



XCED Aviation

Ground Support Worldwide's 2016

By Alex Wendland

XCED Aviation Services has lowered the cost of ground support equipment for ground handlers, airlines and FBOs at 43 airports throughout North America in just two years of operation. Originally a GSE finance lessor, Xced has evolved to become an operating lessor providing fleet management services for ground handlers, airlines and FBOs of all shapes and sizes.



Services:

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It Runs in the Family

In just two years of operation, Xced Aviation Services has grown from a GSE finance lessor into a full “transportation asset management” services provider. Xced’s services have put equipment in 43 airports throughout the United States and Canada through leases,

buybacks and refurbishments; and they’re about to change the way airlines and ground handlers track and manage their GSE.

“We take care of all their GSE fleet responsibility,” William Long, president of Xced, says. “We have the equipment where you need it. We provide you with all of the

data to better manage your business and ensure that your GSE operates properly, so you’ll have fewer breakdowns, and your planes will be able to come and go on time.”

Long says his team has been able to provide a wide array of financial and service solutions for GSE that offers a more

THE SASSER FAMILY HOLDINGS CORE VALUES TREE

All Sasser Family Holdings subsidiaries differentiate themselves from their competition with a dedication to customer service and “doing the right thing.” The following values are prominently displayed in the various office spaces the company holds throughout the greater Chicago area and are cited as core tenets of the company’s operation.

Our Purpose: Delivering superior customer service and expertise in order to help our customers better serve their customers.

We will never compromise our integrity: Respect, commitment and accountability at every level and in every interaction.

We succeed or fail as a team: Every contribution from our clients, employees and partners, has value. We relentlessly seek ways to add value: Dedication to quality and safety in every transaction.

Our only product is superior customer service: Superior customer service is critical to our success and the key to long term partnerships.

attractive alternative than strictly paying cash, and they provide significantly more flexibility as GSE needs change. The differentiator, according to Xced, is their dedication to service, along with their parent company, Sasser Family Holding’s, history of providing single investor financing.

“Sasser Family Holdings and the family ownership dates back to 1928 when our founder, Fred H. Sasser, left his job at Mather Stock Car to start his own company,” Kelly Brannon Pronek, senior director of corporate communications and marketing, says. “As the company grew, it became evident that there was a need to diversify outside of rail to offset economic downturns and continue to provide consistent service to clients in good times and bad.”

Building off the expertise in leasing and managing transportation assets, under current CEO Fred R. Sasser, Xced Aviation Services was established in 2014. Pronek continues, “being part of a privately owned, global organization holds many advantages for Xced and their clientele. The diversification of the holding company’s asset types helps insulate Xced, and our other subsidiaries, from the financial hardships faced by many of our competitors in the event of a down market. Our clients also enjoy benefits that aren’t often seen in a smaller organization, including the pooling of internal resources, guidance of diverse experience and an extremely competitive cost of financing due to our collective volume.”

“Fred really understood the industry from

▼ *The First Eight: Xced’s original team. Pictured: Bill Brooks, Director of Operations; Nicole Romero, Sr. Account Executive; Bridget Rozzano, Staff Accountant; William Long, President; Eric Wennerstrom, VP of Accounting & Finance; Karla Harrington, Manager of Contracts & Administration; Cheryl Doyle, Administration; Joe Giarritano, VP of Sales*



day one, and his long-term vision of how we should grow and meet the needs of our clients certainly played a vital role in helping Xced grow our niche business," Long says of the early planning days of Xced, "we were

at lunch one day, and Fred said to me, 'the Xced business is going to look the same as our rail business by the time we build out the entire GSE model.' I never really thought about it, but you have a rail car, and you have

a cargo loader; they're two entirely different pieces of equipment, but the business model is remarkably similar."

However, as Long went on to discover, the existing Sasser Family Holdings

"Xced doesn't **leverage our situation**. We don't sell the debt or the equity here. It's **our own money** that we're **reinvesting** in all our services."

— William Long, President,
XCED Aviation Services



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model did fit GSE. Like heavy rail equipment, GSE has an exceptionally long lifespan, with a strong secondary market and innumerable refurbishment opportunities – all operational aspects that Sasser Family Holdings had been working in for the better part of a century.

Long and Xced rely on those generations of leasing and financing experience to set the company apart; they pride themselves on their high level of client service and a single investor financing capital structure. In fact, Long cites their capital structure, the ability to finance full fleets without leveraging debt, as one of Xced's biggest assets.

"Xced doesn't leverage our situation," Long says. "We don't sell the debt or the equity here. It's our own money that we're reinvesting in all our services. Single investor financing means all of our GSE capital is invested from Xced and Sasser Family

Holdings, and it isn't bought or sold to finance the next deal."

What does all this history lead to? Perhaps Long says it best himself:

"Sale or leasebacks, short-term rentals, long-term leases, refurbishment, maintenance, trade-in or airline outsourcing – these are the products that make up the Xced foundation, our wide range of service capabilities," Long says. "The legacy of Sasser Family Holdings dating back to 1928 has been built on service and flexibility. Xced is an extension of Sasser Family Holdings operating in general aviation.

"Our programs are all built around providing our clients new or refurbished GSE at the gate."

Most of the Xced products have been developed in conjunction with solving a problem for one of their clients. "Our clients present us with a problem, and we work

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with them on developing a solution,” Long says. “One of our major clients asked us to assist them in reducing their maintenance cost for a particular piece of GSE. We developed our upgrade program by analyzing the needs with our client. We liked the program so much, we built out the program to cover all GSE. Now Xced can offer all our clients the capability of upgrading to new or refurbished GSE through our upgrade program. The program reduces the client’s maintenance footprint and provides a more efficient operation through more reliable GSE.”

GSE for the 21st Century

Xced started when Long and the Sasser management team identified a service element missing in aviation GSE fleet management and financing. Now, two years in, a much larger Xced team is ready to tackle the next gap: data.



▲ *Joe Edison, Chair, Sasser Family Council; Jeff Walsh, COO, Sasser Family Holdings; John Sasser, Sasser family member; Luke Lukens, VP & CFO, Sasser Family Holdings; William Long, President, Xced Aviation Services*



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Xced's new GroundSmart lease program, integrating data collection and asset management services, has been developed to address specific client challenges. A more expansive launch of the service this summer will make the program available to all airlines and ground handlers in North America, giving them the ability to maintain and track the usage of all their GSE – both motorized and non-motorized.

"By integrating three separate technologies, Xced's new program, GroundSmart, accumulates vast amounts of real-time data. This provides our clients with a much needed tool to better manage their operation. If you can't measure it, you can't manage it," Bill Brooks, director of operations for Xced, says.

Through a small attachment on each piece of equipment, Xced collects and integrates real-time usage data to improve

utilization and equipment security, enhance safety on the ramp, increase accountability of operators and the lifespan of GSE and, most importantly, change the maintenance culture from one of reaction to one of prevention. Clients have the ability to decide which data is critical to managing their business, and Xced manages the process and provides them with that critical data.

GroundSmart also allows GSE managers the ability to track the location of all associated equipment through GPS capabilities, accurate to 13 feet, in the battery-sized GroundSmart attachment.

Additionally, given the vast number of GSE contracts in play on airport ramps, the equipment is spread across a large number of gates. It is not uncommon to see artificially inflated fleets and nearly non-existent equipment inventory tracking. GroundSmart allows Xced clients to "right

Xced's goal with **GroundSmart** is to provide **cost savings** to both lessee and lessor through **efficiency** in utilization, refurbishes, **flexible leasing**, buy backs and **immediate service** based on **real-time** maintenance data.

size their fleets" to maximize utilization, further reducing their costs.

GroundSmart provides an ignition smart card attachment in which only authorized personnel are able to start the equipment and take off. The smart card element can be further customized to limit GSE usage based on an operator's qualifications. That's a big safety feature. Additionally, geo fencing can limit where the GSE travels, reducing misplaced equipment scurrying around the ramp.

The goal of GroundSmart is to lower the GSE cost of ownership to the airlines and ground handlers. GroundSmart provides cost savings through efficiencies in fleet utilization, timely refurbishes, flexible leasing terms, strategic replacement of aged GSE, and service based on real-time usage and maintenance data. Not every client will need all of GroundSmart's capability, however.

"Our clients can select any or all of the features of GroundSmart," Long says. "Somebody may only want the software capabilities. Additionally, if they have their own maintenance service capabilities, we can certainly incorporate their maintenance program into our GroundSmart program. This flexible and powerful product is designed to be fully customizable, realizing that our clients all have different needs and requirements."



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Refurb From the Ground Up

Xced currently has over 1,500 pieces of GSE under contract in North America, and recently has expanded with a captive service and refurbishment capability. "Our refurbishment strategy complements our other services. We recently started refurbishing our tugs, GPUs, and belt loaders at our captive Florida refurbishment facility with the goal of initiating integration of our refurb GSE into our GroundSmart program," Long says. "Now we have a second refurbishment facility in Indianapolis that exists to further enhance our service capabilities. Our Indianapolis facility is geared toward our larger GSE: cargo loaders, pushbacks, and deicers. Establishing our facility in a geographically strategic location is a key element to servicing our clients. We save our clients money and time by reducing the transportation cost from a centrally located facility."

"We are not directly competing with the existing refurbishment companies out there today," Long says. "Our refurb and service capabilities are purely captive to service the Xced clients and portfolio. We need to have access to high quality refurbished GSE to enable Xced to fully implement our GroundSmart strategy. Now with our enhanced refurbishment capabilities, Xced offers our clients a 100 percent captive fleet management solution for all their GSE needs, truly cradle to grave services."

Xceding Expectations

"It is hard to believe how far Xced has come since our inception in 2014. I think we have done a very good job of listening to what the industry has told us. Because of our relationships with our clients and our industry partners, we are regularly developing new solutions to meet their needs," says Long.

"We have a passion for the industry, and a commitment to constantly looking for ways to elevate ourselves, our clients and the industry."

Currently, the Xced team is in the early stages of introducing their next new service, which will be establishing a pool of GSE assets at airports, where airlines and ground handlers can share in the use of GSE. "One of our clients is a level 2 airport, and when we recently visited them, we looked at all the GSE at the gates and realized how much value was underutilized. Allowing airlines and ground handlers the option to utilize a pool of GSE drives down their operating cost and, at the same time, provides a higher quality GSE on the ramp. Xced is planning to introduce this product over the next two months. **GSW**

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