

# A LOCAL BUSINESS WITH GLOBAL GOALS

*Air Hamburg is one of the fastest growing business aviation operators in Europe. ADVANTAGE sits down with Simon Ebert, one of the company's owners, who gives us insights into the business and how he helped build it from the ground up.*



From above  
Simon Ebert is the owner of  
charter service company  
Air Hamburg | Legacy 650E  
by Embraer Executive Jets

## *How did you start your career in business aviation?*

I first got involved with business aviation about 12 years ago as a customer. My family started a hotel and golf course project on Sylt, a small island in the north of Germany, and getting there on short notice was always a bit of a challenge. We worked with a small local operator near our hometown to charter flights, but they only had a small and rather old jet available, and it was always a hassle to reach them for booking. Their crew wasn't very organized and the catering came out of a plastic bag from the supermarket—needless to say, less than ideal. I felt that there was an easier way to handle this matter, so I reached out to Air Hamburg, which, at the time, operated three Citation jets that were on-call 24/7 and had a professional crew and friendly office staff. In 2009, I decided it was time to buy my first jet, and in 2011, I became a partner of Air Hamburg. With the help of Floris Helmers and Alexander Lipsky, the founders of the company, we grew Air Hamburg into one of the largest charter operators in Europe, with a fleet of 28 aircraft, 16 of which are Embraer jets. We currently have a total of 380 employees, 170 of them being pilots. We expect a turnover of around EUR 150 million in 2018.

## *What excites you the most about this industry?*

To be honest, everything! Everyone I have met in the industry throughout the past 12 years is so enthusiastic about aviation. It's a very emotional and fun business, working with aircraft.

## *Can you tell us a bit about Air Hamburg and what sets it apart from other premium charter service companies?*

Our highly motivated and friendly crew offers passengers top-level service at the drop of a pin. Our fleet consists of some of the newest jets, and we're able to provide the most generous luggage allowance in class for an unbeatable price. How? There are many reasons: our staff, our company culture, our business model, our investors and, of course, our aircraft.

Air Hamburg is very much a big family, and we all are passionate about our work because we truly love what we do. One of the most important things we look for in the recruitment process is social competence. Simply put, our service is personal.

## *Can you list some of the emerging customer expectations and how they influence Air Hamburg's approach to providing a superior customer experience?*

It is remarkable that our clients increasingly expect an ultra-personalized experience on board the aircraft. Whether it be highly specialized catering, personal items or entertainment on board, we are constantly looking for new ways to set our service concept on board the aircraft apart through personal touches.

As an example, we had a client from the Middle East who was flying to Milan for a charity football match. He was both the chairman of the event and playing for his own charity team. We worked together with the flight broker to brand our Legacy 650 entirely in his charity football team colors, from decals on the aircraft to interior flourishes, catering and even the neck scarves of our flight attendants. We turned our Legacy into a flying embodiment of his charity team, and the client was delighted!

It is this level of personalization that our customers have come to value from Air Hamburg. From a child's birthday party complete with cake and games being held in the rear cabin on the Legacy to a full multi-course culinary experience, we want to ensure that every journey feels personal and special to our clients.

## *About half of your charter fleet consists of Embraer business jets. What attracted you to Embraer?*

Before we bought our first Legacy 600 in 2013, we looked at the some other manufactures as well, and it became clear very quickly that, with Embraer, we found a passionate and supportive team that understood our business model and cared for our needs. Fortunately, this remains unchanged. With the Phenom 300, Embraer delivers the ideal jet for our intra-European flights.

## *In 2017, you became the first customer to receive the new Embraer Legacy 650E, and have since purchased six more, making you the world's largest operator of the Legacy 600/650 aircraft models. What stands out about these aircraft?*

Our customers love the Legacy 600 and Legacy 650E. Three large cabin zones for up to 13 passengers and enough space for their luggage in the huge cabin-accessible baggage compartment—our clients really like the new cabin design of the Legacy 650E. Our pilots also boast about the aircrafts' reliability.



## *How did Embraer help advance your company's growth strategy?*

At an early stage of our relationship, Embraer understood and believed in Air Hamburg and our idea of business aviation. Together with the team of Embraer, Air Hamburg was able to grow at the pace it did in the last years.

## *How do you see your fleet expanding in the following years?*

I believe in business aviation, and I believe in Air Hamburg's approach towards it. We are ready to continue our growth with the Legacy 650E and the Phenom 300 and are also open to have a closer look at the Praetor 500 and Praetor 600 as well as the Lineage 1000E in the future.

## *When reflecting, what are some of the personal and professional achievements that you are most grateful for?*

I am most grateful for my family. With their support, I was able to build and form Air Hamburg in the last few years. Together with my two partners and the support of our great employees, I grew a small local operator into one of the major players in European business aviation—definitely my greatest professional achievement so far.

## *Where do you see yourself and Air Hamburg in the future?*

With the team at Air Hamburg, I am confident that we will be able to strengthen our position in the business aviation market and continue our growth strategy to become a global player. ◀