

WORK EXPERIENCE JOHN STRICKLAND

# Advisory work has ups and downs

A substantial track record established in airline management qualified John Strickland ideally as founder and director of JLS Consulting, which provides strategic insight and analysis to the air transport sector

## How did you get into aviation?

I always wanted to work in the airline business. I'd dreamed of joining the British Airways (BA) graduate programme after university, but it was cancelled when I graduated in 1982, so I wrote letters to as many airlines as I could think of. I was living with my parents in Leicester and it was a local airline, British Midland, that gave me my break. I joined its reservations department at Donington Hall, near East Midlands airport. I'm so glad this bottom-rung job was my starting point.

## How has your career progressed?

Within nine months, I was promoted to ticket sales at Heathrow airport. After that, I secured a position in revenue management at Gatwick airport with British Caledonian (BCal), learning valuable technical skills in a job I loved, before moving into a marketing analyst role. Then, BCal was bought by BA and I moved back to Heathrow, honing my skills as a network planner. After three years, an opportunity to head revenue management for Air UK at London Stansted airport arose. During the 1990s, KLM, which had held a minority stake, took over the airline, rebranding it as KLM UK. I became responsible for the airline's international routes and was subsequently part of the team that set up and ran the low-cost carrier Buzz.

## What have been the highlights?

At British Midland, it was exciting to witness first hand the head-to-head competition with BA's Shuttle service on the important



Setbacks can build resilience and offer opportunities, says Strickland

domestic trunk routes to Scotland and Belfast from Heathrow, something which Margaret Thatcher had permitted the airline to run. When BA fought back with Super Shuttle, I could see we were losing traffic and asked our pugnacious commercial director what effect the competition was having. "It's killing us, John. What's your next question?" was his reply! At BCal I learned about the challenges and complexities of operating an international route network, and joining BA, I recall my shock when I saw just what a honey pot Heathrow was for high-yield traffic. This was when BA launched Club World, a market-leading product and we were filling large business-class cabins on multiple daily North Atlantic flights. At BCal, we thought we were doing well if we filled our

business cabins on a Friday night! I was given opportunities to determine the deployment of BA's new Boeing 767 fleet, prepare a compensation claim for late deliveries of 747-400s and analyse Concorde's poor financial performance on routes like Washington and Miami. At Air UK, I was able to work on KLM's first commercial partnership with Alitalia, attending project meetings in Rome. I also met Northwest Airlines in Minneapolis as part of KLM's market-leading transatlantic joint venture with the airline, the forerunner of all the joint ventures we see today. Developing a new airline with Buzz was one of the most exciting points in my career. Establishing an innovative network with numerous secondary airports is something I'm proud of. It was a rare moment of

creativity, so I'm pleased that many of these airport gems remain in Ryanair's network today.

## Why did you set up JLS Consulting?

The sale of Buzz to Ryanair was the catalyst to establishing my consultancy. It was a "quick fix" until I got another airline position; I had no idea I'd still be doing it 18 years later. Today, I use my experience to work with clients including airlines, airports and investors, providing strategic insight, analysis and advisory services concerning the air transport sector. I also interview many of the industry's leaders at conferences and events around the world.

## What are the challenges?

Consultancy can be very unpredictable; you have to manage the ups, downs and uncertainties.

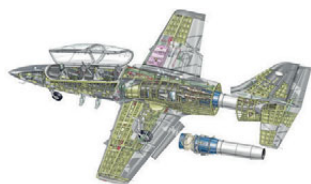
## How would you describe the state of the industry today?

I'm shocked. It's heart-breaking to see what's happening, but my own experience gives me a sense of optimism. I've learned that setbacks – and this is the worst one I've ever seen – can increase resilience and often produce unexpected opportunity. You need to look for that where perhaps others don't see it. ■

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