

# Business Aviation **insider**

The Official Member Publication of NBAA



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Flight Department

No Plane No Gain  
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## Light Airplane Is Part of Company's Recipe for Success

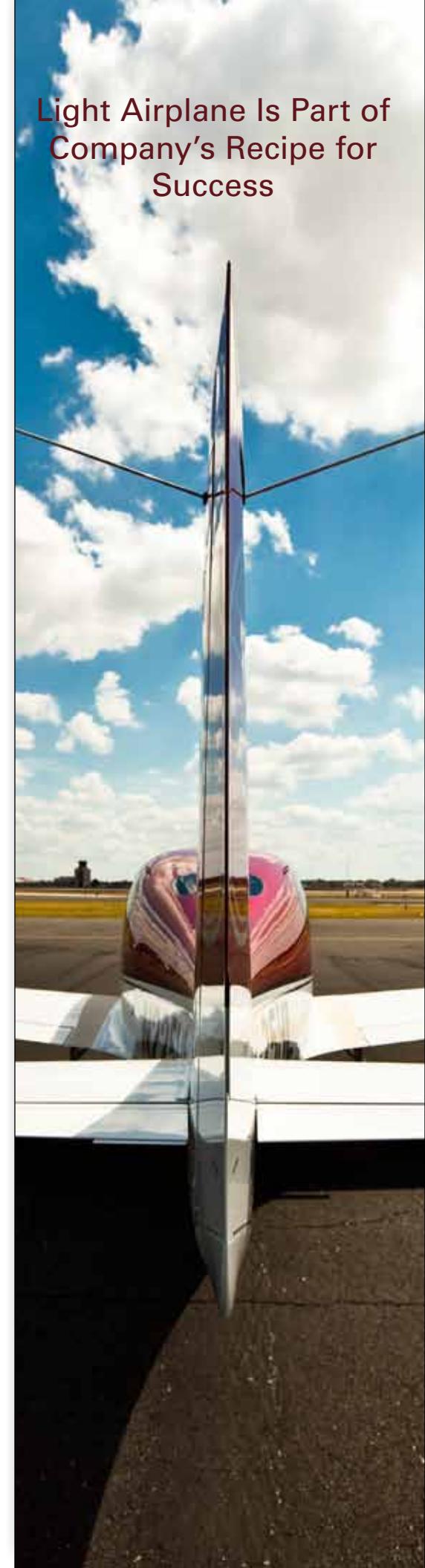
In today's challenging economy, many companies have reacted by cutting discretionary spending and slashing travel budgets.

Brad Pierce, president of Orlando, FL-based NBAA Member Company Restaurant Equipment World, has taken the opposite approach. Although a substantial share of his sales are online through a network of searchable product-specific web sites that feature more than 26,000 items, Pierce believes in going out and seeing existing and potential new customers in person. The company's single-engine, turbocharged Cirrus Design SR-22 has been instrumental in that strategy.

"This business would not be what it is today without the use of general aviation aircraft," said Pierce, who pilots the Cirrus. "The airplane is worth every penny, now more than ever."

"The U.S. economy has not stopped," Pierce explained. "There is business out there, and I believe in the power of making things happen. We are going out there and grabbing our slice of the pie, not just waiting for someone to serve it to us. When I look at where our sales are coming from in this economy, aviation has been the key."

**Growing Business Relationships, Face to Face**  
Restaurant Equipment World,



which was founded in 1976 by Brad Pierce's father Jerry, also sells equipment through its local cash-and-carry showroom. However, the 50-employee company embraced e-commerce nearly 15 years ago and does much of its business online. Besides selling restaurant equipment, the firm offers design and consulting services for commercial kitchen re-models, new projects and turnkey installations. Restaurant Equipment World has tackled jobs for a variety of customers, from restaurant chains and theme parks, to military bases, hospitals and even NASA.

"We are a customer-service-oriented business; we just happen to sell restaurant equipment," said Pierce, who believes it is essential for his company to partner with customers. "Online is the transactional side of our business," he explained, "but when we are there, in person with the customer, that's where the relationship flourishes." It is where deals are sealed and relationships maintained and expanded.

Restaurant Equipment World originally acquired a Cirrus to visit customers throughout the Southeast, but the firm quickly found that using the plane for longer trips made sense, too. Company personnel fly by airline when it fits their schedule, but Pierce has piloted the Cirrus as far as California on business trips, usually stopping to see several customers along the way.

Pierce and his associates make trips in the company plane for numerous reasons. At the beginning of a project, they need to be on-site to help design installations. Once the equipment is in place, they have their technicians calibrate the units and ensure they are working properly. "The airplane allows us to be there to ensure things go as planned," said Pierce, "and if they don't go as planned, we are there, ready to work on a solution."

Restaurant Equipment World officials also take the Cirrus to attend grand openings of new customer facilities, and they come back again after operations have been up and running for a few months. Pierce has even used the airplane to visit competitors' showrooms and see what best practices they use.

The Cirrus also has been indispensable in responding rapidly to new opportunities. When bidding on a recent job in Texas, Restaurant Equipment World representatives were the only ones who visited the prospective customer in person, a fact that Pierce believes helped close the deal. When another prospect in Georgia called one day at 10:00 a.m. to set up a





meeting, Pierce told him that he and his people could be there by 2:00 p.m. – the same day. A competitor said he could not get there until a week later. Pierce made the trip and returned to Orlando by dinnertime with a signed contract.

### Valuing Safety, NBAA Membership

Brad Pierce had been aware of the capability of general aviation aircraft since he was a teenager working summers for an Orlando-based helicopter operator. After he financed his own fixed-wing flight training, his appreciation of general aviation grew, and he soon realized that he could stop driving 20,000 miles per year on business and save precious time by acquiring an airplane.

Counteracting a misperception that business airplanes might be a company excess, Pierce stated flatly: "Cool and neat only get you so far; you need a business justification to operate an airplane. I know I make more money and am more productive because I am able to do more in the day."

To ensure that he operates as safely as possible, Pierce always flies on instruments during company missions and operates with at least an hour of reserve fuel. He also takes recurrent training annually and attends Cirrus Migration meetings, during which he learns best practices and safety tips from other operators of the light airplane.

If threatening weather is likely, Pierce purchases refundable airline tickets and will fly commercial if necessary. He also relies on the Cirrus Owners and Pilots Association's online forum for operational advice for his pilot peers. When he upgraded to a turbocharged Cirrus, he underwent simulator training to smooth his transition from the Avidyne to Garmin cockpit.

Restaurant Equipment World has its aircraft serviced by the local Orlando Cirrus service center, and Pierce has told the facility to do whatever is needed to ensure safety. Thus far, his company has experienced virtually no downtime due to maintenance issues, said Pierce.

Pierce's company became an NBAA Member in 2005, mainly because Pierce values the way the Association promotes and defends the industry. "Advocacy issues are huge," said Pierce, who noted that NBAA protects the interests of both large and small operators.

As for the future, Pierce said, "Business aviation is critical to the long-term growth of the business. I can't imagine operating without a plane." Restaurant Equipment World has a deposit on a Cirrus Jet, and Pierce can foresee a day when the company will operate an even larger jet. For a company that is enjoying double-digit growth in an industry sector that is struggling, it seems that the sky is the limit. ♦