

Top 10 International FBOs

No matter where in the world they go, travelers say customer service matters the most.

by Charles Alcock and Thomas Stocker

European facilities once again dominate AIN's list of top 10 international FBOs. However, the rising in the ranks of FBOs in the Middle East and Asia clearly reflects the strong business aviation growth in these emerging markets.

So what's new at these elite FBOs and what is it that has set them apart from the rest?

1	TAG Aviation, Farnborough, UK	8.61
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TAG Aviation's landmark facility at the London-area Farnborough Airport is—for the second consecutive year—the top-ranked FBO in the AIN international FBO survey. With the airport certain to hit its 28,000 annual movement limit this year, the facility is set to become Europe's most exclusive as well as its most popular.

Last year the airport—which TAG owns—received 26,507 movements, a 24-percent increase on the previous year. Even if this year shows a downturn in business aviation growth, it is now regarded as inevitable that Farnborough will hit the limit and will therefore not be able to accept more traffic.

TAG is about to start a campaign to raise its traffic limit, but in the meantime insists that its strong service ethos will in no way be undermined by the fact that it will effectively have to say “no” to more and more prospective customers. “Knowing that for the time being we will have a finite amount of traffic to handle will allow us to plan better for it and so ensure that we can maintain our high standards of service,” said TAG Farnborough chief executive Brandon O'Reilly.

The Farnborough FBO's eye-catching terminal building and adjoining hangars have fast established themselves as an icon of European business aviation. The company is now seeking approval to build three more sets of hangars to provide an additional 120,000 sq ft of covered aircraft parking space and offices for based operators. Some 50 aircraft already call Farnborough home and these often fill the existing 270,000 sq ft of hangars to capacity. By the time the new hangars are added, TAG's investment in Farnborough will total approximately \$360 million.

Customer service manager Sophie Lesnoff has built a close-knit team that aims to provide the sort of uncompromising, bespoke level of service that guests in exclusive hotels are accustomed to.



In fact, TAG is about to open its own hotel on site, mainly catering to visiting aircrew. The Dakota Group will run the Aviator Hotel for the company.

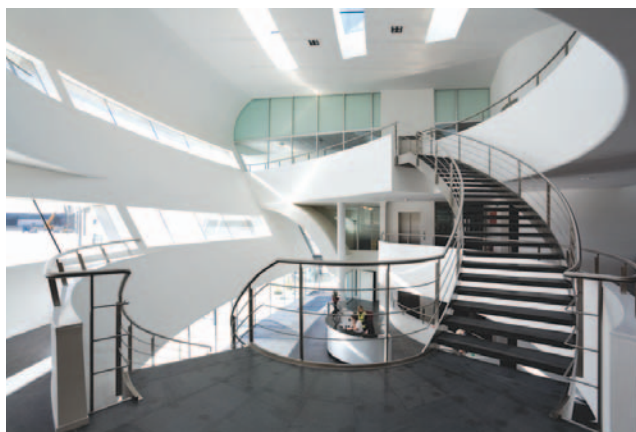
In February, TAG took full freehold ownership of the 581-acre Farnborough site, having previously operated the airport under a 99-year lease from Britain's Ministry of Defence. Last year TAG achieved its first operating profit on the Farnborough operation. The Geneva-based group is now considering opportunities to use its expertise to help establish FBOs in developing business aviation markets, almost certainly in partnership with other companies.

2	Hong Kong Business Aviation Centre/Signature Flight Support, Hong Kong	8.32
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This year marks the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Hong Kong Business Aviation Centre (HKBAC) at the then brand-new Hong Kong International Airport. The facility is owned by a consortium of shareholders, the most prominent being Sun Hung Kai Properties, The Kadoorie Group, China Southern Airlines and Signature Flight Support.

HKBAC occupies a large site featuring a two-story, 18,500-sq-ft terminal building with a pair of adjoining hangars (one 23,627 sq ft and the other 38,413 sq ft). It benefits from a sizable dedicated bizav ramp of 337,197 sq ft.

The 24/7 facility is a full-service FBO in every sense, with amenities such as



TAG Aviation's eye-catching facility at Farnborough, above and left, garnered the top spot on the top-40 list, with an overall average of 8.61, compared with last year's score of 8.55.

The Hong Kong Business Aviation Centre, below, expects double-digit annual traffic growth in the near future.



passenger and crew lounges, on-site customs and immigration clearance, flight planning, conference rooms, showers, line maintenance capability, aircraft cleaning, free wireless Internet connection, refueling, ground support equipment, catering, laundry, cellphone rentals and foreign currency purchases. HKBAC's multilingual staff is well equipped to assist with issues such as the visa and flight permit processes for traveling into and within mainland China. They also handle a wide array of concierge services such as ground transportation and hotel reservations.

Since 2000, the number of business aircraft movements handled annually by HKBAC has grown from just under 1,000 to almost 3,000 last year, and this double-digit annual traffic growth appears to be set to continue. According to the FBO, the airport is being more accommodating in providing slots for this category of traffic. This year, the airport is investing just over \$10 million to further expand the ramp area available to corporate and private aircraft operators.

3	Grafair Jet Center, Stockholm Bromma Airport, Sweden	8.30
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Stockholm Bromma Airport, located five miles from the center of the Swedish capital, is popular primarily with business aircraft passengers and crew. Grafair Jet Center was established in 2004 by Bengt Grafstrom, who has had extensive business aviation interests in Florida for the past three decades. His U.S. FBO experience has had a profound influence on the way he runs Grafair.

Grafstrom told **AIN** that to operate a genuine full-service FBO a company has to have control over its ramp space and key services such as security and de-icing. In Europe, many airports are either unwilling or unable to give an FBO this degree of autonomy.

After experiencing delays in getting snow and ice cleared by the airport, Grafair invested in its own equipment so as to eliminate the cause of delays for its customers. It also has its own tow-tugs and takes direct responsibility for moving aircraft to and from remote parking areas.

"Most FBOs in Europe are lousy," said Grafstrom, who also has experience as a consumer of handling services through the charter arm of Grafair, which operates three Cessna Citation IIs and a Hawker 800. "But this is mainly due to the restrictions they have to accept, such as not having sufficient parking spaces or separate airside access."

Grafair has been able to lease plenty of space from the Bromma management, including its own ramp and separate area for car parking. On this it has built a spacious executive terminal and an adjoining hangar. The company holds options on more land that would allow it to extend the ramp and add three or four more hangars.

"When an aircraft arrives, it is always met by at least one of our staff, there is always a red carpet, and it should take no more than 20 seconds for passengers to get into their taxi—including the time needed to check passports," explained Grafstrom. The goal for departing flights is for passengers to spend no more than 30 seconds getting from their car to the aircraft cabin.

Those passengers and crew who want to

linger longer will find creatively decorated lounges, with esoteric finishing touches such as a grand piano, a parrot, palm trees, an open fire and free ice cream for all visitors. The Swedish FBO also has dishwashing and fridges on site, to complement its longstanding arrangement with a leading Stockholm restaurant to provide in-flight catering for visiting operators.

Last year Grafair handled all 2,000 business aircraft flights into Bromma. The airport has scope to take more traffic between its set opening hours of 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. and subject to its weight limit of 50 tons (110,000 pounds).

Outside these hours, aircraft have to use Stockholm's much more remote Arlanda Airport. Grafstrom has been in talks with the Arlanda management with a view to establishing a dedicated bizav handling operation there but he is concerned that the larger airport will not be able to assure him of sufficient flexibility and control over the necessary infrastructure.

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FBO SURVEY RESULTS

COUNTRY	CITY	AIRPORT	FBO	Line Service	Pax Amenities	Pilot Services	Facilities	Overall Average
ASIA PACIFIC, FAR EAST								
China	Beijing	Capital (ZBAA)	Capital Jet	6.62	5.63	5.74	5.03	5.75
	Hong Kong	Hong Kong International (VHHH)	Signature	8.34	8.34	8.07	8.55	8.32
EUROPE								
Austria	Innsbruck	Innsbruck (LOWI)	Flughafen Innsbruck	7.23	5.92	6.81	6.58	6.63
	Vienna	Vienna (LOWW)	Vienna Aircraft Handling	7.91	7.37	7.65	7.49	7.60
Azores	Santa Maria, Azores	Santa Maria (LPAZ)	Servisair	8.00	5.88	6.85	6.04	6.74
Belgium	Brussels	Brussels National (EBBR)	Abelag Aviation	7.07	6.85	6.68	6.79	6.85
France	Cannes	Cannes-Mandelieu (LFMD)	Cannes Airport Handling	6.4	6.71	6.26	6.46	6.46
			Swissport Executive Aviation	7.16	6.16	6.45	5.99	6.44
	Paris	Le Bourget International (LFPB)	Aviapartner	5.98	5.80	5.73	5.69	5.80
			Universal Aviation	7.98	7.50	7.52	7.52	7.63
			Dassault Falcon Service	7.94	7.67	7.31	7.51	7.61
			Euralair Airport Services	7.65	7.32	7.52	7.40	7.47
Signature Flight Support	7.26	7.57	7.34	7.53	7.42			
Germany	Berlin	Berlin Tempelhof (EDDI)	TAG Aviation Berlin	7.57	6.78	7.30	7.14	7.20
	Dusseldorf	Dusseldorf (EDDL)	Jet Aviation	7.52	7.31	7.14	7.28	7.31
	Hamburg	Hamburg (EDDH)	Service People	8.00	7.29	8.41	7.88	7.90
	Frankfurt	Frankfurt Main Int'l (EDDF)	Fraport Executive Aviation	7.48	6.48	6.34	6.17	6.62
	Munich	Munich (EDDM)	MES Handling	8.26	8.00	8.4	7.91	8.14
Greece	Athens	Athens International (LGAV)	Signature Flight Support	6.22	6.22	6.16	6.22	6.20
Iceland	Keflavik	Keflavik (BIKF)	IGS Ground Services	8.03	5.94	6.73	6.03	6.69
Ireland	Dublin	Dublin (EIDW)	Signature Flight Support	6.38	6.07	6.00	5.85	6.07
	Shannon	Shannon International (EINN)	Signature Flight Support	8.16	6.48	7.15	6.27	7.05
Italy	Florence	Peretola (LIRQ)	Delta Aerotaxi	6.31	4.79	5.57	4.86	5.39
	Milan	Milan Linate (LIML)	Universal Aviation	7.09	6.41	6.82	6.35	6.67
			Ali Transporti Aerei	6.31	5.48	5.59	5.79	5.79
	Olbia	Costa Smeralda (LIEO)	Eccelsa General Aviation	7.33	8.57	7.47	8.40	7.94
Rome	Rome Ciampino (LIRA)	Universal Aviation	7.11	6.12	6.53	5.93	6.43	
Netherlands	Amsterdam	Schiphol (EHAM)	KLM Jet Center	7.69	7.02	7.37	6.87	7.22
Russia	Moscow	Moscow Domodedovo (UUDD)	Feras	7.07	6.33	5.93	6.00	6.33
		Moscow Vnukovo (UUWW)	Vipport FBO/Vnukovo	5.82	6.14	4.69	5.48	5.53
Spain	Barcelona	Girona-Barcelona (LEBL)	Euraservice	6.48	5.55	5.96	5.45	5.86
	Madrid	Madrid Torrejon (LETO)	Universal Aviation Spain	7.32	5.00	6.48	5.17	6.01
	Palma de Mallorca	Palma de Mallorca (LEPA)	Mallorcair	7.79	7.09	7.39	7.33	7.40
Sweden	Stockholm	Bromma (ESSB)	Grafair Jet Center	8.29	8.24	8.28	8.41	8.30
Switzerland	Geneva	Geneva (LSGG)	TAG Aviation	7.79	7.85	7.75	7.89	7.82
			Jet Aviation	7.93	7.82	7.53	7.83	7.78
	Zurich	Zurich (LSZH)	ExecuJet Switzerland/Aviation Ground Services	7.78	7.81	7.78	7.50	7.72
			Jet Aviation	7.91	7.16	7.35	7.02	7.36
Turkey	Istanbul	Istanbul Ataturk (LTBA)	Gozen Air Services	7.46	6.94	7.03	6.82	7.06
United Kingdom	Farnborough	Farnborough (EGLF)	TAG Aviation	8.43	8.65	8.56	8.81	8.61
	London	London Biggin Hill (EGKB)	Jet Aviation	7.85	7.78	7.44	7.44	7.63
			Biggin Hill Executive Aircraft Handling	7.11	6.89	7.06	6.69	6.94
		London Luton (EGGW)	Signature Flight Support	7.88	7.38	7.49	7.13	7.47
			Harrods Aviation	7.21	7.09	6.54	6.59	6.86
		London Stansted (EGSS)	Universal Aviation	8.56	7.67	8.05	7.36	7.91
Harrods Aviation	7.81	7.40	7.58	7.19	7.50			
MIDDLE EAST, AFRICA								
United Arab Emirates	Abu Dhabi	Abu Dhabi International (OMAA)	Royal Jet	7.84	8.08	7.88	8.00	7.95
	Dubai	Dubai International (OMDB)	Jet Aviation	7.55	7.41	7.31	7.59	7.47

Source: AIN 2008 Europe, Middle East, Asia and Africa FBO Survey. Overall average out of a possible 10.

Compiled by Jane Campbell with data provided by Forecast International of Newtown, Conn.

Yellow shaded area indicates FBOs with an overall average of 8.0 or higher.

Top 10 International FBOs

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4
**MES Handling,
Munich, Germany**
8.14

MES Handling is a long-established FBO at Munich Airport that claims a market share of some 90 percent of business aviation traffic at Germany's second major hub. The privately owned company has no plans to open other bases beyond the nation's borders.

However, last year, MES did open a new lounge in its facility at Oberpfaffenhofen Airport, which serves the southwest side of Munich. It is now preparing to upgrade its lounges in Munich's General Aviation Terminal. The company also has just obtained a license to start operating its own limousine service to avoid having

to rely on outside vendors.

Despite its already strong market share, MES has achieved an annual growth of 10 to 15 percent for the past eight years in line with the growing executive traffic at Munich. "We shall continuously strive to improve our offer still further; it is all a matter of service-oriented attitude," commented FBO manager Oliver Trono.

He told **AIN** that MES benefits from a good working relationship with an airport management that appreciates the importance of business aviation. Eurocontrol statistics show Munich to be one of Europe's busiest airports for this category of traffic.

MES believes that business aviation will continue to expand in Europe over the next few years and it is ready to

make further investments to share in this growth. The company has no plans to give up its independence but believes that consolidation in the FBO market will continue, with larger groups taking over smaller units.

5
**Royal Jet, Abu Dhabi,
United Arab Emirates**
7.95

Charter group Royal Jet operates from one of the Middle East's few purpose-built executive terminals in the Middle East and has been ranked by **AIN**'s pilot readership as the region's top FBO. But, even as it continues to improve the base at which it has operated since 2003, the company is working to develop a completely new business aviation enclave at Abu Dhabi International Airport to accommodate staggering growth in traffic. Abu Dhabi—which is preparing to triple the size of its airport—wants to have the Middle East's foremost business aviation hub, a position currently held by its neighboring emirate and rival Dubai.

The new center is set to open by early 2010 and will be at least five times the size of the existing facilities. It will incorporate an executive terminal, offices, hangars and extensive ramp space. The

FBO will provide ground handling and extensive maintenance, repair and overhaul capability. It will offer significantly more space for Royal Jet's headquarters, as well as for visiting crews and flight planning.

The most pressing need is for more ramp space since the existing FBO is now receiving about 150 aircraft per month. Twelve of these are from Royal Jet's own fleet and it is preparing to increase this to 50 aircraft by 2020. As a stop-gap measure, the airport is to provide some more hangar space in the existing business aviation enclave and this should be available by year-end. Last year saw a 90-percent increase in traffic using the existing Abu Dhabi FBO.

"There are not many real FBOs in the Middle East," Royal Jet chief executive Shane O'Hare told **AIN**. "We believe there is a strong opportunity to develop facilities in the region and we are in a good position to exploit this, as the dominant charter operator here.

"It's like running a great hotel with strong front and back of house staff," said O'Hare. "The customer sees timeliness, sensitivity, privacy and special warm hospitality. Royal Jet has been successful in

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*Munich's MES Handling moved up one spot in **AIN**'s international FBO survey between this year and last year. Last year the company occupied the fifth spot and garnered an overall rating of 7.88.*

Top 10 International FBOs

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this because as an operator it is a focused service provider. Our service pedigree comes from our role as the Abu Dhabi Royal Flight and this translates through to our FBO. We regularly receive high-profile customers regularly and the entry-point standard is extremely high.

“Good FBO staff is customer-focused, which can be a challenge with operational people,” said O’Hare. “Our people cross over between the two roles.”

Royal Jet now employs its own executive chef who works closely with visiting aircraft on catering requirements. The company has also hired a hospitality and aviation training organization to further raise service standards both on its aircraft and at the Abu Dhabi FBO. “We want to innovate and stay ahead,” concluded O’Hare.

In Royal Jet’s view, there are good opportunities to establish real FBOs in places such as Doha, Muscat and Egypt. “The more control we have over the customer experience on the ground, the better for our business,” concluded O’Hare.

6	Eccelsa Aviation, Olbia, Italy	7.94
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Eccelsa Aviation takes its name from the Italian word for excellence. It needs a big name to live up to because its fabulously opulent clientele—the rich and famous who flock to Sardinia’s exclusive Costa Smeralda resort region—are demanding customers.

The FBO opened in 2003 and the privately owned company has already started construction of a 43,000-sq-ft terminal. This will be more than double the size of its existing facility and will also have its own 10-hectare ramp space to accommodate the rapid increase in business aircraft wanting to fly into Olbia—especially during the peak summer season. During July and August, Eccelsa often receives 160 movements each day, and this figure can include widebody executive transports such as Boeing 747s, for which the company has had to purchase dedicated ground support equipment.

To accommodate the growth in business aviation traffic, Abu Dhabi-based Royal Jet is preparing to move its facility to a new bizav enclave at Abu Dhabi International Airport.

The new terminal will be complete this year but Eccelsa will not relocate until after the summer season, which can extend into early October. According to managing director Francesco Cossu, Eccelsa is investing around \$30 million in the new FBO.

The new terminal will feature a large canopy to shield passengers and crew from the weather, an idea that Cossu picked up during visits to U.S. FBOs. This will be large enough to shelter Boeing Business Jets and will be the only one in Italy. Like the existing terminal, it will feature exclusive stores selling designer eyewear, jewelry and watches, as well as local delicacies.

Eccelsa Aviation’s greatest challenge is dealing with peaks and troughs in demand that see 80 percent of its business arrive during the summer months. “The danger is that you can lose good people who need more work than just the summer season,” explained Cossu. “The value of having the right people for our company is high. Building a good team takes time so you don’t want to lose anyone.”

The FBO’s full complement of staff is about 40 people. Eccelsa operates a staff rotation system so that everyone gets about eight months of work over the course of the year.

Eccelsa is prepared to open FBOs at other locations if the right opportunities come along. Cossu said that he has already had some discussions with prospective partners at airports on the Italian mainland.

The past five years have seen an enormous growth in traffic coming to the Costa Smeralda. The question now is how much more this goldmine of wealthy tourism can take. Most hotels are now full throughout the season, as is the marina and all the choice villas. Eccelsa is expecting to see further growth of between 5 and 7 percent this year.

Cossu said his FBO’s goal is always to make an extremely good first impression on



Last year Eccelsa Aviation, left, nearly cracked the top 10, taking the 12th spot. This year the company made a top-10 showing. The company is building a larger terminal, which it will occupy later this year.

Top 40 International FBOs

RANK	FBO	CITY	Overall Avg
1	TAG Aviation	Farnborough	8.61
2	Signature Flight Support	Hong Kong	8.32
3	Grafair Jet Center	Stockholm	8.30
4	MES Handling	Munich	8.14
5	Royal Jet	Abu Dhabi	7.95
6	Eccelsa Aviation	Olbia	7.94
7	Universal Aviation	London	7.91
8	Service People	Hamburg	7.90
9	TAG Aviation	Geneva	7.82
10	Jet Aviation	Geneva	7.78
11	ExecuJet Switzerland/Aviation Ground Services	Zurich	7.72
12	Jet Aviation	London	7.63
	Universal Aviation	Paris	7.63
14	Dassault Falcon Service	Paris	7.61
15	Vienna Aircraft Handling	Vienna	7.60
16	Harrods Aviation	London	7.50
17	Euralair Airport Services	Paris	7.47
	Jet Aviation	Dubai	7.47
	Signature Flight Support	London	7.47
20	Signature Flight Support	Paris	7.42
21	Mallorcair	Palma de Mallorca	7.40
22	Jet Aviation	Zurich	7.36
23	Jet Aviation	Dusseldorf	7.31
24	KLM Jet Center	Amsterdam	7.22
25	TAG Aviation Berlin	Berlin	7.20
26	Gozen Air Services	Istanbul	7.06
27	Signature Flight Support	Shannon	7.05
28	Biggin Hill Executive Aircraft Handling	London	6.94
29	Harrods Aviation	London	6.86
30	Abelag Aviation	Brussels	6.85
31	Servisair	Santa Maria, Azores	6.74
32	IGS Ground Services	Keflavik	6.69
33	Universal Aviation	Milan	6.67
34	Flughafen Innsbruck	Innsbruck	6.63
35	Fraport Executive Aviation	Frankfurt	6.62
36	Cannes Airport Handling	Cannes	6.46
37	Swissport Executive Aviation	Nice	6.44
38	Universal Aviation	Rome	6.43
39	Feras	Moscow	6.33
40	Signature Flight Support	Athens	6.20

Source: AIN 2008 Europe, Middle East, Asia and Africa FBO Survey. Overall average out of a possible 10. Compiled by Jane Campbell with data provided by Forecast International of Newtown, Conn.

Yellow shaded area indicates FBOs in the Top 10.

the passengers and crew he serves. "But we are always asking ourselves whether we are giving enough," he added. The company has not increased handling prices for the past three years and has no plans to do so at least until next year.

Eccelsa enjoys a good relationship with the Olbia Airport management, which clearly appreciates the prestige that the private jets bring to the area. But as Cossu considers the possibility of opening new businesses elsewhere he is well aware that this is not the case everywhere.

"It is difficult to change the FBO business. The hardest thing is to make the airport authorities understand that private aviation needs to be treated differently and that the rules need to reflect this," commented Cossu. "We need to encourage people to use private aviation and make it easier. This is changing, but I wish it was faster."

Similarly, Eccelsa has faced a battle to get fuel suppliers to be more responsive to business aircraft operators' need for fast turnarounds. They still tend to give priority to the airlines but the situation is improving.

"I am in the business because I believe it is a good business. It is worth the effort," concluded Cossu. "We have to fight against costs; the bottom line has to stay black and this is hard in a seasonal place."

7	Universal Aviation, London Stansted, UK	7.91
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Universal Aviation's base at Stansted Airport is never going to win any architecture awards, but its prize assets—extraordinary operational knowledge and an uncompromising culture of customer service—are almost certainly of much greater value to the business aircraft crews and their passengers. The group is first and foremost a trip support specialist and prides itself on taking a holistic approach to making all aspects of a flight go well.

"We aim to do just about everything other than fly the airplane," said Sean Rafferty, managing director of Universal Aviation UK. As with Universal's trip planning teams worldwide (some 60 sites in total), the goal is to help operators circumvent the many potential pitfalls that await business aircraft operators in terms of access and logistical problems. There are few more challenging environments than the crowded London area, where all airports are subject to restrictions and complex operational issues.

Operating business aircraft globally is getting increasingly complex due to factors



Universal Aviation's facility at London Stansted focuses on providing trip support and does almost everything but fly the airplane. The Stansted facility nearly cracked the top 10 last year, with its 7.71 rating earning it the 11th spot.

such as changing requirements for customs, immigration and security screening. "Quite simply, operators need to select the right FBO to help them cope with all these issues. It is too complex for them to do their own handling," maintained Rafferty.

"Our people, culture and training are

the keys to our being able to get customers exactly what they want, and indeed to exceed their expectations," said Rafferty. "They can benefit from full access to the Universal database, and the secret of success for us is making it appear to the

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customer as if we have done nothing at all to make the trip a success.”

The starting point for making Universal’s service delivery appear this seamless is to anticipate all possible issues with a trip, and this can come only from years of experience and a genuine desire to put yourself in the

clients’ shoes. “Anticipation is everything, and this means engaging with clients as early as possible to understand what matters to them and their different ways of working,” explained Rafferty. “We believe that we get so much repeat business because we take so much time to get to know clients’ operations and to

build our relationships.”

Universal’s reward has been a 50-percent growth in its handling business at Stansted last year—generated by rising levels of traffic and claimed increase in local market share. It competes with Harrods Aviation and Inflight at Stansted.

In addition to passenger and

crew lounges, Universal Stansted offers a crew business center that gets heavy usage with pilots increasingly dependent on high-speed Internet access and flight planning databases. The FBO has been approved to the safety standards for handling set by the U.S. National Air Transportation Association and it claims to

be the only UK facility to hold this approval.

The Stansted site is also home to Universal’s European operations center, which offers trip planning services to Europe-based operators traveling within Europe (in tandem with the group’s main trip planning center in Houston). The company is aiming to extend the geographical reach of the European center. Out of a total staff of 40 people employed at Stansted, about 12 are dedicated to handling and another 12 to the European operations center, and these numbers are set to rise. Universal is also investing in more ground equipment to make it fully responsive to growing demand for handling, including from widebody executive aircraft operated by various head-of-state flight departments.

8	Service People, Hamburg, Germany	7.90
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Service People of Hamburg is an independent FBO set up in 1988 by Barbara Loehnert and her brother Knud. At the time, both were working in the main part of Hamburg Airport and noticed that the services the airport provided for visiting executive aircraft left a lot to be desired. They set up their own company to fill the gap and their venture has proved successful, with repeated triumphs in AIN surveys over much larger facilities. In their 20 years of operation, airport facilities have improved for Service People and its customers, including the addition of a dedicated executive terminal 15 years ago.

Service People is no longer the only FBO at Hamburg. Business traffic has been increasing steadily after a dip in 2001, and space is getting scarce in the general aviation enclave, mainly because more stringent security rules require additional space. These new requirements may also lead to landing and handling price increases.

On the other hand, ramp space is adequate and the FBO has rented additional parking space for customer cars and created a summer garden to complement its passenger and pilot lounges.

Based on its experience, the Loehnert family believes that locally based FBOs provide the best service. “We have our roots here and know everybody at the airport,” noted Barbara Loehnert. Based on that philosophy, Service People’s owners have no ambitions of expanding to other airports but do believe there is more business to be had at Hamburg

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International, the only large airport in the area.

Hamburg is an important business center in Northern Germany, with one of Europe's largest sea ports, shipbuilding activities from luxury yachts to cargo ships, and an important Airbus plant, as well as many other industrial and business ac-

tivities. Lufthansa Technik has a large completion and maintenance facility at the airport.

The only significant criticism Loehnert has of her base airport is that the established fuel suppliers do not face enough competition and that this does not help to exert downward pressure on the price. Generally speaking, the

airport still seems to prefer airlines with plenty of fee-paying passengers to executive traffic.

9	TAG Aviation, Geneva, Switzerland	7.82
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Eturk Yildiz, handling manager at TAG Aviation Geneva, is an old hand in the business,



TAG Aviation's Geneva facility shares the site with several other FBOs. To distinguish itself, the company has purchased its own handling equipment so customers don't have to rely on anyone else.

having previously worked for Aeroleasing in the 1980s. Geneva Airport has enjoyed strong growth of business aviation traffic over the past five years, with its share of total traffic at the airport having risen over this period from around 20 to 30 percent. There are now an average of 48 bizav movements each day at the airport, shared among four licensed handlers—TAG Aviation, Jet Aviation, Ruag (formerly Transairco) and PrivatPort. Competition among them is stiff, but relations are friendly, as they are also suppliers and customers of each other for various equipment and services.

TAG and Jet Aviation rent their facilities in a dedicated executive terminal built by PrivatAir on airport land in 2003 at the southern end of Geneva's single Runway 05/23, and all three share a common customs and border police checkpoint. Ruag is located on the west side of the runway.

Yildiz pointed out that the 40-percent share of total business aviation handling claimed by his company would quickly shrink with decreasing customer satisfaction. "Our customers are loyal and will forgive us an occasional mistake, but we cannot hide from them that we have able competitors right next to our facilities. Our neighbors would be only too happy to take over our dissatisfied customers," he acknowledged. He believes that the main reasons for customers to stay with his company are good service, trust and appropriate facilities.

The customer base of TAG's Geneva FBO is made up of about one third of aircraft managed worldwide by the company and two thirds of visiting aircraft of operators not connected to TAG. Based on his personal experience from work at other airports, Yildiz considers that service levels at Geneva are among the best in Europe, both for services provided by the airport and by handlers, and relations with the airport are

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Top 10 International FBOs

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excellent. However, he echoed the common complaint of European FBO managers that fuel suppliers are not sufficiently responsive to their operators' needs, preferring to focus on the airlines.

Investing in further growth, last year TAG acquired a large de-icing truck. "If we have our own equipment, we are sure to have it

available when needed for our customers," explained Yildiz. The company owns other heavy ground equipment at Geneva airport, such as tractors and GPUs for large aircraft, and the TAG maintenance shop, located next to the handling facility, can provide line maintenance for operators as required. TAG subcontracts only

a few of the services it offers, such as catering.

Looking to the future, Yildiz predicts that TAG will expand into new markets in Russia and Asia. He believes that despite increased consolidation among large FBO groups, there will be room for competition, including from small independent handlers.



Tied for fifth place in last year's survey with an overall rating of 7.88, Jet Aviation's Geneva facility this year earned a score of 7.78.

10	Jet Aviation, Geneva, Switzerland	7.78
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Jet Aviation has been present at Geneva Airport for more than three decades. The FBO currently employs well over 100 staff in both maintenance and executive handling activities. The handling is based in modern facilities in the airport's C3 executive terminal, but manager Bernard Ratsira pointed out that customers want above all streamlined service and efficient solutions for any problem rather than long waits in lavish lounges.

That said, Jet Aviation offers customer and pilot lounges with Internet connections, bathrooms with showers, and a conference room free of charge for visitors preferring a short meeting at the airport with their business partners to a longer stay in Switzerland. The FBO's amenities also include flight planning and dispatch, limousine service, valet parking and hotel reservations. Jet Aviation shares customs and border police services at Terminal C3 with TAG and PrivatPort.

Large Maintenance Shop

Jet Aviation operates a large worldwide fleet of managed executive aircraft, but Ratsira noted that aircraft handled by the Geneva FBO are mostly visitors not related to Jet Aviation. The fact that the group has a large maintenance shop at Geneva may influence the choice of the FBO in some cases.

The company also has good relations with charter brokers, many of whom reportedly recommend Jet Aviation to their customers, but Ratsira is convinced that good service, trust and personal relations with pilots are the main motives in the choice of an FBO. "Of the 21 people we employ in our FBO, 70 percent have been with Jet Aviation for more than ten years. So we know our customers, and they know us," he concluded. □