



DESTINATIONS WE SERVE ARE NOT ALWAYS HOSPITABLE, BUT WE FIND SOLUTION FOR EVERY NEED – MARCO PRUD'HOMME NOLINOR AVIATION

News / Airlines



The best of both worlds, any idea, if we talk about aviation? An airline with a fleet offering several combi configurations to group passengers and cargo on the same flight. One more discovery for 50skyshades to be honest. Looking at services provided, the best statement characterizing this company is "solution provider". 32 years of experience, the largest airline specialising in commercial charter flights in Canada. The team ensures the reliability of every flight and allows to offer a rare quality service.

We had the pleasure of speaking with Marco Prud'homme, President of Nolinor Aviation:
“I was actually born in aviation. So basically my first house was a hydro base with the bush aircraft. So, my father had a bush operation with DHC-2 Beavers and DHC-3 Otters and Norseman's. First type of people I met in my life were pilots and mechanics. So, it's been in my day-to-day life for many years now. I tried to do other stuff, but you always come back to your roots. Aviation is very complex world. There's a lot of regulation, lot of change, lot of system in place, a lot of knowledge. So, when you've been there for a couple of years, it gives you an edge. And trying to start all over again into another market or other. it's too big of a challenge for me. So, I stick with aviation.”

T.O. 32 years of Nolinor Aviation and it's a lot, at the same time still young. Looking back, what was the best, what you've learned and what do you want in the next future?

M.P. I guess the main thing that we have learned throughout the years is to remain ourselves. Meaning that we're not trying to copy anyone. We are doing mostly charter flights. Currently the fleet that we have the most type of aircraft we have are the 737. We have the 200, the 300, the 400 and also 800. But mostly we're not trying to replicate anybody else success. We're trying to grow our business with our customer, and we adjust, we listen to them. The type of aircraft that we are adding to the fleet are linked to the needs directly of our customer. So, unlike many people who are dreaming of the very glamorous vibe of aviation we're trying to stay grounded and figure out exactly how to niche our service and how to offer something that is different into the market. And if I look at the last 20 years, that's pretty much been the principal reason behind our success. Our team obviously is a big part of our success. But on a strategic note, I would say that listening to the customer and offering very specific and tailored services is what that's the key for us.

T.O. Do you think the market is changing? This is something we hear from manufacturers, operators etc. If you look at last two decades, how much did it actually changed, is it just evaluating or a normal speed?

M.P. I think the market has changed a lot since the pandemic. Meaning that before the pandemic nobody could envision that many airlines would be stuck to the ground for months. I mean, the longest delay that we ever had before that was 911, and we were stuck to the ground for two, three days. It was a challenge in itself. Pandemic started I think it did change the plans of many airlines. It created a new dynamic. Many problems related to liquidity. Many problems related to finding pilots, training them. Coming out of the pandemic, finding parts, finding people who still have the knowledge of some type of aircraft. And I mean, the list of challenge that we have faced since the end of the pandemic is quite long. But I guess the strength that we had at Nolinor Aviation that made it possible for us to keep on going was that within our culture and our mindset we have the skill of being able to adapt fairly quickly to change in the market. And that's probably what saved us.

T.O. Do you think that the fact that you are listening to your customers is the secret to be able to adapt to the needs of your customer and trends on the market?

M.P. In a way. I think if you look at the offering of many airlines, many big airlines, the way they tailor their service is not for the customer need, but for their balance sheet need. And sometimes the saving that they're trying to do just brings the level of service to a level that we see more and more people with rage, air rage and complaints and all that. And it's not because the people have changed. It's because the level of service throughout the years have changed and it becomes a commodity. And in that sense, it's kind of hard for airlines to differentiate and have a different strategy, a different offering if everyone is costing at the same place and cutting price and service at the same price. Our view, the type of service that we are offering, it's charter services. So, it's by nature something that is tailored to the customer need. What time do they want to leave? How many passengers do they want? Where do they want to go? How many days we're going to stay over? What type of in-flight service do they like? These are the type of questions that we are asking to our customer and when they experience this type of service that has a certain reflection to a bygone era they say, wow, you guys are still offering great food on the flight. Yeah, we do, because we know what it's like to board a flight where there's no food. I mean, I was in Austin, Texas last weekend and I had to do six hours of flying coming. Back to Montreal with only a soft drink and no food offering. That doesn't make any sense. It's not a regional flight. So, I guess airlines have to review and have more the customer and their mindset and instead of trying to bring new aircraft to the market. Or more aircraft to the market, I guess they should try to give a good service to the customer they currently have. Instead of daytime dreaming of cutting price to acquire more passengers, they should take care of the passengers they already have, instead of dreaming of having somebody else customer. That's what I believe.

T.O. This is a very hard question. As a frequent flyer, I would really love big airlines to think more about passengers. Thanks to my experience, I know how hard and big job is to make an aircraft fly. What is the life of crew members, pilots etc. But as you told, there guys from financial departments, asking for some balance sheets.

I've seen that Nolinor Aviation got many awards. It's an achievement and or are proud of that. Or it's still a motivation for you to get even better?

M.P. That's a good question. I would say that our motivation to improve and innovate is more related to our core values. And I would say that the biggest achievement we have at Nolinor Aviation, the one we celebrate, is when we have a customer signing back an agreement with us for a couple of years. And I mean, that's the best award you can achieve when customers are satisfied, and they want to do business again with you. And sometimes throughout the years we have seen customer hoping to find a better service somewhere else and getting back. I have a funny story on it. One of those customers left for another airline, cheaper price. And upon the first flight they say well, how come I didn't receive the automated email for the departure? He said, we don't do that. Well, I used to have that with Nolinor Aviation. Well, if you're not satisfied, you can go back to Nolinor Aviation. And they did. When you offer quality service to your customer, there's a price for that. I often see people saying they want to start a low-cost airline. There's nothing low cost in aviation. Nothing. Every time there's a part breaking, it costs thousands of dollars, if not more. And the salaries are quite high. Every day you have new challenges. The weather creates delays and everything. So how can you offer a service that is low cost? On an excel spreadsheet with volume It's going to work. But in real life, because of entropy and because nothing is linear, nothing is low cost. Okay? So, these companies come and go, and they leave the passengers stranded all over the place. And people are under the impression that we are offering an

expensive service compared to those low prices. But it's not the same quality of service. And I mean, we've been in business for more than 30 years, and my goal is to be in business for the next 30 years. It's not a hit and run success story. We're going to be still around for years to come. But to do that you need to make a profit and you need to reinvest those profit within your company. But to do that in the first time, you need to make money. So that's my vision on it.

T.O. Here in Europe we talk a lot about pilot shortage. What is your vision? Do you have enough pilots or still looking?

M.P. All right, well, that's a very good question. We saw the pilot shortage coming in about, I would say, six years ago. The writing was on the wall. If you were good in math, it was easy to see that all those baby boomers pilots were going out through retirement and people would be stuck with less pilot and training. A pilot takes about a year and a half to two years. So, when you do the math, you could clearly see that there was a problem coming forward. So, what we did five years ago. We created a program, in house. Program called "Become a pilot," where we offer the chance to our employees who have been with us for over a year to be selected and chosen and to become a pilot to do their commercial license. And we pay 100% of all the costs related to the training, the ground training and the in-flight training. And so far, we have seen 20 people getting into this program. Ten are already flying. Some of them have been a flight attendant, mechanics, dispatch office people that had the dream to become a pilot but didn't have the financial resources to actually do the training. So, for us we've been lucky so far. We've not canceled over the last three years, we have not canceled any flight in related to the pilot shortage. And we are making sure that we are revising as we speak the salaries of our pilot to make sure that we are staying competitive on the market and making sure that we will still have those fine folks to offer the service for years to come. But it is a challenge for sure. And what is the main problem, I guess, is that some airlines... I don't know if it the case in Europe, but in Canada for sure. Some major players seem to be hiring more than they need and creating a burden on smaller operator to make sure that these guys are not getting into the market or getting market shares and so on. Because obviously it's cheaper to hire pilots than buy a competitor. So, we're seeing more and more pilots being hired and stay at home for five to six months waiting. For a training slot while they could have kept on flying for a smaller carrier. This type of strategy in the short run I think will have some success, but in the long run it's a very costly strategy and I don't see why people would be doing that.

T.O. Looking at everything you're offering and I've seen that you've doing a lot of disaster relief mission. You need to be even more organized than the daily basis. It takes really a very special talent to be organized at that point. And what it takes to your c company to do that. What is the most impressive in this kind of operation?

M.P. The skill that you need is to be able to adapt fairly quickly and our team is capable of doing that. For example, last summer, it was fire season. So, a lot of forests was burning, and it created many problems that didn't make it to the front news. But I give you an example. There was a fire that was close to a railway track. The train could not go through the fire for weeks. And many regions were stuck without fuel and without food. And so even though people could stay in those regions because they were further North, they still need fuel and food. So, we were doing an airbridge for many weeks. Every time there's a crisis, we try to get up into creative mood. And for example, during the pandemic at the beginning 2020 we chartered the Antonov 225 to pick up some protective gear for the health system from China and bring it back all the way down to Montreal area. That's the type of mission that we've done in the past. Not only with our fleet, but trying to find, listening to the customer and trying to find the best solution for them and making sure that we deliver. And I guess that's the key here.

T.O. It's always difficult but as you told time of reaction counts and where seconds count and where seconds counts and the ability to react. You're building a new route in no time. I'm always asking myself how hard it is and do people really realize when they read disaster relief missions do they know what's behind?

M.P. Yes. Every hour counts, that's for sure.

T.O. An obvious question as we were publishing about your brand-new Boeing. Tell me, FLY in FLY out, what exactly you will do with this aircraft? What's for.

M.P. Well people might not know this, but in Canada most of the Northern region are not related by roads. There's no road to go there. And basically, the only means of travel is by aircraft. The mining industry up North is pretty active and so they will find workers willing to go work on a mining site for a period of could be between two to four weeks. And after that they want to go back down south to see their families and loved one. We are offering those transportation between the South and the North. Basically. There's different kind of mines. Some have unpaved runways; some do have paved runways near them. For the unpaved runways we are using the 737-200, which is the only Boeing approved to land on unpaved runways. And for paved runways, the 400 has become more and more in demand. And we wanted to have one with the branding of Nolinor Aviation and making sure that our service is easy to identify. And so far, it's been a good feedback.

T.O. I think making people happy to have an opportunity to fly back home. This is something they will remember. Branded aircraft and they will tell company they were flying with. My last and very easy question. What do you wish for your company for the year 2024?

M.P. I would say that we have a very busy schedule this year of project that we want to deliver. And so far, three months into the year we're still on track. So, we're quite happy about that for sure. There's always challenges and some of those challenges might delay some of those project, but I would say that the key is this year for us is to pivot and focus more and more on the Northern region. I think that is key for us. There's less offering in those markets and we're not there to compete or reduce pricing and we're not there to reduce the quality of our service. Having a niche service and basing our expansion on that, I think that's key for us.

T.O. At 50skyshades we are very much looking forward to inform on new achievements and development of Nolinor Aviation.

18 MARCH 2024

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