

# Interview

## A Necessity Based on Productivity

An Interview with Ken Austin, President, Marquis Jet



Ken Austin

**EDITORS' NOTE** Prior to joining Marquis Jet<sup>SM</sup>, Ken Austin was Senior Vice President at The Seagram Beverage Company based in New York City. Before joining Seagram, he held various positions of increasing responsibility for the E.&J. Gallo Winery and Price Waterhouse International Tax Group. Austin received his undergraduate degree from the Binghamton University School of Management. He also received his Executive M.B.A. from Fairleigh Dickinson University and currently sits on several company boards.

**COMPANY BRIEF** New York-based Marquis Jet ([www.marquisjet.com](http://www.marquisjet.com)), founded in 2001, offers corporate and personal-use aviation customers access to NetJets® fractional aircraft program in 25-hour increments, via prepaid, short-term subleases of a NetJets fractional interest. Through its exclusive alliance with NetJets, a Berkshire Hathaway company, the Marquis Jet Card provides Card Owners with access to NetJets' extensive global fleet of more than 800 jet aircraft, world-class convenience, and unrivaled service and safety.

**Over the past 24 months, Marquis Jet seems to have weathered the economic storm well. How much of an impact did you see, and what was it about the positioning of the brand that helped sustain it through this market?**

For starters, we started on second base because we were providing access to NetJets, backed by the financial resources of Berkshire Hathaway; so we had great credibility. Next, it's the brand.

We've been in business for nine years and are continually focused on and innovating our brand. We did some very smart marketing to take advantage of the fact that in aviation, everyone had always done everything the same way, so we were able to build a better mousetrap in our front-end branding. We then partnered with the blue chip companies in every industry from travel to wealth management to luxury brands, even though I don't consider Marquis Jet a luxury brand. I consider the Marquis Jet Card a necessity based on productivity.

Another advantage we have here is great people, which is critical. In every business, to build a great brand, you have to have great people who get out of bed every day and want to come to work, and who believe in the integrity of the product and in themselves, which makes for a winning combination. Add to that our senior management team, who are all smart and entrepreneurial, and who understand the value of our brand and our people, and you have a winning combination.

In addition, we're fortunate to have great Card Owners who understand the value of what we sell, which is not based on price – it's based on the value of the deliverable. So although we've been hit like every business in America has been hit, our brand is stronger than ever today. We were the first private aviation company ever publicized on the Winter Olympics for two weeks on NBC and on the Superbowl last year. Plus, we're running full-page ads in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. Overall, that is the look of the leader and we will continue to lead and remain relevant.

**As a result of the recent backlash against luxury, private aviation also took a hit. Is the message getting out about this being a business tool and the advantages it can have for the bottom line?**

I never considered a Marquis Jet Card a luxury. After nine short years in business, we are viewed at the top of the pyramid, and those who know us have or aspire to have a Marquis Jet Card.

That said, private aviation is a necessity for hardworking people. No matter how much money you have, you can't control time. But having access to private aviation – in our case, the best: NetJets and the Marquis Jet Card – gives you control. It's a virtual time machine. If you're going on vacation to recharge because you're working longer hours than you've ever worked before, you want to make it a pleasurable experience so you can come back and work your rear-end off again. So saving time and minimizing hassle is a necessity for people who are under major amounts of pressure.

On the other side, as a productivity tool for business, the question becomes how you get to three cities in one day and still be back in time to be productive for the next day. The answer is, in a private jet, and in our case, it's in a NetJets operated aircraft via the Marquis Jet Card. It's something in your tool box as a businessperson or an individual that most people can't attain, and it gives you a competitive advantage in business. It also gives you a competitive advantage on the personal side because you can be more competitive on the field of business when you're using our service for personal use as well. There is not one person on this planet who wouldn't love to have access to a time machine, and that is what private aviation is.

By demonizing private aviation, some in Washington and the media didn't do the category any favors. I believe most of those same people have realized that they went too far with the rhetoric and have recognized the benefits of sensible private aviation.

**You were here from the beginning. When you look at where this brand is after nine years, do you ever step back and appreciate the success and awareness you've been able to build for this brand?**

We pinch ourselves every day. The company and the people within this company are gold standard people; and if anyone knows private aviation, they have heard of the Marquis Jet Card and NetJets. I can't come up with too many brands that have become as relevant in their space in such a short period of time. The Marquis Jet Card is the Google, Kleenex, or Nike of our space. It's mind-blowing to me that we did it, and the great feeling is that we have the talent in this house that can do it again. That's why we wake up every day and want to come to work and do more for our customers and employees. After advertising during the Olympics alongside many of the world's most iconic brands, I ask, what do we do for an encore? But we have always found an encore. We're not even close to covering everything that we want to cover. It's not about money – it's about growth, success, learning, and building people. I could never have imagined the script would be written the way it has been for this company, but it's a thrilling feeling to know you've been part of this creation, and hopefully for another 50 or 100 years, my kids and their kids will be talking about Marquis Jet. ●