



Product support sells repeat buyers

Manufacturers must remember the operator after the sale.

By **James B. Taylor**

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MOST airframe manufacturers are primarily engineering and/or manufacturing oriented. Sufficient attention is rarely given to the critical importance of marketing before during and after the successful introduction of any new or improved product—especially expensive and very visible capital equipment like an airplane.

Marketing must be an integral part of the overall management of any product. It should precede product development and then monitor and improve the product throughout its inception, fabrication and for the rest of its operational life—long after it's out of production. Happy, satisfied customers are always your best sales supporters and generally become repeat buyers.

For many logical reasons, every marketing organization should be directly responsible for market research, product development, all training (internally and externally), sales (direct and indirect), communications (internally and externally) and post-delivery service and support.

Marketing should always work closely and openly with engineering and manufacturing to make sure that any modifications and improvements are economically and technically feasible. And engineering and manufacturing must design and build what the market wants to buy not what they want to build. An effective and efficient support program keeps its finger on the customer's pulse after delivery. Thus, support is a key element in this product evolution process that marketing guides for the manufacturer.

May I suggest that support be grouped into the following categories:

- **Warranty and service programs** like PBTA and other cost guarantees. The warranty should be effective and competitive.

- **Service centers** (factory and authorized) factory-owned and -operated service centers have some competitive advantages: face-to-face communication with the customer, knowledge of the product, parts availability and less downtime.

- It is not possible for factory service centers to meet all the operators' geographical needs but it is in the best interest of the manufacturer to insure all customers are well cared for.

Therefore there is also a real requirement for qualified, factory-trained and factory-controlled **authorized service centers** strategically located around the world.

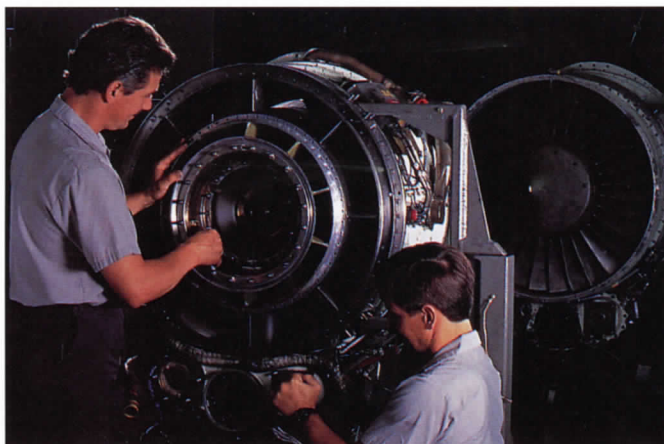
- **Technical support.** Well-trained mechanics for every airplane sold and highly trained field service representatives available on site or via a 24-hour hot line worldwide.

- **Parts support.** Adequate spares at factory, factory service centers and authorized service centers. Overnight service in North America. Two-day service almost anywhere in the world.

- **Technical publications**

(readily available manuals and periodic newsletters).

The longevity, reliability and safety of any airplane is directly related to training, support and maintainability through standardization. A combination of these, plus motivated, happy employees, will naturally lead to more sales, lower sales prices, lower operational costs, lower insurance rates and last, but even more important, higher profits for the manufacturer.



After-sales support is becoming increasingly more important to operators.



James B. Taylor's career includes senior management and marketing positions at Pan Am, Cessna and Canadair. He was president and CEO of Gates Learjet before his retirement in 1988, when he established an aviation management and marketing advisory firm.