the global financial meltdown, and perhaps even a bit more as pent-up demand comes into play. Traffic has doubled every 15 years since the advent of deregulation in the mid-1970s, Airbus said, and will continue to do so in the future, with a 4.7 percent annual increase in revenue passenger kilometers. That means a lot of people flying in a lot of airplanes, requiring a lot of trained personnel, likely bringing back with a vengeance the personnel shortage threat that loomed several years ago.

Most of the new forecast is a minor variation on last year's, but I was struck by the expanded role low cost carriers (LCCs) will be taking in the world market. Already constituting 21 percent of the global airline market in terms of seats offered, Airbus says LCCs and large emerging markets will drive industry growth over the next two decades. Over the next 20 years, Airbus expects, LCCs will account for 30 percent of the nearly 17,000 single-aisle aircraft that will be sold. Since much of the emerging market growth will be fueled by people able to afford air travel for the first time, it certainly makes sense that LCCs will be the natural business model for capturing this new demand.

Many components of the LCC business model are common to carriers in that segment, one of the most important being a fierce focus on spending. One consequence is that LCCs are reluctant "joiners," preferring to avoid industry commitments that eat into finances and valuable personnel time. They will not sign up just because everyone else does; in fact, LCCs don't automatically do *anything* others — including other LCCs — do without serious consideration.

Unfortunately, this also applies to becoming a member of Flight Safety Foundation. With some notable exceptions I won't list out of fear of missing a couple, LCCs are obviously underrepresented in the FSF membership rolls. We do have a lot of members that are very small airlines with revenues smaller than most LCCs, usually due to home market size. However, they apparently believe that membership in the Foundation and participation in FSF activities are good safety investments, and I can't argue that. If your safety department is small for any one of a number of valid reasons, it makes sense to supplement it with FSF's resources.

As LCCs become an increasingly important segment of the world airline industry, their participation in industry-wide activities becomes more essential. We will continue to try to coax LCCs into the fold, but we can always use some help. If you work for an LCC, take a few seconds and check the FSF membership list on our new Web site to see if your company's name is there. If you can't find it, consider politely asking your safety department why not.

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