

## Providing Transparency

### An Interview with James Chitty, President and Founder, PlaneClear

**EDITORS' NOTE** As one of the youngest entrepreneurs in the field of private aviation, James Chitty recognized the need for a new approach to private jet charter and subsequently founded PlaneClear in 2008. Previously, Chitty served as Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Liberty Equities of America and led the retail charter team for Jet One Jets and Liberty Jet. Chitty also served as Director of Business Development for FAME Aviation.



James Chitty

**COMPANY BRIEF** PlaneClear ([www.flyplaneclear.com](http://www.flyplaneclear.com)) brings unprecedented transparency to the private aviation charter industry. Founded in 2008, the company was created to bridge the gap in information between the private aviation client and the 135 operators with whom they work that exercise control of their charter services. PlaneClear provides impartial, personalized, and totally transparent private aviation solutions delivered with integrity and dependability. The result is personally tailored, cost-beneficial options as unique as the individual needs of the clients.

#### What were you looking to provide in starting PlaneClear that you felt was lacking in the industry?

From the day I became involved in the private aviation industry, I learned that priorities in private aviation are focused on time and convenience more so than the “champagne and caviar” image that is so often covered in the media.

Early on, I worked for a broker who did an excellent job on the customer service end and catered to those that value time and convenience. However, it was clear that what they were lacking was in-depth knowledge on the operational side of the business.

I'm inquisitive by nature, so I moved over to the operational side. Spending time in the hangar, with pilots and maintenance, interacting with the FAA and different safety agencies such as Argus and Wyvern was a totally different experience.

I discovered that the operators had loyalties to the owners of the aircraft. They have a more vested interest – it had more of a business model than sales. The brokers want to provide service but the operators' revenue is generated from the management of aircraft, so that is their first concern. There was a huge disconnect among the person chartering the plane, the broker selling

the charter flight, and the operators.; a breakdown in transparency and communication existed. You even had some dubious behavior where brokers were paying operators with credit cards and disputing charges after flights.

Before we started PlaneClear, my customers rarely had the opportunity to speak to the operators; however, when they had the opportunity, they did so and their experience was better because of that transparency and access. That realization set in motion the idea for PlaneClear.

#### How does PlaneClear differentiate on transparency?

We are the only charter broker that provides any true sense of transparency, meaning our clients know who has operational control of their aircraft at all times – who holds the 135 certificate and which company manages that aircraft; they know the pilot's qualifications, the number of hours he has in that type of aircraft; the last time the plane went through a third-party audit with Argus or Wyvern; insurance value; and we'll provide information such as the size of the fleet or how many full-time pilots are available.

This approach guarantees a surprise-free experience for clients throughout the process. Our unique booking procedure provides unparalleled access to vital information, ensuring a client's decision-making is accurate and informed. We know what our clients expect and we may advise them that, although a certain plane might be pricier, it makes sense for them for specific reasons.

#### Do you find it difficult to differentiate your brand in such a crowded space?

There is lot of information out there that pushes people in a lot of directions. The bigger companies and notable names do a fine job for their audience. The difference is, they're geared toward volume. We're focused on building something that works for a single person. Each client is valuable to us. As a result, we view ourselves as consultants as opposed to brokers or operators. We're almost an extension of your business. We go out to the marketplace on your behalf. We can offer 10 different options from 10 different providers and narrow it down to the options that make the most sense for you and why. In the end, our clients make the final decision.

#### How broad is the market?

In the week prior to the recent Super Bowl, we had a number of clients with tickets

contacting us. They wanted to go to the game but not spend \$15,000 to get there. However, as they were mid- to high-level management, they and their friends could chip in \$3,000 each and fly privately so their kids could be back in school on Monday. There are so many opportunities like that, which people don't consider. In these last minute situations, PlaneClear provides direct access to the best possible aircraft solutions for each client's specific itinerary. This is what separates us from the rest of the charter services out there – we provide our clients with the best, customized solution with all of the flight information made available.

#### Is the relationship membership-based?

There are two ways of doing business with us: the first is through our newly launched Debit Card, which offers a savings of more than 30 percent over comparable programs. Making this card even more attractive is that card members will never pay more than the fair market price on any flights. This promise is part of our client commitment to our card members. As a card member, you receive the complete offering of safety audits and trip checks. We cap our commission structure at 7.5 percent above the wholesale rate. Compared to the charter marketplace standard rate, our card offers a \$15,000 savings in aggregate. Compared to the Jet Card industry, it's a \$50,000 savings. So we're focused on building loyalty by charging a reasonable fee for exceptional service. In return, we want to be our clients' private aviation partner. The membership aspect is the core focus of our business for this reason.

For our individuals that fly a few times a year and don't want to commit to the Debit Card program, PlaneClear offers a charter service, which is a one-time on-demand transaction. In this scenario, clients enjoy access to a wide fleet but don't necessarily enjoy the same level of transparency and flexibility when it comes to operators and margins. For these trips, margins can fluctuate and we dictate the fee structure.

#### Will the volume increase for PlaneClear?

We only allow ourselves to take on a certain number of clients. This allows us to create unique and personalized flight options for each and every individual need. Our goal is to deliver the best private aviation solutions to our clients every time they fly. In fact, preferences in speed, price, passage capacity, and aircraft amenities are recorded in each personal profile. This profile ensures that we consistently provide clients with the perfect aviation options based on their unique needs. ●