



FLY AEOLUS

A new step in business travelling

As the saying goes, time is money – and businessmen are fed up with waiting. One of the worst enemies of a businessman is an unexpected delay, such as getting stuck in traffic while on the way to a meeting. Meanwhile, more time is lost by waiting around for up to two hours after check-in at large airports when flying with commercial airlines. While there is the option of travelling by private jet, this option is far too expensive for most companies. Fly Aeolus has the solution.

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THE BEGINNING

Fly Aeolus was founded by Stefaan Ghijs, a former student at the faculty of Aerospace Engineering at the Delft University of Technology. The idea originated from a project during Stefaan's MSc. at the chair of Aerospace Management and Operations which required him to set up a business plan in the aerospace industry with a unique value adding proposition. He and a classmate started to brainstorm about what a unique and effective idea for this plan could be. Putting their focus on the private transport industry, the initial idea was to offer the opposite of low cost airlines: fully on-demand luxury flights. However it was quickly concluded that this idea was not new at all.

But after more research, it was discovered that in the region of North-Western Europe there was no company offering low cost, on-demand private air transport or Air Taxi services for the high demand short haul destinations (300-700km). The

combination of both low cost and personal service made this an intriguing proposition. With this in mind, together with the use of Very Light Jet's (a new breed of light jets anticipated to innovate the Air Taxi market from a cost perspective) they continued their work on the business plan to offer this kind of transportation.

After graduating, the business plan regained life and after several visits to North America to learn more about the air taxi market, the idea of using an even cheaper, but still comfortable single piston aircraft – the Cirrus SR22 – was born.

FRACTIONAL OWNERSHIP

Putting the business plan into practice required a lot of work, and it went through various iterations as a result of the many challenges that were faced. One of the most difficult of those challenges came from the stringent safety regulations involved in operating a single-engine aircraft in a commercial context. The

regulations at the time would not allow the aircraft to fly at night or during bad weather, limiting the mission of Fly Aeolus considerably. The team realised that regulations tend to react to innovations and not the other way around, which is the case for the Cirrus SR22 aircraft. Determined to find a way to get their idea off the ground, they needed to explore all the possibilities. So they decided to set-up a meeting with EASA (European Aviation Safety Agency) – the aviation rule maker in Europe. Surprisingly, EASA reacted very positively to the idea and in a unique move, offered to sit down together with the Fly Aeolus team to look for a solution together.

Working together with experts in aviation regulation meant a greater chance of success, and after a lot of talking, exchanging ideas and thinking outside the box, the solution was found: realizing the plan under a Fractional Ownership Program. Fractional ownership is a percentage

share of an expensive asset, which in Fly Aeolus' case is an aircraft, and under such a scheme the operations of a single piston aircraft are not restricted.

It works as follows: before people can use Fly Aeolus' services, they have to become a Fly Aeolus' executive member. Signing the introduction fractional ownership contract includes a one-time down payment of €995.95. You actually 'buy' a piece of the aircraft and secure your ownership part in Fly Aeolus' fleet; call it a membership fee. When customers decide to stop using Fly Aeolus' services, the down payment is reimbursed. In this way Fly Aeolus is able to offer their service with the Cirrus SR22 single piston aircraft without considerable operational boundaries.

Fly Aeolus aircraft (and pilots) are based in multiple cities all around North West Europe making sure they can adapt to the demand all over Europe and consequently keeping empty leg (empty flights to the origin airport to pick up the customer) costs low. Aircraft are leased from private owners who want to decrease the ownership costs of their aircraft.

CIRRUS SR22

As mentioned before, the aircraft which Fly Aeolus operates is the Cirrus SR22. This type of airplane flies four people, including the pilot, and enables Fly Aeolus to offer private flights for a low price to short haul destinations. One of the reasons for this choice is based on safety and comfort aspects; this high performing single pis-

ton aircraft can be seen as the Mercedes A series in the single piston aircraft segment. The aircraft has large doors which offer easy access to the aircraft, laptop power plugs and leather seats. Together with noise reducing headphones, this aircraft provides all the necessary comfort for the short haul private flights.

Safety wise Fly Aeolus also chose this full glass cockpit aircraft because of the availability of its innovative safety system, the Cirrus Airframe Parachute System (CAPS). In essence it is a large parachute which carries the whole aircraft in case of emergency and ensures a safe landing. CAPS has been tested with success and has proven to be reliable. Fly Aeolus sees CAPS as a silent second engine. The usage is rather straightforward and can be activated by pulling an emergency lever in the cockpit like in a train.

WHY IS THE FORMULA A SUCCESS?

Due to the inefficiencies in the current travel options, a lot of business travellers are looking for flexible travel options in which they don't lose time and waste money. Most short haul destination airline options require at least one transfer or stop over, limiting the possibility of same day returns. That is why an on-demand air taxi is an interesting option: not only does Fly Aeolus have access to 1,600 airports in its service area, thus always bringing the customer closer to their final destination, most aircraft fly direct 'straight-line' routes saving a lot of time to more rural destina-

tions. Through recurrent market surveys, business travellers point out that time and cost are the most important factors in deciding to use specific travel services. Decreasing the costs for private air services opens this market considerably and reduces the barrier to travel by private aircraft.

Fly Aeolus travellers are time conscious and mostly decide to book flights themselves. In this respect bookings are done through e-mail or on the internet, saving additional time and adding flexibility for the customer to book when they want. Additionally, customers are able to calculate the costs for their flight directly on the site. The website has a special calculator which calculates the price from door to door, and customers can then book their flight in five steps. In addition to booking flights online, Fly Aeolus will soon expand this service towards smart phones.

ADVICE FOR FUTURE ENTREPRENEURS

- Be creative in keeping your costs as low and variable as possible; always try to think outside the box!
- Don't make decisions or start a company without doing thorough research.
- If you have an idea which you think will be a guaranteed success, go for it and believe in what you are undertaking! Don't give up.
- When you meet an obstacle which you think you cannot overcome, try to fight it, there is always a solution. ✈



Figure 1. The Cirrus SR22