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A roadmap for expansion

AJW Group has expanded its maintenance services into Europe with the launch of a new MRO facility near London Gatwick Airport called AJW Technique Europe. Here, AJW Technique's chief executive officer **Sajedah Rustom** discusses the company's aims and ambitions

Congratulations on the launch of AJW Technique Europe. Could you explain the idea behind it?

AJW Technique has spent the past two years clean-sheeting process, data and technology, to allow us to optimise our workflow and unlock efficiencies. We have developed the perfect recipe to run a seamless MRO, allowing us to copy/paste our approach and extend AJW Technique into a global franchise.

The European MRO has been strategically positioned to meet the needs of AJW Group's flagship local customers, delivering the same outstanding quality and customer experience provided by AJW Technique in Montreal, right at their doorstep.

The facility now operates as a centre of excellence for batteries, given that these repairs are done locally to the carrier and will soon expand into new capabilities that fit wider needs of our European customer base.

What are AJW's aims for the facility in the short term and in the long term?

Our immediate aim is to deliver a world-class service for this product line. Our battery technicians are specialists of the units' behaviours and continuously find ways to streamline the repair process to ensure excellent turnaround times.

We intend to expand our list of capabilities to complement our state-of-the-art facility in Montreal and conduct repairs for our wider European customer base on equivalent locally repaired commodities.



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What was the thinking behind beginning with a specialisation in battery repair?

AJW Group acquired Avia Component Services, which has been AJW's preferred battery repair vendor for many years to service our European customer's battery repairs. Batteries are expensive to ship and considered

dangerous goods. Although AJW Technique Montreal has in-house battery capabilities, we cannot repair battery units from outside the Americas for this reason, hence using a specialist shop has historically been the most efficient solution. The acquisition of Avia has provided a perfect opportunity for both parties, allowing AJW Technique Europe to retain Avia's skilled technicians, with over 50 years of technical expertise, permitting us to provide a turn-key full-service experience.

The suite of main batteries and emergency packs of 30 part numbers cover a wide platform of aircraft types, from Airbus A319, A320 and A321s to Boeing 727, 737, 747, 757 and 767s as well as Global Express, Challengers, CRJs and Embraer 500s, which means our customer base will be wide and varied.

How will the facility develop its capabilities?

We intend to expand our capabilities initially to other 'hard to ship' capabilities, whether due to their hazardous nature, size or regional customer needs. Naturally we will be focusing on lighting, audio, auxiliary, galley equipment and gas capabilities.

How will you measure the success of AJW Technique Europe?

We have a four-phased roadmap for the expansion of AJW Technique Europe, which are huge measures of success within themselves. We are also using the

Right: AJW Aviation turns 90 in 2022; the group is focused on business expansion and evolving its services
Below: The group's headquarters in Slinfold, England – which is near the new AJW Technique facility

same key performance indicators used at AJW Technique Montreal covering product, sales, delivery and customer experience. More specifically on the operational side, we monitor proactively our turnaround time per customer commitments, quality, reliability and competitive pricing. The franchise model benefits from all the digital MRO tools and lessons learned from AJW Montreal.

AJW Group has also launched AJW Technique Interiors. How will the two new facilities work in conjunction with the existing facility in Montreal?

AJW Technique Europe complements AJW Technique Montreal and offers our renowned repair excellence on local repairs to European operators.

AJW Technique Interiors specialises in aircraft interiors, specifically innovative materials for seat covers, manufacture and supply of head rest covers, life vest pouches and carpet kitting. We see AJW Technique Interiors as a complementary service that we are now able to offer our customers, giving them a one-stop-shop with design, development, testing and production all housed under one roof to drive sustainability and efficiency for their interior requirements.

AJW Technique signed a 10-year lease renewal for the Montreal facility earlier this year, what are the plans here going forward?

The 10-year lease renewal secures AJW Technique's commitment to continued growth and acceleration of our repair

business in Montreal. Over the past year we have expanded our safety cell to meet our customers' demands and added an additional 320 part numbers to our capabilities. In addition, we have recently been awarded Airbus Approved Supplier status and are a licensed facility for many tier one OEM component manufacturers.

Having positioned the company to emerge from the Covid-19 crisis stronger, how are those plans playing out and how do you see the state of the MRO and spare parts markets now?

The industry is still disrupted, and we are seeing 60 per cent of pre-Covid volume and value. The pandemic gave us the opportunity to reset, accelerating our business and digital transformation. It has been a tremendous period of growth for the company, with a number of notable highlights.

For example, we retained all our contracted customers and onboarded six new power-by-the-hour customers, including Aer Lingus, while extending our easyJet contract for another 10 years.

We also negotiated a US\$100m joint venture investment with Arena Investors, and opened, staffed and stocked a new EU hub in Italy at the height of the global lockdown.

Another highlight was developing and launching a fully automated sales platform called 'AJW eventory'.

What are your expectations for the future in terms of trends and innovations?

As part of AJW's digital and innovation roadmap, we are looking into the eVTOL and drone market, positioning ourselves to become service providers, logistics, parts suppliers and strategic partners in such new endeavours. The expansion of AJW Technique into a franchise will enable AJW Technique to offer repair and engineering services with a proven model that works, offering products that iterate with market trends and changes.

Next year, AJW Technique turns 10 and AJW Aviation turns 90 – is there a 'philosophy' or set of business principles that has underpinned the company's growth and longevity?

Since 1932, for almost 90 years, AJW Group has been transforming aviation efficiency adapting dynamically and flexibly, through recessions, global unrest and now a pandemic.

AJW's greatest strength is its independence and agility which gives it the freedom and fluidity to move with





Left: AJW Technique signed a 10-year lease renewal for its Montreal facility earlier this year, with the company committed to “continued growth” there

the market’s needs and develop tailored solutions for its customers. As a company we embrace change and work hard to provide an unrivalled expertise and customer experience.

What are the main challenges that you see the business needing to respond to?

The main challenges we witnessed over this period are businesses’ ability to maintain their cost structure, requiring them to divest parts of their businesses, especially those with heavy lease payments, and reducing the workforce to level with reduced work volumes.

Businesses have also had to adopt flexible working hours in line with volumes of work and accelerate their digital transformations to eliminate administrative burden and manual intervention that comes from legacy aerospace processes. The adoption of these new digital solutions has also been a major challenge in the industry, as major disruptions occur on culture and processes at the same time. It is important that businesses focus on change management culture and people just as much, if not more than, on the technology.

Can you outline your progress on digitisation?

Digital transformation has been critical, especially in MRO environments where tribal knowledge of the workforce is extensive. With the goal of maximising technicians’ component touch-time, we have investigated tools to enable a digital shop floor. Examples include productivity trackers, automated payables and receivables, credit control automation,

turnaround time gaming systems, performance management dashboards, piece parts provisioning models, and dynamic pricing algorithms. We have also tested asset location tracking using RFID and Bluetooth technology as a proof of concept. This allows technicians to have a full view of high value assets at their fingertips, facilitating traceability and workflow management. Beyond RFID technology, we have also investigated other hands-free systems and collaborated on predictive maintenance discoveries.

“The pandemic gave us the opportunity to reset, accelerating our business and digital transformation”

At the beginning of the pandemic, we built digital tools and dashboards to closely monitor fleet recoveries by customer and by platform to ensure our operations are synchronised with flying patterns. We invested in customer-facing digitalisation which resulted in real-time monitoring dashboards and tracking tools, thereby making internal productivity fully transparent and, in turn, the customer experience seamless from end to end.

To enhance our customers 24/7/365 needs we launched a responsive, interactive and mobile customer portal, ensuring clients can access orders, view status on the go and extract any related documents. It also enables interaction with support teams, regardless of location, with no transaction delay, full data and process integration. Our new e-commerce platform for parts

trading, ‘AJW eventory’, enables users to browse and purchase from our extensive inventory, with easy access to full paperwork trace, chat functionality and the ability to ship via any chosen method and track the shipment in a few clicks.

What about progress on sustainability?

Sustainability comes in two forms – creating longevity of people, process, data and technology to drive continued success, as well as the physical side of investing in environmental sustainability via green approaches to production and repair.

Some transformations lead with a focus on generating value for the business in the short-term and neglect the long-term effects on the business, especially the ability for a business and the people to sustain the changes. At AJW Technique, we ensure that the people are at the core of the transformation.

We start with clean-sheeting data and resetting consistent processes across the board. The final step is to then introduce technology built in partnership with the business, spending 80 per cent of the time on change management and successful adoption. Customer journeys are not only for the customer!

In terms of the product roadmap, AJW Technique has a robust training and qualification process which ensures successful deployment of any new capability launched operationally. In parallel, customer experience and procurement work to ensure a proper sales push is in place with secured contractual volumes and replenishment rates in line with work inflow.

At AJW Technique Interiors our most innovative product is ‘SkyLeather’ – which is a lightweight synthetic material that has the possibility to significantly reduce the carbon footprint of an aircraft – leading the way for sustainability. For example, an A320 operator could save nearly 16,000kg of fuel and reduce their carbon footprint by over 50,000kg per year, per aircraft, using SkyLeather. With a weight of 460g/sq m, operators can save 0.86kg per seat compared to hide leather, as well as being extremely durable, anti-microbial, easy to clean and eco-friendly. 🌱



AJW[®]

Complex MRO vendor network?

Let us be your single
point of contact

AJW Group is a world-leading, independent component parts, repair and supply chain solution provider, transforming efficiency in **commercial**, **business** and **defence** aviation.



NEW - AJW Technique Europe,
your local centre of excellence
for battery repair and overhaul.



NEW - AJW Technique Interiors,
delivering revolutionary synthetic
materials for seat covers, carpet
kitting, headrest covers and
life vest pouches.

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