



*“As soon as I gave him the price of a seat to Parma, he said: ‘Book it’. These guys know a good deal”*

This photo: Find the seat you want at a price to suit. Inset, above right: A Bombardier Global 500 – the perfect ride home.



# FLYING HIGH

Adding some transparency to the business of booking an empty leg on a private jet

Words | Charlotte Bailey

**T**here’s an occurrence in life that, no matter who you are and what level of society you’ve reached, always feels like an achievement: securing a bargain. Indeed, for the ambitious, the thrill of making a good deal is a constant motivator. It was this line of thinking that prompted former aircraft salesman Antony Rivolta and Patricio Zunino to found their online private jet empty leg specialist website, JetPartner.net.

“We have spent the past 15 years having clients booking a private jet saying: ‘I’m coming back next week: can you get me an empty leg at a special price?’. They want to fly privately, but they all want to save money,” says Antony Rivolta, who has been in the aviation industry for 30 years, working for Bombardier and as the MD of JetClub before setting up JetPartner. “These are people who’ve made a lot and don’t like to waste it. So they’re always looking for ways they can do things for less.” JetPartner was started as a jet broker in 2010 by Antony and business partner Patricio Zunino, and opened an online arm last year. Like so many of today’s most successful websites, JetPartner.net is a simple concept, allowing the user to independently

enter his chosen route and, in two clicks, see whether there’s an empty leg flying that route and what price it’s going for. “It’s so simple, so logical,” he says. “Let’s say about 30% of private flights are running empty: we provide that data to the end customer. We’re just harnessing the data and making it available to them.”

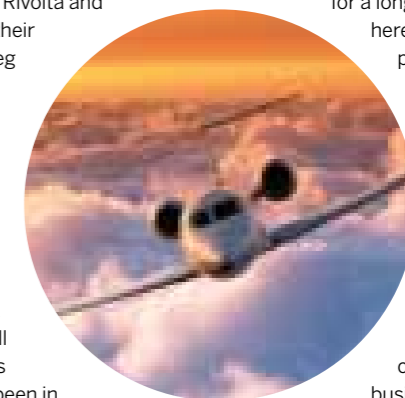
While empty legs have been available to book for a long time, the unique element

here is that the options and prices are readily available for

the client to see in black and white. If a client finds a price he likes, he clicks a button to reserve the flight and the JetPartner team contact him or his PA soon afterwards to finalise the deal personally, via phone or email. “There are some companies looking to make business travel ‘end to end’,

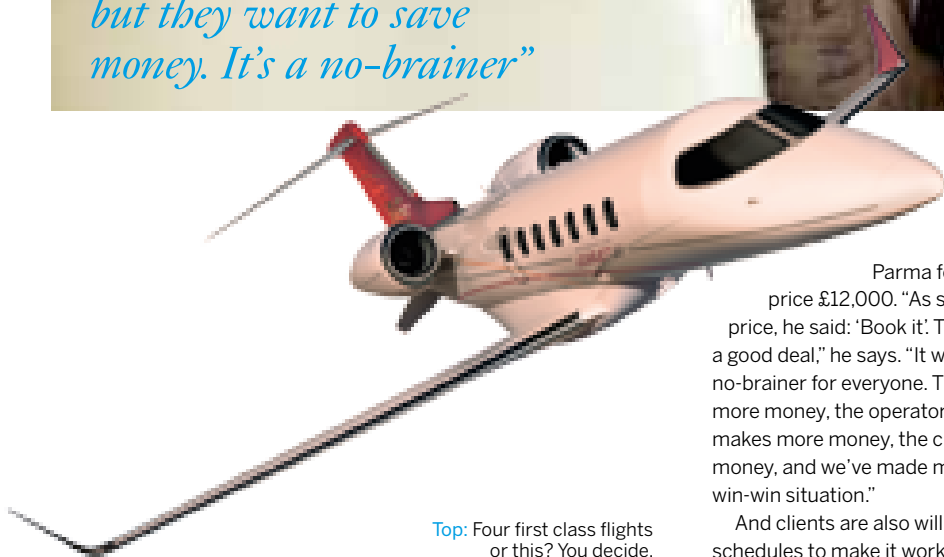
where the client doesn’t speak to anybody and completely books online,” says Antony. “That doesn’t work in our view – this business is too bespoke.” The personal service is also necessary partly because the empty-leg prices that the system searches through, from a total of 230 organisers and 1,600 aircraft, are constantly in flux.

Nevertheless, the savings are substantial – up to about 50% of the price of a normal single leg in some cases. When we meet, Antony

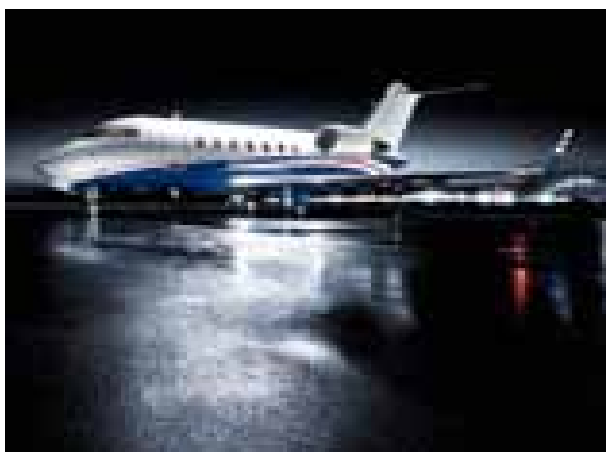




*“They want to fly privately but they want to save money. It’s a no-brainer”*



Top: Four first class flights or this? You decide.  
Above: A Learjet 85 in the air.  
Below: Landing in style – a Challenger 605.



has just arranged for a client to fly from Düsseldorf to Parma for £6,200 – usual price £12,000. “As soon as I gave him the price, he said: ‘Book it! These guys know that’s a good deal,” he says. “It was an absolute no-brainer for everyone. The plane’s owner gets more money, the operator looks good and makes more money, the client has saved money, and we’ve made money. It’s win-win-win situation.”

And clients are also willing to adapt their schedules to make it work: “It’s amazing how adaptable people become when I tell them that a Tuesday flight is £10,000 but I have got one on Wednesday for £5,000. Suddenly they become very flexible in their schedule!” There is a box to check at the start of the search process for flexible dates.

The planes range from five to 16 seaters: the client chooses a small, medium or large cabin when he searches the site. You can specify a galley, conference table or bed via phone or email. Only the bespoke optional extras aren’t included in JetPartner.net’s online prices. “The prices are usually quoted all-in, unless you want vintage champagne!” says Antony. “Anything can be customised: you can have stickers on the outside of the plane and anything you like catering wise, as long as the plane is large enough to have an oven and a fridge. You can ask for hostesses or a desk.” JetPartner’s customers are currently about 20% leisure

passengers, flying to a resort, property or yacht, for example, while the other 80% are business.

Early on a drizzly morning in November, just a few minutes after arriving at Farnborough airport in the UK, our group was whisked by 4x4 from the terminal to the steps to board a Cessna Citation XL. It became clear how much time and energy is saved flying privately – on our medium-category, nine-seat plane were tables to work or hold meetings, seats that could face forwards or backwards, and a well-stocked provisions area that saw us nibbling on Novikov caviar and sipping Dom Perignon en route to Vatry airport near Châlons, for lunch at the Dom Pérignon château in Epernay and a tour of the cellars. Just an hour after take-off, we were on the road on the other side, refreshed, and spared the frazzling airport queues of scheduled flights.

According to Antony’s business partner Patricio, creating an accessible, easy-to-use online system has opened up the private jet industry to new customers. “We are creating a demand for customers who thought they couldn’t afford it,” he says. “When they see our prices they become interested. They realise that instead of paying for five or six first-class tickets, they could be paying the same price for a private jet empty leg. Our flight to Vatry in a similar-sized aircraft as an empty leg would have cost around £3,500 one-way. For nine people, that works out as under £400 per person. Why fly any other way?” **SYW** [www.jetpartner.net](http://www.jetpartner.net)