

# VENTURING ABROAD

## INSIGHTS



## INTERVIEW WITH JEAN ROSANVALLON

President and Chief Executive Officer, Dassault Falcon Jet

### ***What brought Dassault to the United States?***

Just a bit of history—in 1963, Dassault was primarily a military company, but Marcel Dassault had the idea that he wanted to try to propose an aircraft for a new market segment: business aviation. At the same time, Pan AM was the big airline in the US, and the CEO wanted to see if he needed to start a division in business aviation and he asked the famous Charles Lindbergh to be his consultant.

Charles Lindbergh went to Bordeaux and saw the first prototype of what was then called Mystiere 20 and decided that it was the airplane he would recommend to Pan Am. And then, a big contract for 80 airplanes was signed between Dassault and Pan Am, and Dassault started to represent the Falcon all over the western hemisphere. So, our beginnings were really for the Falcon family almost 54 years ago.

### ***If you could give a piece of advice to a foreign company coming into the US market, what would it be?***

The one piece of advice I would give a company wanting to enter the US market is to build a bicultural management team earlier. I think that's very important. And then, depending upon whether your focus is more on commercial or on manufacturing, you obviously have different priorities.

### ***What are the keys to your success in the American market?***

The key to our success, number one, I think, is the product. If you ask a pilot in the US, I think 90% of pilots who have flown the Falcon or Gulfstream will tell you that the Falcon is really a superior airplane when it comes to flying and handling characteristics. But you know there are also a lot of

# “THE US MARKET ALONE IS MORE THAN 50% OF THE WORLDWIDE MARKET...”

things that are important. And if Dassault was good in engineering, American teams have a better customer service culture. So we learned a lot from that. So in the end, as I said earlier, it became really a bicultural company.

## ***What were the obstacles you had to overcome?***

One obstacle we had, for instance, was when we started manufacturing in the US, we started with a small facility in Arkansas, and we had to do a lot of engineering and specialized manufacturing to satisfy a contract we had with the US Coast Guard. That was very important, and we were not quite prepared enough, so it took us longer. But in the end, today we have 2000 people in Arkansas, and that's the biggest facility in the Dassault Aviation Group.

## ***Did you experience any difficult failures that almost made you rethink your decision to do business in the US?***

We never had any question that we needed to stay and to succeed in the US. You know, the US market alone is more than 50% of the worldwide market, so we had to work hard and succeed. We had no choice.

## ***What is the one attribute of the US market that differed the most from any other market?***

In the case of business aviation, you have more than 12,000 business jets, and you have a lot of very professional people in every part of the business. We have consultants involved in half of our deals. We have specialized lawyers who do only one thing—buy or sell business aviation airplanes—so it's really a very, very professional market. At the same time, the US market is the most competitive. We have two very good and active competitors—Gulfstream and Bombardier—

they have a very good product, and both as I said earlier, are very professional and also very competitive.

## ***With the benefit of hindsight, if you could have done one thing differently, what would it be?***

Over the last 50 years, we've probably made a lot of mistakes, but we also made some good decisions. But, I think in terms of industrial presence, we should have been better prepared. It took us a few more years than maybe it should have to become a really great manufacturing company in the US as we have today. I mentioned earlier we have 2,000 great professionals in Little Rock, Arkansas.

We have over 1,000 aircraft flying in the US. We have (just next to me) the Falcon 8X, the latest in the Falcon family. It can fly from Los Angeles to Moscow nonstop, about 10,000 feet over the airline. That's quite an airplane.