

**PROFESSIONAL PILOT****INTERNATIONAL OPS**

## International scheduling

**With latest-generation dispatch systems, corporate schedulers take on more responsibilities in mission planning and crew scheduling.**

By Grant McLaren  
Editor-at-Large



**VF Corp Aviation Schedule Coordinator Ken Graham uses CAM Systems Aviation Information Service (AIS) software to coordinate crew and aircraft on domestic and global ops.**

Scheduling international corporate trips has always been something of an art, but increasingly it's evolving into predictable science. With the latest-technology scheduling software, datalink capabilities to/from aircraft, increasing professionalism and training among the ranks of corporate schedulers and dispatchers, and new services available from international trip support providers, the task of orchestrating international corporate ops is now a more stress-free and accurate endeavor.

The once ubiquitous corporate flight department scheduling "grease board" has, for the most part, given way to the digital representation of schedules. Gone are the days when leaning against the board might wipe out a week's worth of schedules. Pilots are now able to access schedules online; receive up-to-the-minute changes via wireless PDA devices. Increasingly, inhouse corporate schedulers are taking over much of the nitty-gritty of flight planning, often coordinating virtually all arrangements with handlers, fuel providers and caterers before company pilots even become involved with a trip.

"More and more, we're working almost exclusively with corporate schedulers and dispatchers in coordinating international trips and there have been across-the-board increases in capabilities and experience of these professionals," says Universal Weather & Aviation Trip Support Specialist Dani Crouch. "Many larger flight departments want everything funneled through dispatch and, often, we'll only deal directly with pilots while they're actually on the road."

Air Routing Operation Supervisor Matt Pahl also works more closely with corporate schedulers and dispatchers these days and sees fewer "mistakes" with digital paper trails integrated into today's scheduling software. Still, there are smaller flight departments where flightcrews are required to "multitask" and pilots can become overwhelmed.

"We were working with a corporate pilot recently who had to do everything—from flying the aircraft, scheduling international trips, making schedule changes and hiring pilots—and often from halfway around the world," Pahl says. "This is not a position you want your pilots to be in."

Once a flight department has more than 2 aircraft they'll often bring in a qualified scheduler and invest in scheduling software tailored to mission requirements.

The Home Depot, which operates 5 aircraft, has 2 dispatchers under the command of Flight Ops Supervisor Kristi Ivey. IMS Health, on the other hand, operates just one aircraft—a Gulfstream G450—but coordinates all international scheduling via a one-person scheduling and dispatching department. “We fly double the NBAA average, with 70% of our flying international,” says Flight Coordinator Amy Roy. “At IMS Health everything goes through the scheduling department. Even with itinerary changes on the road, international trip support providers contact us rather than going directly to our pilots. With advances in scheduling software over recent years, dispatchers are able to delegate so much better today and we’re able to take on a lot more responsibility.”

At AIG’s TEB (Teterboro NJ) base, Dispatchers Don Fazio and Heidi Morrison initiate all international schedules, working directly with Universal Weather & Aviation. AIG publishes upcoming trips online for pilots to view. “In the old days our pilots would set up an entire 2-week trip to Asia on their own, coming in every day a week or so prior to the trip just to set everything up,” observes Fazio. “While pilots are still definitely in the planning process loop, and they work directly with our handler when there are changes on the road, we take care of all the details, fuel negotiation, crew positioning and permits. Scheduling software, and datalink capabilities, are a huge advantage today but there’s still room for this technology to become even better.”

### Potential problems

Scheduling a successful international corporate trip depends on effective coordination between pilot schedulers and international trip support providers. The focus must always be to prevent problems and mitigate errors, while maximizing safety and efficiency. Such considerations include cross-border issues, permits and visas, cabotage risks, airport curfews and closures, firearms regs, TSA and border overflight waivers, and the need to qualify charter operators prior to contracting additional lift.



**(L–R) Universal Weather & Aviation Security Services Consultants David Solo, Phil Linebaugh and Sheldon Devantier work with the company’s internal security resources to ensure that pilots and clients “know before they go” and are better prepared for traveling to higher-risk destinations.**

“There’s no such thing as an easy trip,” says Fazio. Whether flying to DCA (National, Washington DC) or HAN (Hanoi, Vietnam), he continues, “all corporate flights need constant care and have to be watched closely in order to have a safe and smooth outcome. You can

have every detail worked out perfectly, but if the ground transportation doesn’t show up, it can ruin a trip.”

N-registered aircraft returning to the US with non-US citizens on board, absent appropriate visas, continue to get flight departments into trouble on a regular basis. In such cases US immigration officials may refuse entry to the passenger, levy a fine or, at the very least, delay an arrival. While cabotage issues in the European Union (EU) are less common than they once were, the risk of aircraft seizure is still present if these rules are violated.

Today’s 12 to 14-hour ultralong-range corporate jets have changed the market and allow operators to achieve so much more—but they’ve also created new issues, including crew rest, where to land for tech stops, and the effects of winds aloft on max-endurance ops. This is where it’s important for schedulers to work with trip support providers well ahead of a trip.

“We had a G550 trip request recently from NBO (Intl, Nairobi, Kenya) to MEL (Intl, Melbourne, Australia), where the obvious great circle routing tech stop would have violated equal time points (ETP),” recalls Pahl. “We also had a Dassault Falcon 900EX trip request, from BOM (Intl, Mumbai, India) to TEB (Teterboro NJ), where the scheduler had requested KEF (Keflavik, Iceland) as a tech stop. We advised the schedulers that ARN (Arlanda, Stockholm, Sweden) would make a better fuel stop as the routing was shorter and winds were more favorable.”

Universal’s Crouch offers the following caution: “Don’t assume that you’ll be able to make multiple

stops, or change your itinerary too often, on trips to China.

“And don’t take for granted that summer parking reservations in Italy or France are 100% secure,” Fazio says. “We had a crew recently with confirmed parking at FCO (Fiumicino, Rome, Italy) but the reservation was cancelled 2 days out as parking had been overbooked. Be flexible to last-minute surprises and always be prepared for the unexpected.”

To operate in different parts of the world, crews must be ready and willing to play by local rules. For example, the operating environment in central Africa can change frequently, due to evolving political situations, and when operating into Somalia you may have to deal with representatives of local warlords.

Universal Weather advises that Venezuelan authorities are considering new, onerous permit requirements for corporate operators who plan to visit the country for more than 72 hours, twice or more each year. “In this age of security concerns and changing regs, you really are taking a gamble you don’t have someone in your dispatch department to reduce the workload and stress level of pilots who need to be focused on managing aircraft,” says Roy.

It’s always preferable to have corporate schedulers communicate with international trip support providers as early as possible and before presenting initial corporate itineraries to head office. “Work with your service provider up front,” says Pahl. “We’re like detectives looking out for potential operational glitches and we can help you avoid pitfalls early on.”

### Scheduling programs

Ideal corporate scheduling software programs are powerful, comprehensive and user friendly. When choosing one, consider implementation, training time and length of time needed to get online schedules up and running successfully.



**US-registered Dassault Falcon 900 taxis to corporate ramp at GVA (Geneva, Switzerland). Company schedulers back home have looked after all ground support, catering, hotel and ground transport arrangements.**

Fazio says, “We’re very happy with FlightPak, but what we’d really like is one program that runs everything—scheduling, e-mail, flightplans, weather access and fuel quotes. With all of today’s scheduling programs you’ve still got to jump around a lot, in and out of various windows, to do what you need to do. We’d like one program that runs everything.”

Some of the better-known corporate scheduling programs on the market are Bart-4-Web, CAMP Systems’ Aviation Information Services (AIS), CTA, FlightPak, Flight Schedule Pro, FT Scheduler and PFM. These programs are optimized for the typical demands of small to large flight departments with capability to track multiple missions, crew scheduling and duty times. They come complete with customization options. Most scheduling programs offer online capability and allow various levels of security. Once a trip is created it can be e-mailed to your international handling provider, passenger and crew.

One of the most refined scheduling and dispatching programs in the aviation industry is NetJets’ IntelliJet II system. NetJets, which operated flights to 140 countries in 2005, developed IntelliJet II via a 50-person software development team and a \$20-million investment.

IntelliJet monitors every flight constantly to check for changes that might require attention. It sends schedule updates to pilots automatically via BlackBerry PDAs. All NetJets flights have a dual-release requirement, with no flight taking off until both the PIC and dispatcher verify all flightplans and agree that the flight can be accomplished without compromising safety. Thanks to the high-powered scheduling automation of IntelliJet II, NetJets says it can handle 20% more call volume without adding staff, resulting in over \$2 million in direct savings annually.



**Jeppesen's flight support command center works with flight department schedulers/dispatchers 24/7 to smooth the intricacies of overseas corporate travel.**

Among the new capabilities of FlightPak, which now has more than 200 corporate flight department users worldwide, is the ability to e-mail reports directly from the scheduling program. Future enhancements will include the ability to integrate into maintenance, tracking and catering systems from one package.

As the industry sees the advent of digital versions, it's becoming easier to make the transition to modern scheduling software. "Grease boards are coming down, even with some of our more entrenched users," says Mgr FlightPak Product and Field Support Mark Reilly. "Many operators are choosing to ease this transition by implementing digital grease boards—using either projection systems or large LCD monitors."

### Professional schedulers/ dispatchers

The profession of corporate scheduling and dispatching has evolved in recent years, with tasks becoming more complicated and requiring higher levels of professionalism. Evidence of dedication to the profession can be seen at the ever-growing NBAA Schedulers & Dispatchers Conference. This year's show, in San Antonio TX, attracted 2200 attendees and 322 exhibitors.



**Not everything has gone fully digital—scheduling grease boards are still used here and there. Here American Seafoods Group Capt Rune Tvedt discusses an upcoming Bombardier Challenger 300 trip with Chief Pilot Brent Hansen at BFI (Boeing Field, Sea WA).**

Managing a corporate flight department is a significant responsibility and involves a broad knowledge base and range of skill sets. Aircraft and crew scheduling involves everything from customs, immigration and document preparation to understanding advanced weather, buying fuel on the road, learning about international catering, understanding tax issues, IRS regulations for valuing personal flights, and assorted government and regulatory authority reporting requirements. Security planning, including knowing when and where you may need additional security services, has become a huge issue in recent years.

"The corporate scheduling and dispatch function has changed," says Roy. "Today, you need to take professional courses right off the bat before you even start answering the phone. Our profession has taken on a lot more responsibilities and definitely requires more education today than it did in the past."

While dispatcher licenses are not required for corporate schedulers, AIG's Fazio and Morrison both elected to earn FAA dispatcher licenses at FlightSafety Intl LGA (La Guardia, New York NY). "Pilots feel a sense of relief when corporate schedulers are also licensed dispatchers," says Fazio. "While dispatch training is geared to Part 121 ops, and we did our test on a Boeing 727, the course is very worthwhile and includes differences training for corporate aviation."

Inhouse scheduling capabilities offer efficiency and cost savings for today's corporate flight departments. With online scheduling programs, corporate schedulers are able to boost load factors on corporate shuttle and ad-hoc flights.



**Kohler Scheduler Carol Lehmann manages Challenger 600, Learjet 45 and Gulfstream IVSP travel schedules with CAMP AI software.**

And, says Fazio, "We'll often put together our own flightplans and s

a bundle of money by setting up arrangements directly with oversea local handlers at STN (Stansted, London, England), LTN (Luton, London, England) or ATH (Intl, Athens, Greece)."

### **Efficient scheduling**

Scheduling international corporate operations effectively requires a smooth, open relationship between corporate schedulers, pilots and trip support providers. Highly complex international operations are conducted safely and efficiently every day with proper preplanning and effective communication.

Scheduling software and global datalink capabilities will continue to improve. Meanwhile, the corporate scheduler and dispatcher profession will continue to evolve in capability and authority.

"We have more than 50 requesters who can book flights on our 6 aircraft with routine global mission requirements," says IBM Ops Supervisor/Dispatcher Mike Marcin, who uses CTA and Lotus Notes scheduling software, has 4 schedulers and uses Air Routing Intl for international trip support. "With today's technology and professional development training, we're able to maximize use of resources and schedule much more efficiently than we could even a few years ago."



*Editor-at-Large Grant McLaren has written for Pro Pilot for over 20 years and specializes in corporate flight department coverage.*

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