Barry Nassberg
Group Chief Commercial Officer, Worldwide Flight Services

Barry Nassberg joined WFS over 25 years ago, initially working in Europe during the company’s time as a subsidiary of American Airlines, and later in Asia as he led the company’s rapid growth in regions beyond its traditional strongholds of Europe and North America.

Barry’s career in aviation began as a passenger services agent. He then went on to work for Pan American Airways in a career spanning a full range of airline and airport services activities.

Barry is WFS’ delegate to the industry trade organisations, a Trustee of TIACA, and a member of the Hong Kong Tourism Board, appointed by the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Paris-headquartered WFS (www.wfs.aero) is the world’s largest air cargo handler and a leading provider of ground handling and technical services, with annual revenues of over €1 billion. The company has approximately 18,000 employees, serving over 300 airlines at 198 major airports in 21 countries on five continents.

How has WFS performed so far in 2017 and how do you expect the rest of the year to play out?

It has been a strong year. Volume’s up at most of our stations, and we expect the rest of the year to be stable. With a network our size and a big customer base, we do have the advantage of spreading risk.

How is the process of integrating CAS going? How much work in that process is still left to be done?

It’s effectively complete. Management, workforces, facilities, finances, back office… all integrated. Some work still to go on branding and signage, but all should be done in the coming few months. We had a significant advantage, compared to other mergers, of most of the CAS senior team being former WFS employees themselves. So it was a bit like a homecoming, and the chemistry worked immediately.

Do you anticipate more acquisitions on the horizon or will future growth be more slanted towards organic growth?

We’re focused on organic right now, trying to maximise the opportunities our network strength already gives us. But we do have a few market gaps, maybe one or two in the US and a few more around the world. If the right opportunity comes our way, very targeted acquisitions are not out of the question.

You are the leading player in your sphere – but are there any areas of the business, whether sectors or regions, where you are looking to increase your presence?

Keeping in mind we’re a full service ground handler, not just a cargo handler, indeed there are a few areas we’d like to grow on the ground handling side. In terms of cargo, South America and Asia are getting a lot of focus for growth, along with some pockets in Europe.

Where do you see the biggest growth for the air cargo industry coming from in the months and years to come?

The real growth for us is going to come from the increased integration into the supply chain. Having a warehouse and calling yourself a cargo handler just doesn’t work anymore. We’re a partner to airlines, forwarders, distributors… able to meet the needs of very specialised markets. Whatever the requirements – pharma, cool chain, perishable, e-commerce – the handler is the growing link between first mile, aircraft, and last mile. That’s where the opportunities for us are.
Leading lights

Looking beyond your company, what do you think the freight and logistics business is getting right at the moment, and what does it need to work on? What will be the biggest challenges for the industry in the years to come?

From an air cargo perspective, recognising that five-day transits are just not good enough. Who would have thought that rail service between China and Europe would ever be a viable competitor to air? But now it is. So what’s needed is a focus on every link in the chain, pulling out all the inefficiencies. Making best use of IT has come a long way, but still needs encouragement. The challenges will come from the ever-faster alternatives to air, and from operators already working with fully integrated end-to-end IT systems.

What is your earliest aviation memory?

I grew up in a nomadic family, so extensive air travel goes back to the pre-memory period. Earliest recollections are of KLM Super Constellations, and of our many trips between Idlewild [JFK] and the old Schiphol.

What keeps you awake at night?

The sequence of errors, oversights or system failures that can bring disaster – but the reassurance of checks and balances, back-up systems and training help in getting back to sleep.

Would you still want to be a part of the air freight sector if you were starting out now? What are the best and worst things about working in this sector?

After 38 years in aviation, there’s not been a day I regret. I’d do it all again. Ending the day accident/incident-free, with satisfied airlines, shippers, passengers – that is the reward.

How do you relax – what are your hobbies?

Enjoying Hong Kong’s best kept secret… the 70% of its land that is completely undeveloped… mountains, trails, uninhabited islands. I’m an avid hiker, and that’s where I find relaxation.

What have been your proudest moments?

The first passenger I checked in – in 1977. The first load sheet I prepared… and then watching the DC8 actually get airborne! My first posting as Station Manager. But there are actually few individual proud moments. The big ones are when team efforts come together to deliver the real successes. I’m proudest of the people and teams I’ve assembled, many of whom I’ve worked with for the entire 25 years I’ve been at WFS. Our growth has been the team’s success.

Which other companies or executives do you admire, and why?

My competitors, when they win, because they force me to do better. And the companies that find the magical balance of people, customers, values and profit.