TRITON AVIATION PLANS FOR REBOUND IN NIGERIAN BUSINESS

News / Business aviation



As a leading player in the **Nigerian business**-jet sector, aircraft manager **Triton Aviation** is one of a number of West African companies bringing a measure of maturity to the business aviation market. The company has seen growth stall as the nation's economy has slowed but nonetheless is looking to expand its capabilities so it is better positioned for an expected rebound.

The business aviation market in Nigeria has proved tougher this year than last, Triton CEO Ayo Oyewole, told**AIN**. He said, "2014 was a year of strong growth for us and the industry in Nigeria in general. However, 2015 has seen severe pressure on the industry from the fall in oil prices and uncertainty over the Nigerian elections."

The company started operating in 2010 as an outsourced flight department, and Oyewole joined the following year to develop it into a premium charter operator and aircraft handling service provider. Triton manages a Hawker 900, a Hawker 4000, a Challenger 300, a Falcon 900DX and a Global Express. It handles a Challenger 605 and also has a Hawker 850 on charter. Oyewole estimates that there are a total of 100 business jets in Nigeria. Of those aircraft, he said, "Bombardier is dominant…it has stolen a lead on the others," an advantage he attributes to the company's investment in local support, specifically spares inventory and engineers at the service center in Lagos.

Business aviation is growing in Nigeria, he said. "It's a broad spectrum, from government to oil and gas and banking. We are focusing on the niche for the smaller of the large-cabin bizjets. We see a lot of growth there. Our focus is on building our capabilities and revenues in that sector." In fact,

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growing oil and gas exploration and shipping and trade have spurred progress all over the continent. “We do fly all over the world. Predominantly, it’s Europe. Regional Africa is South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Kenya and the west coast of Africa, from Nigeria all the way to Senegal. In Central Africa it’s the Democratic Republic of Congo. Gabon is getting more interesting. I see that inter-Africa is continuing to grow,” he said.

“You find plenty of Europe and Middle East. There are plenty of good commercial options. We found with the slowdown in the global economy, a lot of the jaunts are taken out. Somebody who wants to go to London on the weekend, will probably wait for British Airways or similar. In the past, they would not think twice of going private. Now people are more judicious with the use of their funds.”

Nonetheless, he is bullish on the number of wealthy individuals in Nigeria. “There are lots. Those who fly to Europe and the U.S. will generally be owners of the aircraft, and not people chartering. They’ll fly everywhere, with several flights to the U.S. every month. It’s primarily New York, Houston, Los Angeles and Toronto. In Europe, it’s London and Paris.”

These travellers need the flexibility that business aviation can provide, and Nigerian regulators are beginning to understand the industry’s needs. “Their procedures are still geared toward commercial operations, but they have recognized the existence of bizav, which is a big step, and are looking at ways of implementing appropriate regulations. That will only enhance our operations and the business environment there,” said Oyewole.

EXPANSION PLANS

Triton currently operates under a partner’s AOC but is in the process of acquiring its own. The local market is fragmented, with mostly one- and two-aircraft operators, so Oyewole foresees some consolidation. The company also intends to operate FBOs as part of its management service to improve the customer experience. “Most African countries lack proper FBOs,” he said. “We have first-class service until you arrive at the airport. It’s first class when you get on and stops when you get off. There’s a break in the quality of the service. There are very few FBOs where you’ll get the really high standard that you get in Europe or the U.S.”

Triton uses third-party MRO services. “We have many options within and outside Nigeria, so there are really no issues working with third-party MRO. In-house MRO operations are not in our immediate plans. Owners want us to manage MRO. That is what we are there for.”

However, he noted, “The quality [of MRO services] is quite patchy. I think a lot needs to be done to get to the level of service we get in Europe or the U.S. There are qualified engineers, but you find that the quality of work, the professionalism, for us doesn’t seem to match the service you would get at a service center in Europe or the U.S.” The company has its line maintenance completed in Nigeria; more complex work is sent outside the country.

02 OCTOBER 2015

SOURCE: AIN
ARTICLE LINK:
https://ut.50skyshades.com/news/business-aviation/triton-aviation-plans-for-rebound-in-nigerian-business

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