

THE PROFESSIONAL FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR

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Independent Instruction

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position Report

Your Own Way

Independent instructing builds on the basics of good teaching



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During my aviation career, I've worked as a flight instructor both inside a school, as an employee, and outside of one, as an independent flight instructor; I've also employed instructors, both as staff members and as independents who work with us as they train their customers. In each case, one thing is clear: Working on staff and teaching solo are two different ballgames.

On your own, you fundamentally change the characteristics of the work you must do to be successful. Working independently often means there's little support from anyone. You're a one-stop shop. Students working directly with a flight school have a home base; they can call the school to schedule, check aircraft availability, or reschedule with another instructor if theirs calls in sick. Furthermore, the school's staff can do the marketing, billing, and customer-service types of activities, which leaves instructors to simply teach. Instead, you take on these responsibilities yourself—on top of the actual first-quality instruction you need to provide.

But you also gain more control over your relation-

ship with students, greater income from those who seek out your particular expertise, and the ability to work with customers from more than one location.

Indeed, not every airport has a flight school, and in many cases, independents are the only instructors around to provide training. The services you provide are vital at those airports, and they make the difference whether that airport has any instruction at all. At times like these, the independent instructor is basically a traveling flight school, working out of the back of his car (or airplane) and bringing everything he needs with him. Yet even that means more work—knowing security procedures at each, verifying maintenance records for customers, and let's not forget tax withholdings, insurance, and other bits of financial, aeronautical, and regulatory record-keeping.

For all the hard work, the professional payoff can be a unique, successful career—one that allows you to build your own "brand." You don't think of specific schools when you think of Rod Machado or Max Trescott; you think of them as knowledgeable experts who have carved their own niche in

the world of training. In cases like these, an independent is highly qualified, with a wide breadth and depth of experience and often very specialized aircraft or avionics systems knowledge; for that reason, the role this pilot plays within the aviation community is important. And while not every independent flight instructor will achieve national notoriety, locally the recognition for being a knowledgeable instructor can lead to dedicated, consistent demand.

It can also create long-lasting, personal relationships between an instructor and his customers, which has rewards of its own. I've known some of the pilots I've trained for years, and I've helped them receive multiple ratings or certificates, and even transitioned them through multiple aircraft. In some cases I've also trained their significant others, friends, and family—and become close friends with them along the way. In doing so, I've worked with pilots who have their own airstrips and fly unique aircraft, and I've traveled to their homes or personal hangars to provide my services.

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school; they were built with an individual instructor, a person who's more than just a "rental" CFI. He is that student's flight instructor—and that's the lesson independent instructors can teach those who teach on staff: providing personal, dedicated service pays dividends and creates loyalty throughout your career.

Creating a successful career as an independent instructor allows you to sell what you do best; all you have to do is market those skills, carve out your own piece of the pie, and serve your customers in a personal, personalized way.

And really, when it comes to flight training, that's everything any of us should hope to do, too. ■