

## ***The Business Plan: Mining for Data***

Your business plan provides the roadmap of your current business or your future vision. The roadmap is probably the single most important tool you can develop. This article will help you locate the data you will need to mine to better define and structure your business potential.

As anyone in the industry will tell you that while there are dozens of parallel businesses for each aviation unique occupation aviation is still unique. The better you can translate “aviation-ese” in to the language of business the more opportunities you will create.

How big is aviation?

“Big” is a relative term. How big is the overall industry? How many aircraft are there? How many employees? How many different types of businesses? Most of this data is available from various FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) data bases.

The most general information is contained in the [Administrator’s Fact Book](#). In the Administrator’s Fact Book you will find data and statistics for airports activity, the number of active airmen ( the Administrator’s Fact Book only tracks mechanic, repairman, pilot, ground instructor, flight engineer, flight attendant, and flight instructor data). The fact book also includes industry trends.

One disappointment of the Administrator’s Fact Book is the age of some of the data. For instance, the fact book reports the size of general aviation fleet as 221,900 aircraft. But that data is from 2006.

The data for airlines is much better. For the Air Carrier fleet, the data is for Calendar Year 2007. In 2007, there were 7,449 aircraft in the major airline fleet and 11,483 aircraft in the Commuter Air Carriers and Air Taxis fleets.

Knowing how many aircraft are in your geographic region certainly helps banks and other financial institutions know how large your potential customer base is. Let us assume for a moment you are looking to start an aircraft maintenance business for light general aviation aircraft in Cheyenne, Wyoming. You would certainly like to know how many aircraft are in Wyoming and the adjacent areas.

The FAA’s [Aircraft Registry](#) allows you to search the registry by State and County. In this case, there are 1,803 aircraft in Wyoming with 242 aircraft registered in Laramie County (the county in which Cheyenne is located). But because Cheyenne is located in the South East corner of the state, you certainly would also look to Western Nebraska and North Eastern Colorado.

So you have looked for the customer base, now what about labor? The FAA’s Airmen Certification website contains the number of licensed mechanics in your region. We need to mine this site a little deeper for the actual number mechanics and repairmen. The

[Regional Active Airmen Totals](#) provides the specific accounting of technicians (as well as pilots) In this case, there are 280 certificated Airframe and Powerplant (A & P) mechanics in Laramie County, Wyoming.

Now, what about competition? The FAA recognizes two types of maintenance “facilities.” First is the “certificated” facility, then the non-certificated facility. This does not mean certificated maintenance and non-certificated maintenance: all aircraft maintenance is certified by a licensed person. The difference is the facility is simply whether you are a certificated repair station (14 CFR Part 145), or are you operating independently under your mechanics license (14 CFR Part 65).

The FAA has a data base of all certificated repair stations in their [Repair Station](#) database. According to the FAA’s information, there are only 8 airframe repair stations in the entire state.

Unfortunately, the FAA does not have any records of independent maintenance shops who work strictly under their mechanics licenses.

What about labor? You will need to hire aircraft maintenance technicians. Where can you find employment and wage data for the various labor categories? The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) compiles an unbelievable amount of employment data in their [Occupational Employment Statistics](#). You can mine this data source for any labor category. For maintenance data you use the Occupational Employment and Wages database for [Aircraft Mechanics and Service Technicians](#).

These estimates are calculated with data collected from employers in all industry sectors in metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas in every State and the District of Columbia. These estimates do not include self-employed workers.

The Occupational Employment and Wages database provides national wage estimates for aircraft mechanics as well as which industries have the highest levels of mechanic employment. You can also find which states have the highest concentration of aircraft mechanics as compared to other trades.

There are huge amounts of data that are available from the various industry representative groups. While the amount of information from aviation associations would fill a small library, some of the data you need for your business plan may be mined from these associations.

More than 100 major aerospace and defense companies are members of the [Aerospace Industries Association](#) embodying every high-technology manufacturing segment of the U.S. aerospace and defense industry from commercial aviation and avionics, to manned and unmanned defense systems, to space technologies and satellite communications.

In addition to a variety of statistical data, the AIA publishes specific statistics on economic indicators, aerospace statistics, and the Aerospace Facts & Figures book. AIA

also publishes its year-end report on the financial health of the aerospace industry each year in December.

The [Aircraft Electronics Association](#) (AEA) publishes an annual Rate and Labor Survey which is derived from an annual survey of their member repair stations. Their survey reports both shop rates as well as labor rates including an overview of popular employee benefits. AEA represents repair stations that specialize in maintenance, repair and installation of avionics, electronic, and instrument systems.

Each year the General Aviation Statistical Databook & Industry Outlook is published by the [General Aviation Manufacturers Association](#) (GAMA). GAMA represents the manufactures of general aviation aircraft, engines and accessories.

The Helicopter Annual is the comprehensive reference guide for the civil helicopter industry. The Helicopter Annual includes specifications, industry statistics, [Helicopter Association International](#) (HAI) membership directories by class and geographic matrix, listings of international civil aviation contacts, key FAA personnel, association committees, and more. HAI membership includes helicopter operators and owners, users, manufacturers and suppliers, service organizations and individuals interested in following the events of the helicopter industry.

The [National Air Transportation Association](#) (NATA) publishes an annual survey of general aviation service employee compensation. The survey includes salaries and benefits for pilots, line-service personnel and maintenance technicians. It is based upon data collected from 290 companies employing nearly 10,000 people. The association also publishes the *Aviation Businesses and the Services They Provide* fact book, complete with statistical data, on the aviation services industry.

All of the government supplied data is free to the public and all available on-line. Most of the products from the individual associations are considered member benefits and usually generate a modest charge for non-members. In most cases, you do not have to join an association to purchase the resources, but it may benefit you to join the association that best provides the goods, services, and representation needed by your business.

The business plan defines your future. In order to translate your vision into a marketable plan requires an understanding of the industry and your potential customers. The data represented here will go a long way to defining the aviation industry to those decision makers who may not have your passion.