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Comlux rethinks Middle East policy

By **Kate Sarsfield**

Business aviation services company Comlux is re-examining its strategy for the Middle East and is now favouring partnerships with local companies in the region in place of an earlier plan to launch a stand-alone operation. The decision comes as the Swiss-headquartered company takes delivery of its fourth Airbus Corporate Jetliner type - an A319CJ - cementing **Comlux's** position as the world's largest ACJ operator.

"The Middle East is an important market for us and we are keen to get a foothold here," says Stephen Laven, chief executive of Comlux's operations arm **Fly Comlux**. "Having reassessed the market we now think it is beneficial for the company to have an established local partner, one which operates smaller business aircraft than ours but is looking to add to their portfolio at the top end of the business aircraft spectrum."



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Comlux's growing fleet of business jets includes two A318 Elites

Fly Comlux specialises in high-end business aircraft management and charter with its smallest offering the mid-size Hawker 800XP. Other types in its 15-strong fleet include the Falcon 2000, **Bombardier Challenger 605**, Challenger 850, Global 5000, XRS and A318 Elite. "We are talking to a number of owners with a view to managing their ACJs. This would help to satisfy the demand for these types in Middle East," says Laven.

He says demand for widebody business jets has "started to pick up", while the market for mid- and large-cabin aircraft "has become saturated and is purely driven by price. After a slow start to the year we are now doing a healthy amount of business with the ACJs from customers in the Middle East, CIS and Africa," he says.

Meanwhile, Comlux's US completion arm has received a multimillion dollar financial package, consisting of tax breaks and grants, from the Indiana state government to help **upgrade the former Indianapolis Jet Centre facility** and pave the way for Comlux Completions USA to expand into narrow and widebody VIP outfitting. The first green **A320** is scheduled for delivery in February.

"We have already received a number of enquiries from customers wanting us to complete or refurbish their aircraft but we are not going to rush into this," says Comlux president Richard Gaona. "We will be judged on the value of the A320, so we are going to concentrate on that programme first before we take on any other major contracts," he says. Comlux is investing over \$46 million to upgrade the site which will include a widebody hangar.