

Rocky Mountain News

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Jumpjet targets business flier without sky-high budget

By Chris Walsh, Rocky Mountain News
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Private jets have long been the territory of high-profile executives and wealthy individuals - and nothing more than a daydream for the average traveler.

An upstart company hopes to change that.

Santa Fe-based Jumpjet is looking to bring private jets to travelers who can't afford to buy their own planes or charter aircraft. It's also targeting travelers who are just fed up with the hassles of commercial flights.

Starting May 29, the company will launch new service in Denver and more than a dozen other major cities that allows customers to fly on private jets for business and leisure trips in exchange for a fixed monthly fee.

Travelers can save time flying from smaller, less-crowded airports. Customers also can fly nonstop to smaller areas that have limited commercial service, and they sometimes can bring guests and pets along at no extra cost.

"Private jet travel has been out of reach for many people, and we want to bring it to a much greater audience," said Will Ashcroft, founder and chief executive officer of Jumpjet. "We think this will appeal to people who normally fly business class and first class or pay for full-fare tickets."

Ashcroft pegs the potential market at about 60 million passengers.

Jumpjet contracts with another company for aircraft and crews, which must meet some of the industry's highest safety standards, Ashcroft said. It has access to 16 types of jets ranging from an eight-seat Citation II to a swank Gulfstream V capable of carrying 16 passengers and loaded with amenities such as a microwave oven and a phone.

Membership plans range from \$1,500 a month - good for up to two round-trip flights each month - to \$4,000, which will get you four round-trip flights. The prices are lower than options such as fractional ownership, buying or chartering aircraft.

But observers say other factors will determine whether the company is successful.

"If people are going to spend extra money to fly, they do so primarily to save time," said Evergreen aviation consultant Mike Boyd. "It will depend on how convenient this is."

Members must make reservations several days in advance, which isn't ideal for business travelers who have to catch last-minute flights. Travelers also might have to share a plane with other passengers if more than one Jumpjet member wants to fly the same route on the same day.

Robert Olislagers, executive director of Centennial Airport, said he certainly sees a market for the service. But the size of that market remains to be seen.

"Obviously the difference between these guys and fractionals is that there's no ownership in aircraft, so there's no equity," Olislagers said. "But with a lower entry fee, they certainly might be able to attract a number of customers."

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The Lear 35A, good for quick trips, is part of the Jumpjet fleet.