WHITE PAPER · AIRCRAFT SALES

Six Must-Do Steps to Get *Top Dollar for Your Aircraft*

The seller's checklist: what to do before the market sees your aircraft

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

The difference between a disciplined sale and a disappointing one is rarely the aircraft. It is the preparation. By the time a buyer's technical representative walks your hangar, most of the value has already been decided.

This checklist covers the six steps that most reliably protect value in a pre-owned aircraft sale, in the order they should be taken. Each one removes a reason for a buyer to discount, delay or walk.

A closing section covers the items that sit outside the checklist but routinely decide whether a transaction closes cleanly: title and liens, escrow, tax exposure, and the delivery conditions agreed long before the aircraft moves.

Hayden Christie
Head of AI & Aircraft Research, Integris Aviation Consultancy

01 · INTRODUCTION

Before you list

Preparation, not price, decides the outcome

An aircraft that arrives on the market unprepared invites every buyer to negotiate. An aircraft that arrives prepared narrows the conversation to price and terms, which is exactly where a seller wants it.

Buyers do not discount aircraft because they are old. They discount aircraft because they are uncertain. Every unanswered question, from a gap in the logbooks to an inspection coming due in ninety days, converts into a number in the buyer's offer, and that number is almost always larger than what it would have cost the seller to resolve the issue beforehand.

The six steps that follow are ordered deliberately. The first group prepares the asset itself. The second prepares how the aircraft is presented and documented. The third prepares the transaction. Work left undone in an early phase does not disappear. It resurfaces during the pre-buy inspection, when the seller has the least leverage and the clock is running.

None of this is exotic. It is simply the discipline of deciding, in advance, which conversations you are willing to have with a buyer and which ones you would rather have already closed.

FIGURE 1

The six steps, grouped into the order they should be taken

Phases run in sequence. Steps within a phase can run in parallel.

PHASE 01

Prepare the asset

1. Interior and exterior detail
4. Clear maintenance due within 3 months

PHASE 02

Prepare the story

2. Professional photography and marketing
3. Logbook review and digitization

PHASE 03

Prepare the deal

5. Desktop valuation
6. Exclusive broker engagement

Work left to the listing stage is work a buyer will price against you.

Source: Integris Aviation Consultancy.

02 · STEPS 1 AND 2

Presentation

What the buyer sees first

A buyer forms a view of how an aircraft has been cared for within the first few minutes. That view is difficult to reverse and it colors every technical finding that follows.

1. Interior and exterior touchup and detail

Present a clean, well-kept aircraft. First impressions matter, and they matter disproportionately. Worn seat belts, scuffed sidewalls, crazed windows, tired paint on the leading edges: individually these are small items, but collectively they tell a buyer that maintenance may have been handled the same way.

Detailing is among the least expensive work a seller can do and among the most reliably returned in the sale price. It is also necessary before any photography.

2. Professional photography and marketing package

Quality visuals showcase your aircraft and attract serious buyers. Most aircraft are shortlisted from a screen, often by an advisor filtering on behalf of a principal who will never see the listing. Poor photography removes an aircraft from consideration before anyone reads the specification.

A professional shoot means an empty ramp, good light, and a full set of interior, exterior, cockpit and detail images. It should be paired with a clean specification sheet: airframe and engine times, program enrollment, avionics fit, interior configuration and inspection status, presented consistently.

CONSIDER

A marketing package should include

- Exterior images in good light, from several angles, on a clear ramp.
- Full interior set, including galley, lavatory and baggage.
- Cockpit and avionics panel, showing installed equipment.
- A current specification sheet and equipment list.

03 · STEPS 3 AND 4

Records and maintenance

Removing doubt before the pre-buy

Records and near-term maintenance are where sales slow down, and where sellers most often lose money they did not need to lose.

3. In-depth logbook review and digitization

Use a service such as Bluetail to organize and index the records. Avoid gaps or errors surfacing during the pre-buy inspection, when a missing entry stops being an administrative problem and becomes a negotiating position.

Reviewing the records before listing gives the seller time to locate missing documents, obtain replacement paperwork and reconcile discrepancies. Discovering the same issues during a pre-buy, with a buyer's technical representative in the room, produces a very different conversation.

A digitized, searchable record set also shortens the inspection itself, which reduces the days the aircraft sits out of service and the window in which a buyer can change their mind.

4. Perform any maintenance due within three months

Handle it on your terms, not under pressure during the pre-buy. An inspection coming due shortly after closing is priced by the buyer, and rarely at the seller's cost. The buyer prices the disruption and the risk of overruns as well as the invoice.

Clearing near-term maintenance also moves the aircraft to a stronger position in the inspection cycle, which is one of the first things a buyer's advisor will assess.

CONSIDER

Questions to settle before listing

Are the logs continuous, and can any gap be explained in writing?

Is all Airworthiness Directive and Service Bulletin status documented?

What inspections fall due in the next twelve months?

Is damage history, if any, documented with the repair paperwork?

04 · STEPS 5 AND 6

Pricing and representation

Where the value is finally set

The first two phases determine what the aircraft is worth. The last phase determines whether you actually receive it.

5. Nail pricing with a desktop valuation

Accurate pricing ensures no money is left on the table. It also prevents the more common and more expensive error: an aspirational asking price that sits on the market, accumulates days on market and eventually sells for less than a disciplined price would have achieved at the outset.

A desktop valuation should reconcile published guide values against recent retail transactions for genuinely comparable aircraft, adjusted for times, program status, avionics and configuration. Asking prices are a weak guide. Closed transactions are the evidence, and they are not public, which is precisely why advisory access to transaction data matters.

6. Hire an exclusive broker with proven market standing

A broker with pedigree and focus ensures maximum exposure and credibility. Exclusivity matters more than it appears: an aircraft shopped by several parties at once signals a motivated seller and invites buyers to wait for the price to come to them.

Judge a broker on transactions completed in your type, on whether they will show you the comparable evidence behind their price opinion, and on whether their interests are aligned with the outcome rather than the transaction.

THE COMMON ERROR

“Disciplined sellers aligned with comparable transactions clear faster than aspirational pricing.”

On setting the asking price

05 · RECOMMENDED ADDITION

Beyond the checklist

What decides whether the deal actually closes

The six steps prepare the aircraft. These items prepare the transaction. They are less visible, and they are where otherwise sound deals are lost.

Title, liens and escrow

Order a title and lien search before listing, not after a letter of intent is signed. Stale liens, unreleased security interests and registration issues take time to clear, and they surface at the worst possible moment. Where the aircraft has international history, the International Registry position needs checking as well.

Tax exposure

The tax consequences of a sale, including depreciation recapture and state sales and use tax, should be understood before a price is agreed rather than after. This is specialist work and worth engaging aviation tax counsel to review.

Delivery conditions and acceptance

The single most contested document in an aircraft sale is the delivery condition clause. Agree in advance what constitutes an airworthy discrepancy, who pays for what, which facility performs the pre-buy, and what the acceptance process looks like. Ambiguity here is expensive.

Timing, crew and continuity

Decide what happens to the crew, the hangar and the insurance during the marketing period, and be realistic about timeline. Aircraft transactions take longer than most sellers expect, and a seller who has to close by a certain date has quietly handed the buyer leverage.

PREPARE EARLY

Start these at the same time as step 1

- Title and lien search, including International Registry where relevant.
- Aviation tax counsel review of the expected structure.
- Escrow agent selected and terms understood.
- A data room holding records, specification and compliance status.

06 · CONCLUSIONS

Selling on your terms

Preparation is leverage

Every item on this checklist has the same purpose: to move a decision from the buyer's side of the table to the seller's. Maintenance cleared in advance is maintenance priced at your cost rather than theirs. Records organized in advance are records that do not stall a pre-buy. A price set against evidence is a price you can defend without conceding.

The sellers who achieve the strongest outcomes are rarely the ones with the most desirable aircraft. They are the ones who did this work before the first inquiry arrived, and who therefore never had to negotiate from a position of surprise.

Integris advises owners through this process on an advisory basis, including desktop valuation, records readiness, broker selection and transaction oversight. The objective is a clean sale at a defensible price, on a timeline you control.

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