

MOVERS & SHAKERS

INDUSTRY LEADER INSIGHTS – PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

BY HANK HOGAN

SPOTLIGHT ON

MARK SEARS

VICE PRESIDENT, FIGHTER & STRIKE PRODUCT SUPPORT
THE BOEING COMPANY



An F/A-18 Super Hornet at Boeing's Cecil Field location near Jacksonville, Florida. Boeing performs inspections and modifications on U.S. Navy Super Hornets before returning them to the fleet.

Image courtesy of The Boeing Company.



In addition to periodic maintenance inspections and repairs, Boeing performs structural and electrical modifications at the company's Cecil Field facility in Jacksonville, FL.

Image courtesy of The Boeing Company.

The government side of Dallas-based Boeing Global Services supports warfighters across all military branches, both in the United States and around the world. Estimates in Forbes put Boeing Global Services' revenues in 2019 at \$19 billion, with more than a third of that total coming from the U.S. government.

Part of those proceeds originate in the Fighter & Strike Product Support business, which provides innovative post-production training, analytics, sustainment, and modification services for the A-10 Thunderbolt, F-15 Eagle, and F/A-18 Hornet. Vice President Mark Sears states that while technology is transforming support of fighter aircraft in many ways, making it both easier and more efficient, the people who effectively utilize and act on that technology remain the key to aircraft availability and mission success.



Image courtesy of The Boeing Company.

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Sears recently discussed both current fighter support trends and ongoing developments. His lightly edited answers to questions follow.

Q: You have had a number of roles within Boeing. What are the most valuable lessons you have learned?

A: “Our business is really about people,” Sears replies. “First and foremost are customer relationships. Whether it’s developing intimacy with our customers’ problem sets, so that we have better solutions to their needs, or developing trust through delivering on our commitments. That customer intimacy and customer relationship piece, the strength of that, can really help a program succeed.”

“From a supplier perspective, the people and relationships are equally important, both to meet commitments and also to think through innovatively how we can provide solutions that bring the best of industry to the armed services.”

“A third piece would be with our own Boeing teammates, leveraging the diversity they bring to form the best team. So much of our success depends on the relationships we form within these three groups.”

Q: What are the most important trends or changes in the industry during your time in it?

A: “In the services business, especially, there’s opportunity to constantly look for those efficiencies and gains in how do we do things better on fielded platforms. We’re being looked upon to find those innovative solutions that can bring as good, if not better, performance — in the platform, availability, or readiness — for less.”

“The old adage for this business is 30 percent of the cost is in development and production, and 70 percent is in sustainment.” In this context, Sears says they consider: “How do we help control that overarching cost for our customer?”

“The second trend is digital and the importance of digital toolsets that are coming. Whether it’s the direct application to platforms and the insights they give us in helping with decision making and driving to efficient use of resources. Or whether it’s the platform itself, in the supply chain or maintainers on the flight line.”

“How can we use the information at hand to make better decisions?” he considers before finishing with a prediction. “I think we will see a major shift in how we think about sustainment for new platforms.”



Image courtesy of The Boeing Company.

Q: Can you provide an example of how this might look or work?

A: “A digital twin exists today on some of the platforms. Having a digital model of the reality of what each individual airplane has experienced offers historical insight into what that airplane has been through — nonconformances, modifications, repairs on the flight line. All of that information together begins to give you, as a depot provider, insight about what you’re about to face.”

“As the techstack becomes more mature, as model-based systems engineering starts to proliferate into every platform, we will start to realize the other possibilities associated with the digital architecture that’s there. How do we let that information flow not only into design, development, production, and testing, but how do we let it flow all the

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Two U.S. Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt IIs release countermeasure flares over the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in July 2020. The A-10 Thunderbolt II is a highly accurate airframe that provides U.S. and coalition forces a maneuverable close air support and precision strike platform.

Image courtesy of U.S. Air Force. Photo by Staff Sergeant Justin Parsons.

way to the post-production aspects, as we think about tech data or airplane health management or supply chain forecasting?”

For the last item, he explains, “You can take real-world data, bounce it against your model and predictions, and adjust your supply posture.”

Q: Finally, where do you see things headed in your segment of the industry? What would you tell others to keep an eye on?

A: “Without a question, it’s the digital advancements and transformation that is coming,” he immediately responds. “I think that transformation is going to be huge over the next 5, 10, 15 years.”

After this, Sears circles back to the importance of the people who implement and use such evolving technology, stressing

that post-production sustainment must be done in close partnership with customers. He adds that this collaboration should start long before an aircraft is delivered and put into service to reap the maximum benefits and achieve the desired outcome.

“In that partnership, how do we develop concepts and solutions that are going to help customers achieve their objectives?” Sears says. “In the end, our number one objective is to make sure they’re ready and that is through however we can best serve them.”

Thus, through a combination of the people, relationships, and technology, Boeing Global Services plans to meet the sustainment challenge, even as platforms continue to evolve.