After celebrating four decades of innovation, Toulouse, France-based Airbus looks ahead to the next 40 years. In its recent “The Future by Airbus” report, the aircraft manufacturer seeks to determine what air transport will look like in the year 2050. Through this initiative, it works with various stakeholders and experts to anticipate the global needs of a better-connected and more sustainable world.

Airbus believes that the aviation industry as a whole must focus on technological advances that will satisfy passenger and market demand, the growing population and its demographic profile, and respect all aspects of the environment.

Airbus has come a long way since it launched four decades ago. It has gone from a vision to consolidate and develop an independent European aviation industry, which led to its creation in 1970, to being today’s market leader with more than 11,500 aircraft orders. At the heart of this growth has been creating the world’s most modern aircraft by building innovation into all of its products.

Airbus incorporates advanced technology to:

- Improve customer profitability,
- Address environmental concerns impacting the airline industry,
- Provide the best possible flying experience for passengers,
- Technology, combined with economies of scale, is the main driver in making airlines more economical.

From the onset, innovation has been key to competing with established manufacturers Boeing, Lockheed and McDonnell Douglas. While three- and four-engine aircraft were standard for large aircraft at the time, Airbus’ founders decided to design and develop a competitive two-engine wide-body aircraft. The Airbus A300 would be lighter and more economical than its competitors. After a slow start, the aircraft became a hit, reaching a market share of 26 percent by the mid-1970s.

With the development of its product line, Airbus pioneered innovations such as:
- Cockpit commonality,
- Fly-by-wire controls that reduce training time and costs,
- New weight-saving materials such as carbon fiber,
- Time- and cost-saving centralized maintenance.

An ambitious focus on innovation required groundbreaking marketing techniques to overcome the traditionally conservative opinions of crewmembers, maintenance and operations teams, and finance departments. More importantly, the financial benefits for airlines had to be clear to demonstrate the advantage of Airbus products against well-established competitors.

As part of the process, Airbus developed a team of fleet- and network-planning experts who model, evaluate and determine, for each potential customer, the revenue and cost benefit of flying Airbus aircraft. Using special support tools to assist with decision making, and working collaboratively with its airline partners, Airbus’ marketing team creates specific scenarios to design the optimal fleet size and sub-fleet requirements in the medium and long term to maximize airline profitability.

This innovative partnership approach allows airlines and Airbus to quantify the revenue and cost benefits of each incremental aircraft or sub-fleet.

For years, Airbus has been in the position of the challenger to penetrate new airline customers. However, marketing challenges for Airbus are changing: Airbus experiences more fleet renewals rather than gaining new customers because of the success of its sales campaigns. This

Airbus Facilities

More than 11,000 people are employed at Airbus facilities in the Toulouse, France, area, where final assembly lines are located for the A320 family as well as A330/A340 and A380 aircraft.
Our aim is to continue to innovate; keep our aircraft at the forefront of economics, capability and value; and deliver world-leading products to our customers.

— Philippe Gossard, vice president, fleet and network profitability group, Airbus

Christopho Ritter is a senior partner for Sabre Airline Solutions. He can be contacted at christophe.ritter@sabre.com.