

Russia's SkyExpress hires former Virgin exec Boulter

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Moscow-based operator SkyExpress has hired former Virgin Atlantic senior executive Willy Boulter to help map out and pursue its business development strategy as a low-cost carrier.

From 2002 until last April Boulter had been Virgin's commercial director with responsibilities for revenue management, pricing, sales and distribution.

SkyExpress says it views him as an executive of the highest calibre and has offered Boulter to be its consultant on strategic business development.

"He has a wealth of managerial experience at various levels at various airlines," SkyExpress marketing chief Maxim Poberezhnik tells *ATI*. "He will be an invaluable asset to us."

Before joining Virgin Atlantic, Boulter spent several years with Cathay Pacific and worked with South African Airways where he held positions in regional management, corporate planning, alliances and network development.

A spokesman for SkyExpress says Boulter will also act as a CEO of a group of offshore companies representing its investors and shareholders.

The carrier bills itself as a first Russian low-cost budget operator. It became operational in February 2007 but has been lagging behind its schedule in meeting growth targets set for the first year in business.

SkyExpress transported one millionth passenger earlier this month and will receive its tenth Boeing 737-500 on June. Under the original plan, it projected to carry 1.2 million travelers using an 18-strong fleet of 737s in 2007.

The spokesman cites delays in aircraft delivery caused by increased market competition for second-hand 737s but says the company is taking the situation in hand.

"We've firmed up contracts for the supply of three aircraft during the rest of the year and are working on finalising three more," he says. "With 16 aircraft in the aggregate, we realistically expect passenger numbers to reach 1.4 million in 2008."

Boulter left Virgin Atlantic at the end of March and was succeeded as director commercial and revenue planning at the airline by Edmond Rose.