

## TRAINING

# It's the REAL thing

Specialists in cabin crew training equipment serve the Middle East market

**F**or cabin crews to get the most out of training, staff need to get as realistic an understanding of the challenges as pilots get from the latest simulators.

Airlines in the Middle East are getting the benefit of the latest in training devices manufactured right on their doorstep. UAE based Spatial Composite Solutions manufactures Cabin Service trainers (CSTs), Cabin Emergency Evacuation Trainers (CEETs) and Door Trainers in current Airbus and Boeing configurations. Since 2007 the Jebel Ali business has been producing exact replicas of aircraft and is the only such specialist in the Middle East to do so.

"The devices are constructed entirely from durable composite components affixed to an aluminium super structure," says Joe McKeever, CEO. "These are similar in many ways to the assembly techniques used in the manufacture of actual aircraft. We use actual aircraft cabin interior components as a start point and from these we manufacture perfect 1:1 scale replicas which are in turn strengthened and reinforced before installation. No MDF or other timber products find their way into the build, as the end user expects the finished product to endure the rigors of day to day training over a 10 to 15 year period."

Spatial has been working with Emirates to design, build and install a total of 12 cabin service trainers including the upper and lower deck of the Airbus A380, which was built in just under six months. Although McKeever is quick to point out: "This was exceptional however as the device

Emirates A380 business class cabin.



CEO Joe McKeever, Henry Robinson and the spatial design team in the A380 social area.

## EgyptAir looks to be the frontrunner in Middle East

was urgently needed to train their cabin crew prior to the arrival of their first aircraft last year. A typical lead time for an A320 or a B737 device would be 8 to 9 months”.

‘Spatial’ is currently working on a combination A320 / B737 Emergency Evacuation Trainer which will have fully operational main and over wing exit doors for both aircraft types which will function exactly as per the actual aircraft. The device will also have a cockpit, evacuation slides, decompression and smoke simulation.

Being a newish company has it discovered any difficulties along the way?

“Our experience to date has been that the client tends to change plans at short notice,” says McKeever. “Usually there are other parties involved, the construction company or consultants responsible for the building in which the training device will be located for instance. As a result we must be flexible and we must respond quickly. It is vital to be close to the client and so our Dubai location does give us a real advantage with airlines based in the Gulf.”

### Major trading hub

The UAE is a major trading hub within the Middle East. With its current factory located in Jebel Ali are there plans to open up new plants anywhere else within the GCC? “The Emirates is a good place to do business,” says McKeever. “In the past many European and American manufacturers have viewed the Gulf as a place to make a quick buck and leave. That is simply not good enough anymore. If you are serious about your business in the Middle East you must have a presence here. Local support in absolutely vital as an interruption in training as a result of a breakdown is critical for the end user, the airline.”

The company says it is in ‘advanced stage negotiations’ with several other airlines in the GCC which as yet can’t be mentioned. “We have no plans just yet to expand but it is an option. The aviation industry has been facing new challenges recently, there are greater prospects for growth in the Gulf region than in the more matured markets in the west. The order book at Airbus and Boeing is testimony to this. In order to survive we must adapt”.

The company has a staff of 25 professionals and that number is expected to increase to 40 within the next two years. McKeever says: “We are flexible, quality orientated and our pricing is competitive. We are ‘open for business’ and look forward to meeting new friends at the Dubai Air Show in November where we will exhibit for the first time.”

With Horus the winged god of the sun as its logo, EgyptAir has a lot to live up to. The falcon-headed sky diety is evidently a good omen for Egypt’s flag carrier, which has a knack of spotting market opportunities.

For example, while the rest of the world scales back on airliner orders, one region went on a buying bonanza at the recent Paris Air Show. The Middle East was ramping up fleets with an eye on future prosperity. This rapid growth means that finding crew to fly these aircraft will be essential.

However, there simply are not enough properly equipped training facilities in the Middle East and Africa to meet future demand, so EgyptAir is seizing the opportunity in a flaccid market to position itself as the frontrunner. Its training division, EgyptAir Training Centre (ETC), was noticeable by its presence at the recent Paris Air Show. ETC was the only training provider to take a booth at the show in a bold bid to supply freshly minted first officers to these new fleets.

So what makes EgyptAir confident it is the right training provider for the region? Experience plays a part. Eng M Gamal Said, ETC director of marketing and sales says: “We are the oldest airline in the Middle East and Africa. We were established in 1932 and were the first in both locations. For the last 77 years we have pioneered aviation’s growth here.”

The carrier is a founding member of Arabesk Airline Alliance and the Arab Air Carriers Organization.

Headquartered at Cairo International Airport, EgyptAir

Holding Company (EHC) is a state-owned enterprise with special legislation permitting the management to operate as if it were a private company. The organisation wholly owns several smaller entities, including ETC, and is self-financing without any financial backing.

Said says: “EgyptAir was split into several companies in a strategic move, enabling each facility to make its own decisions. Investing in a training centre was part of that structure.”

The airline division operates scheduled passenger and freight services to more than 70 destinations in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas and is Africa’s second-largest airline. The parent company posted profits of \$170 million in the 2007/2008 fiscal year and in 2008, EgyptAir’s traffic increased by 6% to 8.2 million passengers.

This April EHC overhauled its operations at Cairo and created a new terminal. The airline transferred all its operations there and has more than doubled the airport’s capacity.

In addition to EgyptAir, EHC shelters several domestic airlines under its umbrella, which have a

constant need for pilots. Said says: “We have invested in training and now have a new building fully equipped with 90 modern classrooms plus four JAR-approved full-flight simulators covering the Airbus A320, the A330 and A340 and the Boeing 777 and B737.” Three of the simulators come from Thales, with the fourth from Flight Safety International, which covers the B737 training.

At present 49% of ETC’s business comes from its parent, but it wants to push that ratio down by 6% over the next few years, so that 55% of its revenues will come from third parties.

The company is hungry for more business. Said continues: “As a business unit EgyptAir is a profit centre. We also cater for more airlines in the region including surplus training for Emirates. We intend to expand.”

ETC does not conduct ab initio training; rather it focuses on professional tuition. Said says: “We are already a Type Rated Training Organisation, so pilots come with their ATPLs for transition training.”

Said points out that flight training is not all the TRTO offers and says: “We run courses on cabin service training, emergency training, as well as other

aspects that cater for the expansion of all EgyptAir’s fleet.” The centre is ISO 9001-approved and offers EASA and GAAC qualifications.

Said says: “All our courses are developed to ICAO standards.” Indeed, IATA and EgyptAir have joined forces to bring a whole gamut of professional aviation training to the region. A sample



Egypt Air conducts training for pilots and cabin crew, including emergency evacuation.

of this summer’s offerings includes international negotiation skills, cargo security, advanced airline sales strategies, aviation law for managers and basic passenger fares and ticketing.

According to Said, ETC is seeing a great deal of business from Europe and expects to see more. He attributes this to lower prices when compared to European training schools, as well as the fact that all the instructors are active pilots for the carrier. He says: “We have experienced personnel on site and our prices are 10-15% below European rates.”

During the 2009 Paris Airshow, EgyptAir announced a new venture with US lessor Aviation Capital Group and other Egyptian shareholders to establish a leasing joint venture focusing on the Middle East and Northern Africa. The new joint venture – named Civil Aviation Finance and Operating Leases – will initially focus on narrowbody aircraft. These planes will also need crew.

It was a bold move to exhibit at Paris in the current economic climate, but without intuitive risk there is no growth. Just like its logo, EgyptAir’s strategy seems divinely inspired.