

# KEEPING IT Credible

Advocating safety in this remarkably safe industry isn't easy, as the people who read this magazine know. It is tough to stand up every day and suggest fixes for problems that haven't happened yet. It is even worse if you have to convince someone to spend money on a "risk" that doesn't seem real to them.

To do that job well, you have to do your homework and have a lot of conversations with yourself, asking if the risk you are attacking is real, or are you overstating the case? Just one overblown claim can compromise the credibility that is essential to our job.

Over the past year and a half, I have been working hard to make the case that all is not well in our aviation world. There are, in fact, big risks out there. That was a pretty easy position to justify when all the indicators were pointing toward record-setting growth that was overtaking the people and infrastructure that are essential to safety.

But what about now? Global financial markets have taken a pounding, and all the signs in the United States point toward recession. Do we still have a problem?

I am not an economist, but when I do my homework and ask the hard questions, this is where I come out: The world is definitely going to notice a U.S. downturn, but not the way it used to. Many areas around the world experiencing rapid growth have either a lot of oil or a lot of people. Oil dollars will continue to fuel expansion in places like the Middle East, Russia, West Africa and Indonesia.

In India and China, growth of the middle class has been driving transportation demand, and it is not going away. Growth may slow a bit, but the

change will be from overwhelming to robust. China already has been trying to slow the nation's overheated aviation growth because of the safety threat; a downturn will ease the Chinese task.

India has not controlled growth, and today it faces a serious shortfall in skilled aviation professionals and supporting infrastructure. Even a substantial slowdown will not relieve India's need to catch up; six months ago the situation looked impossible, six months from now it may improve to really difficult.

I have been asking airline and manufacturing executives what they think. They are not seeing a slowdown yet. Europe looks solid, and even the U.S., as of February, is not seeing a big traffic dropoff. Manufacturers have all achieved record-setting backlogs and those numbers are holding. However, air freight, a reliable leading indicator, is showing some softness.

So my conclusion is simple. We may catch a little bit of a break, but it will be brief and slight. History has shown that aviation growth rebounds quickly from economic setbacks. We need to use this time to build the base of people and infrastructure that can support that expansion. It is a tougher sell today, but it is still the right message. Look at the numbers yourself and make up your own mind. During the coming difficult times we must keep the message credible and focused.



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