Virtual Airline CEO Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in our VA CEO interview for the Virtual Airline List. Depending on the editor this word document it will be published on the social network and our website:

Please take your time answering the questions.

1.   Can you tell us a bit about yourself? For example; how old you are, what your background with flying in general is and what brought you to creating your own Virtual Airline.

I am a 32-year-old Media Broadcast professional from Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Growing up I was inspired by many blockbuster movies (Apollo 13 / Executive Decision) to become a pilot one day. Like most others who loved aviation growing up there was always an "airplane cockpit" setup in my bedroom, which would usually consist of the dining room chairs and an upside-down hangar as the yoke. Unfortunately, during the time I was at Flight School, the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York had just happened and that was when the airline industry took a hard hit and there were no jobs for anyone.   I made the hard decision to shift into Media, and have been using Flight Sim ever since to keep my love for aviation alive.   I joined Virtual LH years after it was born.

2.   When did you start your Virtual Airline?

VirtualLH was started in 2013 by Jonatha Silva with the help of Paulo Sergio and Hudson Braga. Jonatha (Johnny) is a top member of the VAM forum community and had setup many VAM systems with virtual airlines. The goal of VirtualLH was for him to not only have his own VAM system to administer but to have a platform to learn more about PHP, Coding, and interacting with databases.

3.   Do you consider your Virtual Airline successful?

I would consider every virtual airline a success to be honest. It's not about numbers!
Let's face it, flight sim is a very small community with some of the best, honest, generous, hardworking people in the world. But it's a small number of people.

If you as a VA admin have enough interest, and put in the hours required to make a workable product, then that should be enough success in its self.
With every VA there might be a niche (depending on what IRL airline you are modeling) and if you can attract just 1 person to come and fly regularly that should mean the entire world to you. Again, there is not many of us out there!

VirtualLH has been around for 7 years now, and over that entire lifespan we have had approximately 270 people sign up. Over time some people have departed and our current roster is back up to 120

pilots after being down to around 20 pilots.   But the most important ones to me are the 5-10 who are constantly flying with us. That is beyond successful in my opinion.

4.   What is your most interesting experience with your Virtual Airline, what has happened that makes you think so?

The most interesting experience for me was my initial signup with VirtualLH.
I got pretty heavily back into my sim in 2017 trying to crank up the realism. This was when I started to discover P3D and study level airplanes like the PMDG and FSLABs. I watched a bunch of Pilotseye.tv episodes which ignited a love for Lufthansa airlines. So … I went looking for a Lufthansa airline.
At the time there was 3-5 LH VA's that I could find, but when reading the rules over I struggled with one rule that a lot of VA's put down which is "you must fly 1 flight per xx days or be deleted". As a full-time worker and seasonal farmer, I could not commit to that.   I signed up on VirtualLH + 1 other LH airline (I honestly can't remember which one).   At VirtualLH you have to write an entrance exam which I found to be quite interesting.   I passed of course and was signed on right away …   the other guys – well to this day I am still waiting for a response on my application!?

5.   Did you have any bad experiences with your Virtual Airline?

I wouldn't say bad, but when I did sign up for VirtualLH it was at a time when the current administration was moving into other projects, and the roster was down to about 20 pilots. I started to fly a lot and then hit a bit of a wall when I only had the 777 and 320 and the airline only had so many routes for these.   Johnny noticed my dedication at the time and we would chat a lot on Discord and I was brought onto the staff team. I immediately went absolutely HAM on the Database of the airline and we then added every LH Group airline/airplane/route to the system which cranked up the availability different routes for everyone.   I have since updated my personal fleet and added XP11 to my sim machine!

6.   What do you think of your Virtual Airline's flow of new and leaving VA pilots? Is there something you do to attract more pilots? And why do you think some pilots leave your Virtual Airline?

Like I said earlier, it is not about numbers for us. But from the 20 pilots we had last year, the roster for VirtualLH started to go up according to feedback when we did any of the following 4 items:
1) Adding all 11 LH group airlines to the roster. Sun Express was an amazing draw for us.
2) Using the tour feature of VAM we started to create fun routes that many people latched onto.
3) We made a Youtube Channel and started to do weekly uploads. Here you would find hosted landing/takeoff videos of LH routes, tour video's, and we opened up to let our community submit their own content.
4) Always improving: Our website is constantly updated, the fleets and route tables are always

updated, we changed our rules to loosen up the flight requirements (the ones I hated in Question 4) and made sure to be there for our pilots at all times of the day!

7.   What types of planes does your Virtual Airline use and do you have all the custom liveries available for your VA?

The VAM system requires a table of airplanes for pilots to book. I review our table every 2 months comparing to sources like FlightRadar24 to ensure all the retired airplanes are set to retired and all the new airplanes are added. So much so, we now have awards when people do delivery flights.

Real Life Lufthansa and it's airlines use: A319, A320 (and NEO), A321 (and NEO), A330-2/3, A340-4/6, A359, A388, B738, (Awaiting delivery B737-Max8/9), B747-4/8, B763, B77-F/WS/LR, MD11F, E195, CRJ900, and the DH8-Q400.

Because Lufthansa and its group of airlines are so popular, we have not had the need to provide liveries to our members.   That said we do help members with suggestions as to where to find known good liveries on Avsim, X-plane forums, Textures by Tavers, and Max Wohlerdt.
We do have 1 custom livery that I made when I was experimenting with the SSG Embraer … I could not find a livery for Air Dolomiti so for the meme of a YouTube video I painted one … it was horrible and no one has asked for it yet lol.

8.   Does your VA fly on a network? If so, what do you think about it? Do you feel it supplements the general flying experience, what do you think of the network in general and is it required for your pilots to fly on this network?

You learn a lot being in a VA with members from around the world! …   Our pilots have the open option to fly (Offline, VATSIM, IVAO, etc).   I personally use VATSIM and absolutely it has forced me to become a much better and confident pilot.

But when you leave it open it makes for a good debate on Discord …   I find that France and South American's lean toward IVAO, and the rest of us are on VATSIM or Pilotedge. Really, I think we just go where there is ATC and that was how the cards stacked up.

9.   Do you use any flight tracking software? If so, which one, and are you happy about the service it provides? Would you like to improve it for example?

VAM uses SimACARS and it hooks pilots directly into our Database.   Other pilots can see who is flying on our main VAM webpage and we have made lots of our own developments to the moving map to show: where exactly they are flying now / what airplane-airline is being used / and routing.   Like always we are trying to improve but this system has been very reliable and good for the airline. One of my "wishes" is to hook into VATSIM and IVAO to show which pilots are currently flying online vs offline.

10.   Do you make use of the offers some developers / distributors have for Virtual Airlines? Do you think these developers / distributors have good offers? And does it fit your Virtual Airline policy?

No, at the moment we have not gone out to vendors, suppliers for deals. I know it's a good marketing tool but we are just not here to be that kind of airline. That isn't to say if we were approached, I would turn it away, but its not one of our priorities.

11.   Does your Virtual Airline have a custom-made internet web page or do you use, for example, PHPVMS and equivalents? Are you happy about your VA's web page?

Yes, very yes!   Back in Question 2 I mentioned that the creator of VirtualLH; Jonatha Silva, made the airline as a project to learn about PHP and coding. Well mission success as he is now working in the computer industry as a Front-End developer, and VirtualLH was on his main portfolio.

We have VAM as our under lying system. The front facing pilot webpage is all done in PHP using a very well-known template (Admin-LTE) which if anyone has ever built a PiHole Ad blocker you will recognize it right away! It is sleek, elegant, and easy to follow.

12.   And lastly, what are your expectations for your Virtual Airline in the coming twelve months?

The biggest thing for me is community ...we love it. We encourage everyone (whether they are a member or not) to join our Discord. We help each other out and learn a lot from each other. I hope this continues to grow.

The airline is looking into improving our route scheduling system as everything we have right now is done by hand. I have been talking to the admins at VA Systems (if you have a VA you should check these guys out!!!). They offer the ability to purchase IRL route tables that will work in almost every VA system out there.   They are working with me to improve the VAM product export as we need to associate an airplane type with every route, and I want to see them provide something that can show when multiple airplane types are commonly used.   With this new data we are overhauling our schedule search section to be highly filterable.

Lastly, MSFS 2020… I would love to see the first one of us with that new sim do an LH route! Hopefully when the sim is out the tools like FSUIPC will be there too and we should be ready to go straight away! :D

Thanks for the opportunity to be on your website VA-List!

Cody Neman,
CEO – VirtualLH.com

Please send this questionnaire to admin@va-list.com so we can review it and post it on the Virtual Airline List and social network.

Kind regards,
The Virtual Airline List team