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LET'S BE HONEST

ELEPHANTS & MONKEYS' CHRIS BLUMENTHAL ON AIRCRAFT COMPLETION DREAMS AND REALITIES

"I have some bad news. Your new aircraft won't be able to fly nonstop from Moscow to New York in winter." This was one of the first things I had to tell a client. It was unpleasant news to hear, and no joy to say. It was, however, the honest truth and especially bad news because his previous aircraft could make the same trip year-round. From his perspective, the new aircraft was similar in size to his current one, so their capabilities should have been the same.



“ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS AND LISTENING TO THE ANSWERS IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE PROCESS.”

How did this happen?

I was brought in after the deal was done and the interior completion started. Who knows what questions were asked during selection and design or how honestly those questions were answered? What I do know is this: the right questions were not asked early enough and they weren't answered with my client's best interests in mind.

As an independent completion management expert, I represent the buyer through the complicated process of selecting and configuring green aircraft. Evaluating the interior design, picking the completion centre and overseeing the completion project, for the sole benefit of the buyer.

Many business jet buyers have little aviation expertise. Few of them have owned transport category business jets. Although the people selling the aircraft and completion services want to have satisfied customers, they're not paid to look out for the interest of the buyer. That's the job of the independent expert.

An independent expert asks difficult questions, considers data from all sources, translates the answers into something the buyer can understand, and gets him to

make often-difficult compromises and decisions. The expert helps him understand critical concepts, such as payload versus range, and potential compromises resulting from them—providing the truth, no matter how much it hurts.

Asking the right questions and listening to the answers are an important part of the process. In a perfect world the questions begin early, with the buyer. Questions are specific and personal: Where do you want to fly? How many passengers? How much baggage do you expect on the average flight? What type of interior finishes and elegance do you expect? Where do you want the bedroom? How big should the bed be? Which seat location is most important? How many people will shower on an average flight? Where will your mother-in-law sit?

As the process continues and the buyer and expert work together with the airframe manufacturer, completion centre and designer, they're often listening for different things. Buyers may pay a lot of attention to appearance and price. The expert considers amenity weights, maintenance costs and how complicated they'll be to eventually replace or upgrade. White leather upholstery? Exotic marble on every horizontal surface? If the buyer wants it,

the expert will make it happen—but the buyer will make an informed decision.

As each new data point emerges, the expert considers it from the buyer's perspective. Communication stays open and active, but most of all, honest. The buyer hears the truth and can make smart decisions. In the end, he flies away in an aircraft that goes where he wants to go, when he needs to go there—with the comfort he expects.

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