



HELICOPTER INVESTOR Q+A: FRANCOIS GAUTIER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, AVINCO

News / Business aviation, Personalities



In the second of our series on the high-fliers in the helicopter investment industry, Helicopter Investor talks to Francois Gautier founder and chief executive of helicopter sales and leasing specialist AVINCO. He tells us about his ideal client, his father's connection to the world famous Concorde project and about what Hollywood royalty would he want to take the lead in a movie about his life.

(1) What made you want to pursue a career in the Helicopter Investment industry?

I am passionate about aviation for the products we sell and the people that make up the industry. They combine vision, long term investment and a touch of craziness – eyes on the stars, but feet solidly on the ground.

(2) Describe your ideal client.

A customer with whom I can build up a long term relationship based on mutual trust, exchanging networks and who will ultimately become a friend. I've been lucky enough to build such relationships during my career.

(3) Who's been your industry mentor, and why?

My father, who was in charge of the Concorde program. He designed this incredible aircraft with a bunch of engineers willing to do something nobody else had done. He always told me that nothing is impossible if you work hard and if you team up with the best people.

(4) Where is your ideal meeting venue, and why?

Monaco, which is our main office base, is not a bad place to meet and entertain people. But I love New York – we will be opening our US offices there before the summer.

(5) What's hot in Helicopter Investment and what's not?

AVINCO is definitely hot. Just come to our next party!

What I personally don't find hot is when people forget the true operations of their assets and become too focused on financial structuring. We should always remember that the value of an asset is related to what an operator could do with such an asset, not to the theoretical value based on financial assumptions.

(6) When has the helicopter investment industry been less than glamorous for you?

2008, the eye of the financial crisis storm, was an extremely challenging year for us. We had €20 million worth of inventory to be sold, including some assets on lease.

We managed to sell all our assets within a year in this particularly depressed market, losing on some deals, but making money on others. It is during these difficult times that you realise you have solid and efficient people on your team, supporting each other, not just when everything is simple and rosy.

(7) Which industry buzzword would you ban?

“Distress price”: In the helicopter world there should be no such thing. Price doesn't make a deal happen. We do not believe that in a difficult market the best way to move an asset is to reduce the price.

Obviously the market dictates selling price but when you sell in a difficult market such as today it's critical to find the right buyer who has a need for a specific equipment for a specific purpose. By doing that, not only do you create a transaction opportunity, but you generate the best value from your asset. As a result, the buyers know that when they talk to us we will offer the best equipment for their requirement at a fair price ensuring a smooth and risk-free transaction.

(8) Describe yourself in three words.

Passionate, open-minded, humane.

(9) What's your advice for people wanting to get into helicopter investment?

Be prepared to work hard, as it's a tough and highly competitive world. Be ready to think outside the box, markets are changing rapidly and you will need to constantly adapt to new environments. Trust your own judgement.

But when you do, do it all the way and don't forget to have fun: you will be meeting some great individuals all over the globe.

(10) Who would you want to play you in a movie of your life, and why?

Brad Pitt, so I could bring Angelina into my team!

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