

It's Time To Ditch The Airlines. Where Do We Start?

By Jennifer English and Charles Alcock

Customer Case Study: AIN Media Group

AIN Media Group, **Business Jet Traveler**'s parent company, is growing at a rapid pace, and our team has been traveling more than ever. We know better than anyone the benefits of private aviation. With that in mind, we have decided to explore our options. We reached out to several experts to help us craft a private aviation set of solutions that will serve our company.



Fundamentals and Travel Needs For The Client:

AIN Media Group: Approximately 40 employees across the United States and Europe with contributors on every continent. Ten to 20 colleagues traveling from different parts of the world to and from airshows and AIN events/meetings in: Paris, Farn-

borough/ London, Dubai, Singapore, Las Vegas, Wisconsin, and assorted other European and U.S. locations. Regular regional road trips in various parts of the world for two to three people with approximately five to 10 stops in seven days or fewer.

Expert Takes:

The Aircraft Broker

Jay Mesinger, CEO, Mesinger Jet Sales

When a company or individual comes to us for the first time, we always start with the same question: How do we fulfill your mission? We sit down together and look at where you need to travel, how often, and with how many passengers. What are your main city pairs? Because flying from New Jersey to Las Vegas or Colorado is very different from flying from New Jersey to Asia.

I usually tell people to aim for an aircraft that fits 70% of their needs. There's rarely a one-size-fits-all solution—it's often a combination. Even if you own an aircraft, you might still fly first class commercially for certain trips. For example, if you're only going to the Middle East or Asia two or three times a year, it may not make sense to use your own jet for that. If you've got one person in the UK and five in New Jersey, you're probably not going to base a plane in the UK or reposition one from New Jersey just to pick them up. It's more practical to charter a plane for that person, or maybe a VistaJet fractional share. We are always honest with new clients and will be the first to help them find another option if full ownership is not the best solution for them right now. Most times we end up working with them again in a couple of years when the time is right to buy—we value long-term relationships.

We start with the city pairs—point A to point B. Then we look at frequency: you do this route six times a year, that one eight times, and another just twice. Once you know how many hours each trip takes, you multiply that by frequency. Now you've got a clearer picture of your annual flight hours.

That number is key. If you're flying only 100 to 150 hours a year, owning a whole aircraft might not make sense. But once you're at 200 to 250 hours a year, full ownership starts to become a more logical and cost-effective option compared to charter or fractional.

From there, you can say, "Based on these city pairs, I want to fly nonstop to each destination." You'll realize many domestic flights—and maybe even some routes to Europe—can be done

nonstop from New Jersey. That helps narrow down the type of aircraft you'll need.

Then comes cost: how much does it cost per hour to operate the plane? Multiply that by your annual flight hours, and now you have your budget.

It's a pretty natural progression: city pairs, frequency, hours, aircraft capabilities, cost. And once you've done that, you'll know exactly what kind of aircraft makes the most sense to fly your 200–250 hours a year.

How much you're willing to spend absolutely makes a difference. You could go out and buy an older Gulfstream for \$5 million, or you could spend \$35 million on a much newer one. At the end of the day, they both get you from point A to point B. But some people just don't want to deal with a 25-year-old airplane or they want something customized and brand new. These considerations also help to determine the overall operational cost.

Another thing to consider: I think having a management company is critical for running an efficient, safe operation. A good management company can give you supplemental lift when you need it. They can provide backup pilots. They offer



operational excellence that's hard to achieve if you're trying to run everything on your own. In a case where you only fly 150 hours a year, but you want to keep your pilots current and engaged, you might decide to charter out your plane an extra 100 hours—not because it fully pays for itself, but because it helps offset fixed costs and supports a more efficient operation overall.

If you decide to buy a whole aircraft, some models that would work for your mission are:

- » **Gulfstream G450, G500, G600, Dassault Falcon 900 series, or Bombardier 500, 6000/6500 (for New Jersey to U.S. West Coast and most of Europe)**
- » **Gulfstream G650ER or G700, Dassault Falcon 7X, Bombardier 7500 (if you need to get to Middle East/Asia)**

The Case For Fractional Ownership

George Antoniadis, CEO, PlaneSense



Obviously I'm biased, but I believe you will have a very cost-effective solution if you use fractional ownership. We are seeing a lot of people migrating from owning fleets of airplanes to now owning fleets of shares. It allows certainty of availability, pricing, quality, safety, and delivery. I always advise: Aim to fulfill 70% of your travel needs. Going for 100% is very cost-inefficient.

When we figure out the all-in hourly cost of the aircraft, we include the hourly rate, the management fee spread over the hours you fly, and other small expenses. We also factor in the devaluation of the aircraft, because if you buy a share

today, eventually you'll trade it in, roll into another plane, or exit the program. So if you pay \$100 for a share and later get \$60 back, we count that \$40 loss as part of your cost. To me, that's the most truthful way to look at it. Some people bring in depreciation, but that's a tax effect, and everyone handles taxes differently, so I leave that out. Using this approach, the PC-12 comes out to about \$5,200 an hour, and the PC-24 is around \$8,400 an hour.

The PC-12 in our configuration has six passenger seats, the PC-24 has eight.

You can do coast-to-coast in the PC-24 with one 30-minute stop. For anything under 500 nautical miles, the PC-12 is perfect. For longer trips, at some point it makes more sense to use the PC-24. But here's the real advantage with PlaneSense: both the -12 and the -24 are excellent short-field performers, which means you can access hundreds more airstrips than with most other jets. That flexibility really matters. The PC-24 might be faster in the air, but if the PC-12 gets you closer to your destination, the total travel time could be about the same. That's part of how we help you choose the right aircraft for the mission.

We often have clients say, "I want to go to Cincinnati," and we say, "Don't give us the city—give us the address." There are seven airstrips near Cincinnati. You might know one or two, but we may be able to get you closer—saving that last hour or so on the road.

We've just launched a new service we call our Sourcing Solution. If you're a PlaneSense client and you need, say, a 12-seat jet to fly nonstop to Vancouver tomorrow, we will tap into our trusted network of vetted operators, and one of their aircraft will seamlessly show up. You're billed through us, just like a normal flight. In April, we started a cooperation with JetFly in Europe. If you're a U.S.-based fractional owner, you can now call and book a flight from, say, Milan to Hamburg using your U.S. hours on a JetFly aircraft.

We also now offer a jet card program with 25 flight hours. It's a great way to try us out before committing to a fractional share. Anyone can buy a Cobalt Pass when available (we release them based on fleet capacity), and many clients use it up and go straight into ownership. It's a one- or two-year "use it or lose it" program. It costs a bit more per hour, but it gives you a feel for the service and the aircraft. If you decide to buy a share halfway through your card, we'll credit a significant portion of the unused value toward your purchase.

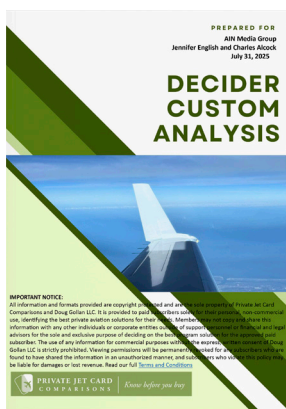
My recommendation for AIN Media Group: Start with a 16th share in each airplane. That would give you 50 hours in the PC-12 and 50 hours in the PC-24, and you can exchange up and down between the programs.

Independent Business Aviation Expert

Doug Gollan, founder, Private Jet Card Comparisons

We always recommend that subscribers take their time and map out the details as thoroughly as possible. As the old saying goes, “Measure twice, cut once.” Private aviation can deliver tremendous ROI, but it’s expensive, especially if you make the wrong choices. Either way, it’s a significant investment. The key is to get it right upfront—so you’re not surprised by hidden fees or policy mismatches, like blackout dates, daily minimums, peak-day restrictions, flights outside guaranteed zones, or stiff cancellation penalties.

In this case, because it involves multiple people traveling in some cases simultaneously in different parts of the country and the world, the best place to start is by building out a detailed travel calendar—week by week, and even day by day when possible. Include how many people will be flying, exactly where they’re going and in what sequence, what features you want on board (Wi-Fi, stand-up cabin, fully enclosed lavatories), how much booking notice you’ll need, and how flexible your travel dates are.



Private Jet Card Comparisons' Decider Custom Analysis Report identifies providers and programs matching your criteria.

For larger group trips such as multiple team members attending a show, look at where everyone is coming from and where they need to go afterward. Do all the travel dates line up? That kind of clarity starts to shape the right solution. For example, will multiple team members need private aviation access on the same day, and how often? Many programs only guarantee one aircraft per day. In some cases, flying commercial makes more sense. For road show trips, some programs operate on a day-based model, which can be very efficient if you're making multiple flights in a single day.

You may be better off chartering an aircraft for the entire trip, with the airplane and crew staying with your team as they move from city to city. Just keep in mind that pilot duty-time limits may affect your schedule. Also, with ad hoc charters, if a recovery air-



Doug Gollan

craft is needed mid-trip, the rest of the itinerary would need to be requested—something you'll want to discuss with your provider in advance. It's also important to know the cancellation terms if you want to change your flights after booking, in case a client cancels or reschedules a meeting and your routing needs to change.

Our Decider Custom Analysis report identifies specific providers and programs that fit your parameters with side-by-side comparisons, including specific costs for flights you will be taking. You'll then speak directly with those providers, and we're here to help if you have questions.

Private Jet Card Comparisons subscription: \$500/year for unlimited access to proprietary database of more than 80 providers and more than 500 program options, constantly updated.

The Case for a Hybrid Charter/Airline Approach: Wheels Up

Seth Rotman, Senior Vice President of Private Jets

For a team like AIN Media Group, where travel ranges from regional roadshows to long-haul international events like the Paris and Singapore airshows, owning two aircraft is likely excessive in both cost and operational complexity. Instead, we recommend combining charter access with a flexible membership program. This model ensures you have the control to choose the right aircraft for each mission—whether that's a light jet for short-haul hops or a super-midsize for longer, multi-stop international trips—without being locked into a fixed asset or paying for underutilized capacity.

If you fly under 400 hours per year, ownership or fractional share simply doesn't deliver the flexibility or ROI. At Wheels Up, we've built our model around dynamic pricing, guaranteed recovery, and

global access, allowing you to scale up or down based on your needs without long-term commitments or asset depreciation.

The core difference is flexibility. You fund upfront, fly when you want, and benefit from rate protections and rewards. Our membership model offers guaranteed availability, capped rates, and perks like Medallion Status with Delta Air Lines. For AIN Media Group, this approach would give your global contributors and sales teams premium access without locking you into a rigid structure.

Ad hoc charter is a great starting point if your flight volume is unpredictable or you're testing the waters. That said, it's critical to work with a provider who not only has access to global charter inventory but also prioritizes safety, operational control, and recovery. Engaging a reputable charter broker can also add tremendous value. Experienced brokers help negotiate pricing, clarify terms like cancellation and recovery policies, and are especially useful when navigating unfamiliar markets such as South America, India, Africa, or Asia. They ensure aircraft and crew meet your specific standards and can act swiftly to resolve any operational issues in real time.

Recommendation: Combine charter access with a flexible membership program.



The Customer's Take

Charles Alcock, Managing Editor, AIN Media Group

My overriding conclusion is that we need a mix-and-match approach that could combine elements of fractional ownership, charter services, and our old friends, the scheduled airlines. But getting that mix right is by no means straightforward, as far as I can discern from our other expert advisors. Doug Gollan's day job is making sense of all this and he gives valuable insights into the sort of hard questions we'll need to ask ourselves as we keep the AIN flying circus in motion.

There is a lot to be said for turning to George Antoniadis at Plane Sense to find out more about the sort of package his team could put together. I confess to having a soft spot for the Pilatus PC-12 and PC-24 models, which score highly for me in terms of their rugged pragmatism. There are plenty of other fractional ownership and block charter options we could consider in a



crowded market that includes giants such as NetJets, Flexjet, and VistaJet. One thing I especially like about the Wheels Up offering is the opportunity to retain the advantages of access to a major scheduled carrier like Delta. Jay Mesinger's seasoned advice about the thought process for choosing one will be invaluable.

So now I'm off to make the case for private aviation to my boss at AIN. I'm sure our sales team will look right at home on a private jet, but, with some notable exceptions, the reporters are going to need a whole new wardrobe.

In the meantime, and in case anyone is curious, my next flight will be when I board an EasyJet A320 (in my imagination it's an Airbus Corporate Jet) for a short hop from London to Basel in Switzerland for AIN's inaugural European Corporate Aviation Leadership Summit. BJT

Interviews have been edited and condensed.