

# 90 YEARS STRONG

AJW is celebrating its 90th anniversary this year, and it has been quite the journey for a company that started life as a surplus parts redistribution business supporting the Piper Cub aircraft. We spoke to chairman and CEO **Christopher Whiteside** about the past, present and future

**MRO Management: Congratulations on AJW's 90th anniversary. Is there a 'philosophy' or set of business principles that has underpinned the company's growth and longevity?**

**Christopher Whiteside:** I would like to think that AJW operates with the same agility and enthusiasm now as it did 90 years ago when an ambitious Englishman took to the seas and ended up in the skies.

In 1932, Anthony James Walter (Jim) set off from the south of England to compete in a yacht race between California and Hawaii. He journeyed for six weeks over sea and land only to discover that the race had been cancelled due to bad weather.

While staying near Van Nuys Airport in Los Angeles, he decided that if he couldn't race, he would learn to fly. He took to the skies in a Piper Cub and, once qualified, decided to travel to the company HQ in Pennsylvania. He was granted an audience at the very top and asked if they would allow him to sell their planes back in England.

In response they told him that lots of people had written, sent

"I LIKE TO THINK FOUNDER ANTHONY JAMES WALTER WOULD BE PROUD OF WHERE THE COMPANY IS TODAY"

telegrams and/or representatives to ask that same question, but that he was the only one who had visited the site in person. Piper granted him the distribution rights for the whole of Europe.

AJW is a very different company now, but we pride ourselves on the personal touch and agility that Jim showed all those years ago. Our vision of 'transforming aviation efficiency' is dynamic and reflects a philosophy of continuous improvement – agility in a fast-paced sector is a prerequisite for success.

**What are some of the highlights for you from AJW's history?**

During my tenure of over thirty years, I would highlight the signing of our first flight hour programme in the late nineties. It was a pivotal contract that led to AJW becoming the market leader for end-to-end supply chain solutions, which in turn secured a deal to support a 320-strong fleet for Europe's leading low-cost carrier.

Opening our purpose-built 175,000sq ft warehouse and campus-style office space in 2012 – the same year that we launched AJW Technique in Montreal – are also incredibly proud and transitional moments.

Investing in the North American MRO a decade ago was a major step in the diversification we are enjoying today.

The facilities in Montreal are outstanding and we consider our pool of highly skilled, licensed

engineers and technicians the real commodity of our business. Most of the technicians at AJW Technique have over 25 years of experience in the maintenance, repair and overhaul world dating back from the days of Aveos.

AJW Technique Europe and AJW Technique Interiors are new to market and we also launched our online retail space, 'AJW eventory', last year, which is going from strength to strength. I'm especially proud of this growth with the backdrop of Covid, Brexit and the current economic climate. The last few years has been challenging for everybody, but our sector has been hit especially hard.

**How do you assess the state of the company now, and how it fits into the wider MRO and aftermarket landscape?**

AJW is in great shape. We have emerged from the pandemic laser focused on expansion and offering a one-stop solution for customers.

We are rapidly expanding our services in North and South America and are delighted to welcome JetSMART and their growing fleet of A320neo and ceo aircraft to our flight hour programme solution. AJW Technique is ready to expand once more in Europe.

The last two years of sector turmoil has changed the dynamic in the industry. It's driving far closer strategic alliances between us and our airline, aircraft manufacturer, component OEM and MRO partners.



1. Two early adverts – one in 1936 in which A.J. Walter was selling Piper Cub aircraft, and one from 1957 for A.J.W. Instruments noting the ability to overhaul and supply “all types of aircraft instruments”
2. AJW Technique in Montreal was launched in 2012
3. Christopher Whiteside, chairman and CEO of AJW

We manage a streamlined vendor supply chain of 60 primary repair workshops with 700 approved facilities and spend US\$400m annually on almost 100,000 repair orders.

Our prime objective is to deliver improved cost and reliability efficiencies for customers and strive for optimum efficiency and profitability while keeping our customers at the core of everything we do. That means working with partners that understand our business, exchange reciprocal work based on core competencies, and collaborating to innovate and collectively expand. We forge great working relationships with our suppliers, viewing them as partners not competitors, and expect new alliances to be formed in the near future.

**AJW has evolved to become a global company – what are the major operational challenges of this?** With operational hubs and local offices around the world AJW has a truly global presence, mindset, and culture.



The current supply chain challenges and longer logistics lead times are driving greater regionality in MRO sourcing, so OEM centres of excellence, say in the US, are sharing work with their European sister sites, so as to mitigate capacity constraints.

Customers are focused on managing their pandemic-induced debts and welcome our effective solutions to help keep their costs under control.

To meet the demands of our local European customers last year, we expanded our global MRO footprint with the opening of AJW Technique Europe, which operates as a centre of excellence for aircraft batteries.

**How have the supply chain solutions offered by AJW and the markets served evolved and changed over time?**

We continue to offer a bespoke service and agile solutions to our supply chains, working together with the operators to find outcomes that work for both parties and agree on KPIs that keep everyone on track to deliver exemplary service.

It is clear that the need to be reactive, adaptable and flexible to meet our customers' changing needs will remain for the foreseeable future as well as offering cost-effective solutions to help operators keep their costs under control as they manage their pandemic-induced debts.

**The company seems to have emerged from the Covid crisis in pretty strong shape. How was this achieved?**

The disruption caused by the pandemic unexpectedly gave us additional time and space to focus on streamlining our services and digitise our end-to-end processes. As a result we powered through, successfully retaining our contracted customers and winning additional customers as operators looked to drive efficiencies in their supply chains.

We opened and staffed an EU hub in Milan during lockdown and expanded our MRO, AJW Technique, with the opening of AJW Technique Europe, specialising in aircraft batteries. We added AJW Technique Interiors, with manufacturing facilities in Europe, offering new product lines to our capability list and helping airlines who need to refit cabins, replace seat covering and carpets by reducing costs and supplying a superior alternative.

We invested and focused on digital advances, including the launch of our fully automated sales platform, AJW eventory.



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1. AJW opened its warehouse and campus-style office space in southern England in 2012
2. AJW Technique is ten years old

of new hires, especially as the industry faces growing concerns of retirement, skill gaps and recruitment difficulties. At AJW Technique, for instance, we are building a tablet application which encompasses the technician's workflow with the goal of maximising component touch-time.

We have also explored asset tracking solutions using Bluetooth, RFID and ultra wide-band technologies for tooling and unit tracking within the facilities which facilitate traceability and asset management. AJW is also far ahead in machine learning and artificial intelligence; we've built dynamic pricing models, predictive sales and procurement forecasting tools, as well as manpower forecasting. We continue to pursue new discoveries in predictive maintenance through the use of machine learning algorithms, as well as blockchain.

On the front-end, our e-marketplace presence continues to grow with new features to our customer portal and AJW eventory marketplace. Air mobility is also an area of interest to us as we collaborate with eVTOL manufacturers on an integrator solution for the new ecosystem and quickly moving market.

**What else is going on at AJW?**

We are excited to welcome on board our new chief executive officer of AJW Aviation, Rachael Caston. She will help guide the organisation in its mission to transform aviation efficiency, focusing on continued strategic, operational and financial strength in delivering an exceptional customer experience.

**What are your final reflections on AJW reaching the 90-year milestone?**

I would like to think that founder, Anthony James Walter, would be incredibly proud of where the company is today. I am excited about the future and the trajectory that AJW is on – the future is bright for AJW. 🎯

“OUR PRIME OBJECTIVE IS TO DELIVER IMPROVED COST AND RELIABILITY EFFICIENCIES FOR CUSTOMERS”

**How do the recent developments tie in with future growth plans?**

AJW Technique Europe is set to expand into a series of other capabilities to complement the repair services offered at AJW Technique in Canada.

The signing of ultra-low-cost carrier JetSMART in Chile is testament to our outstanding customer relationships, founded on dependable turnaround time, cost and quality, reinforced earlier this year as AJW Group was recognised as one of the top suppliers in the region during the ALTA CCMA & MRO Conference. This strategic contract reinforces the expansion of our capabilities across the Americas and builds

solidly on our continued success with key operators in the region.

With the accelerated replacement of aging aircraft, we are focused on developing our next-generation equipment technical capabilities. Our investment in a sole distributorship agreement with Honeywell for the Boeing 737 MAX ADIRU, the A320NEO ADIRU and a suite of Boeing 787 components has done just that – allowing us to increasingly develop our in-house MRO capabilities at AJW Technique. The Honeywell product lines are current production aircraft types which are being delivered with a significant backlog of deliveries going forward, which will require the support that the AJW Group can offer.

**What are your expectations for the future in terms of digital and other innovations?**

Digital is very much a part of AJW's core strategy to create value for the business and our customers. Our digital roadmap is reflective of industry trends and continuously iterating. On the back-end, we are integrating solutions that are capturing tribal knowledge and facilitating training



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AJW<sup>®</sup>  
**90**   
**YEARS**  
1932 - 2022



AJW Group is the world-leading, independent, parts, repair, lease, engine, flight hour programme and supply chain solution integrator, transforming efficiency in commercial, business and defence aviation.

With hubs and offices on every continent - including AJW Technique, a state-of-the-art component MRO facility in Montreal - nose to tail, we have you covered.

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