

The Wichita Eagle

A conversation with Maria Dahlquist

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Maria Dahlquist began her business, Premium RVSM Services, two years ago on a suggestion from a client.

Dahlquist, 44, was helping an aviation-related business owner set up a Web site and was writing software programs for him when he gave her the idea.

Aircraft operators who want to fly in airspace between 29,000 feet and 41,000 feet must have approval from the Federal Aviation Administration to operate there.

The process can take time. He thought Dahlquist could help them.

"That's how I got involved," Dahlquist said.

Dahlquist typically steps in to help once someone buys a business jet to be registered in the U.S. and needs the airspace approval. She also works with foreign-owned aircraft.

In 2005, the FAA reduced from 2,000 feet to 1,000 feet the amount of vertical separation between planes flying at that altitude range — thus the name RVSM, or reduced vertical separation minimum.

Europe and other places in the world had already made the switch.

With the change, "owners have to prove that their airplanes are capable of flying safely in that area," Dahlquist said.

New technology on aircraft have made it possible.

Dahlquist has an associate's degree in computer science from Butler Community College and attended Friends University.

She's worked for herself since 1997.

Since then, she's done landscaping, painted murals and worked as an interior decorator. She's also worked with computers, building Web sites and writing software programs, primarily for aviation-related companies. She also created and maintains the Web site of the Patriot Guard.

Dahlquist has two sons.

How do you help business jet owners obtain approval to operate in RVSM airspace?

"I prepare a (13-section) manual that has all the correct procedures in it. I just gather information on the aircraft and submit it to the FAA and either get temporary approval if it's (for) a delivery or one flight for maintenance or something to that effect... For permanent approvals, it takes 60 days after I submit it to the FAA. I work with the FAA, then we get approval, and the customer can fly RVSM worldwide whenever he wants."

You mentioned that the process can be a long one.

"Especially if it's an international approval. It has to go through the New York international field office. They are just barraged daily with new requests."

What's the advantage of using your services?

"Where I have the advantage, I have developed relationships with the inspectors in New York and in Wichita. They know me. They know my manuals. I keep in touch with them... keeping on top of it. It has to go through two inspectors — the airworthiness inspector and an operations inspector."

Tell me about these manuals. You said they have 13 sections that must be carried on board the airplane.

"(It's) proving to the FAA that the operator has the proper knowledge. They know the procedures they have to follow. It's basically just proving that they'll fly safely."

Who are your clients, and where are they from?

"Anybody that flies a business jet and wants to fly in that area (of airspace. They're from) all over the world. I've done maybe two approvals for U.S. customers. Right now, I'm working on two from the United Kingdom, one from Greece, and I just got done with one from Lebanon."

Has the downturn in the business jet industry — and fewer people buying business jets — affected your business?

"Oh yeah. It still filters in, but we're not anywhere as busy as we were, say last year at this time or 18 months ago."

What do you like best about your business?

"I meet the most interesting people, even if I don't meet them face to face... It's interesting because they're from... different cultures than ours. It's always interesting to talk to them."

What advice do you have for someone wanting to start a business?

"Have a solid business plan and always have some back-up source of income, something you can fall back on if you need to. And be prepared to work, work, work, work, work."