

# Pilots Feel the Pinch

by Dan Smith



**The past twelve months have been difficult for everyone in business aviation. As tough economic conditions have bitten, companies have taken action to reduce employment costs and it's the people at the front of the aircraft who are feeling the pinch. While there are signs that the economy, and bizav, might be on the road to recovery, it's still a hard time to be looking for work. So what's happening in the job market now and how can you improve your chances of getting work?**

Typically the employment market runs about three to six months behind the general economy. With exceptions, the banking crisis began to seriously affect stock markets and business confidence around August 2008. At that time the European Union unemployment rate was 7.0%. It has climbed every month since, reaching 8.9% in June this year. However, the most dramatic increase came between December 2008 and

March 2009 when EU unemployment increased from 7.6% to 8.5%. Although still increasing, the rate is levelling off which suggests that the job market, like the economy a few months ago, is improving.

There are signs that things are turning around according to Fiona Betts, Managing Director of Betts Recruitment:

"We are starting to see companies recruit executive-level staff in management, operations and sales." With almost 20 years' experience in recruitment, Betts has seen it all before: "The first thing companies do when the economy starts to recover is get key people in place. It happened after 9/11 and after the Asian financial crisis in the late 90s."

## Cutbacks Up Front

In the August edition of *On the Fly*, FC asked a number of maintenance organisations whether they were still finding it hard to recruit good people, and the universal response was “Yes”. Eric Gillespie, Sales and Marketing Manager of Flying Colours Corp is on the lookout for quality people: “There is still a shortage of quality maintenance engineers. We have not seen this change to date, despite the big downturn in the economy.”

The economic crisis has effectively grounded many hundreds of aircraft as people choose not to fly or to sell their planes. That has put a lot of flight crew out of work. “It’s the guys at the front of the aircraft that are feeling it,” says Betts. “There is a surplus of candidates for pilot jobs, and clients are as fussy as always. A candidate must have the right number of hours, right certification, even the right passport. People are looking for the perfect jigsaw piece.”

## Screening for Safety

With a plethora of candidates to choose from, you think it would be easy to find the right person. Christian Beckert of Aviation Screening cautions employers against accepting candidates without assessing them adequately: “Big companies commonly screen their candidates but small operators usually do not. A pilot is much like a manager and in a small company they can have a lot to do besides flying. Their flying skills are sometimes really poor.” Beckert’s concerns are reflected in a report on Business Jet Safety by the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). Published in March, the CAA report states in part: “...business jets appeared to be involved in a disproportionate number of fatal accidents.” Over one third of those accidents involved ferry or positioning flights.

A surplus of candidates can also pose problems for the applicants themselves. To ensure your CV is picked out of the bunch, Betts recommends you follow exactly the procedures laid out in the job listing: “Provide everything that they ask for. Employers need to have a process to deal with 200 applications for one job. If we are oversubscribed, we shortlist the people who followed the procedure.”

While getting a job is tough, there are ways to increase your chances of being successful (see Putting Your Best Digital Face Forward on page 33) and there are jobs out there. Who knows where your next position will take you? ■

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