



Records & Resale

The Value of Aircraft Record Accuracy and Data Integrity
for Successful Resale

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OVERVIEW

It could be said that the amount of paper documentation developed to support the complete maintenance history of any aircraft that's been in service more than five to ten years would likely fill that aircraft. Yet what is sometimes lost in the creation of those work logs, inspection reports and compliance records is the long-term value of the data that is buried in those documents beyond airworthiness and compliance records.

The worth of your aircraft is strongly dependent on your maintenance tracking integrity and document archiving structure. Your ability to comprehensively manage maintenance records reflects on the value of aircraft as well as safe operation and compliance. An airplane sales transaction gets very complicated when the potential buyer asks questions beyond the currency of the airworthiness certificate.

Recently, I was asked to review an aircraft's records in the middle of an aircraft sales transaction. The organization performing the buyer's evaluation evaluated the records as being in such poor quality that the buyer elected to decline the opportunity to purchase the aircraft. Those records were stored in approximately 40 boxes, bins, envelopes and binders with little organization, slowing the purchase transaction and costing considerable time and money.

Is your documentation accurate, accessible and complete should your aircraft need to be listed and sold? Can you identify inspection and maintenance activity reports versus modifications, service bulletins, all current instructions for continued airworthiness and regulatory compliance records? How easy is it to determine and demonstrate that your aircraft is compliant to all regulatory requirements and how long will it take to make the assessment? Can you demonstrate that all damage tolerant assessment, L/HIRF assessment and fuel tank safety EWIS assessments, flammability assessment, etc. have been addressed?

If your answer to any or all of the above questions is negative, you might consider altering your asset management processes and protocols in regard to your fleet.

MANAGING AN ASSET

Evaluating the comprehensiveness or quality of aircraft records is more than just keeping, storing and managing your records. Keeping records, like any asset management practice, requires sound business strategies, set goals and defined best practices for operating under your regulatory authority. Your records are representative of how you maintain and maximize the value of your asset, the aircraft.

Therefore, why do I keep aircraft records? What is the goal or purpose of record retention in an organization? How do I know my practices and protocols are working? Do I have an audit process?

Every owner/operator keeps aircraft maintenance records, first because the regulations require aircraft owners and operators to do so. However, while regulations are clear about what is required for a technical record of maintenance within a logbook or work order, they do not define how the data is presented, preserved and managed, or even the required quality of those records. For instance, we might keep battery installation records in the aircraft logbook and a specific maintenance inspection task for the battery on a task card, work order or independent logbook.

What about maintenance planning documents? A maintenance planning document is not a regulatory compliance document. Its intent is to provide status of compliance for planning purposes while representing that aircraft configuration. If I ask for an aircraft status report, I see data on a piece of paper or on-screen that tells me the last time a task was completed — but that information is not valid proof, nor does it represent a regulatory compliance statement. It would be necessary to go find the task card and then ensure that the agency/entity/person that completed all the task requirements is authorized to do so. The task review would consider the appropriateness of associated data to make sure it was done in compliance with data specification and properly recorded relative to the aircraft, flight time, landing, calendars and the date.

In comment without aircraft records, you can't verify compliance, and without compliance verification, you can't fly under an assumption of airworthiness, or sell your aircraft. The completeness and quality of your records enables you to have more leverage to get the most value out of an asset. Bottom line: it's easy to transact an aircraft with documents that are easy to transfer, retrieve, copy and audit. So how do I go about producing the record?

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INSIDE THE PROCESS

Whether inspections, work orders or logbooks, record keeping is most often some combination of paper logbooks, spreadsheets and word processing documents. Paper is a very simple and an internationally agreed upon format of communication, where PDF format is typically an accepted automated method of record keeping.

We're hearing considerably more about the benefits of digital record keeping and automated maintenance tracking solutions. There's no requirement for electronic record keeping, there is only the requirement to have a scheduled maintenance/inspection program that meets the stated regulatory requirements in which task compliance can be verified.

That said, why wouldn't we take advantage of today's technology advances to improve and simplify aircraft maintenance records management?

We've seen evolution of the aircraft and now we're seeing an evolution in the ways to protect the value of the asset with support from technology. Boxes of paper on skids, even with someone in position to support a full paper work method, still requires considerable time and effort to sort and manage data to get the answers needed about an aircraft's status of compliance and configuration.

A few key points to consider when evaluating record keeping goals:

- Accuracy and integrity of data and records
- Continuity of information and inspection capabilities
- Accessibility of data/records
- Presentation of information

Other elements to consider include data security and data reliability (quality/accuracy), and finally, if enrolling in a maintenance tracking solution such as Flightdocs, customer support and service. It is the customer support and service that differentiates between just another program and a true partner in the operations of your department and aircraft.

When evaluating your solution partners, look to see if the solution can be integrated and customized to fit your operations.

Every operational environment, operational management requirement and the aircraft are unique, and your solution should be able to meet the needs of your individual organization.

Are you leveraging the resources available to assure transparency? If someone needs access, it should be there. When I look at owners/operators that rely more heavily on a paper process, it's an interesting conversation. How do you know that your aircraft is compliant? How easy is it to determine if your aircraft is compliant and how long will it take to determine the status?

For auditing, compliance and resale, your maintenance records should be as accessible as your bank records — and able to answer any question on demand.

