

Why have a registry of Australian virtual pilots and cockpit builders?

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The flight simulation community is currently a disunited one. Involvement in flight simulation activities can be an isolating experience. Organisations such as VATSIM, virtual airlines and sim builders' groups etc. exist and provide online support. However, most flight sim activity essentially takes place by solo players in individual locations around the country.

Most hobby simmers begin with a basic desktop kit. Some are or may have been real world pilots which has obvious advantages. But many have not had this opportunity. Their knowledge and expertise development of the complexities of simulated flight comes through a steep, solo learning curve. The same applies to those who delve into the time and expense of cockpit building.

A diversity of online forums, support groups and individuals provide valuable 'how to' advice. Occasionally a conference or expo is held where like-minded people can get together. Another example is the annual World Flight event where teams of simmers prepare for and fly a week-long flight around the world in full-sized simulators with VATSIM ATC support.

In the final analysis however, the 'community' essentially consists of a whole bunch of individuals engaging in their passion for simulated flight in the real world - alone.

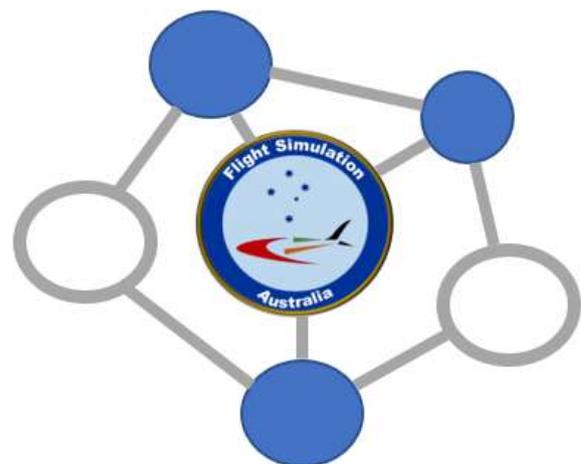
A re-imagined flight simulation community

In the contemporary world the prevalence of interaction between individuals is increasingly through online social media sites. Such outlets have their place and benefits. The

consequence though is a decline of face-to-face interaction where the attainment of immediate, on the spot knowledge learning and social engagement is achieved.

It is conceivably possible that there are simmers in areas of close proximity to each other and don't know the other exists. What might happen if these people were mobilised to form a local support group and meet collectively.

Should that happen the notion of 'community' would change dramatically. Multiply that by a number of demographic area groups and the possibility of inter-communication and collaboration becomes patently possible. All of a sudden you have the potential for a network of connections to be established between local, state, national groups.



Flight sim cluster group model

One such group already exists and can be considered as a model for others. The Illawarra Flight Simulator Group in Shellharbour, New South Wales, welcomes flight simulator enthusiasts from the Illawarra area to coffee mornings to share flight sim know-how. "We are lucky to have a good mix of skills in hardware, software and real-world flying experiences" says Phil Mason, the group coordinator. "This makes for an excellent knowledge sharing environment from which we can all learn something new."

The group has an expanding membership and they guarantee that if anyone has a genuine interest in flight simulation, they will meet like-minded people they will get on with. They might even get the answer to that one question that has been bugging them.



Groups such as this could be formed around the country. Flight Simulation Australia (FSA) is prepared to act as an enabling organisation to realise this. With a large enough registry base, FSA could identify registered members within geographic areas and facilitate a process whereby registered members could get in contact with each other. This in turn could lead to the establishment of local, co-operative groups.

Of course, such a venture is largely dependent upon numbers. Just how many simmers are there in Australia, indeed the world? Are there sufficient numbers of flight simmers in regional areas of Australia for networks to be viable?

It is difficult to get accurate figures. At the international level, SimBrief statistics (4 September 2019) reveals Total Users as being 248,741. The Navigraph Survey (2018) had 15,006 respondents, 73% (10,954) completed the survey. Australia was the fourth largest in number by country at 4.72% or 517 flight simmers. Numbers supplied by the Australian Flight Sim Builders Group show the state by state break down as being:

Victoria: 119

New South Wales: 109

Queensland 109

South Australia: 73

Western Australia: 56

Australian Capital Territory: 10

Tasmania: 9

Northern Territory: 5

TOTAL: 490

How the register works

Flight simmers in Australia who wish to make contact with other like-minded people in their area register their details with Flight Simulation Australia (FSA). Registration details include:

- Name (proper name & surname)
- Email address
- Location (city/town & state)
- Phone number (optional)
- Areas of flight simulation interest/expertise/involvement)

FSA maintains a secure database of those registered. No information is provided to or used by any third party unless written is provided by registered persons.

On receipt of an email contact request by a registered member, the nominated person(s) are emailed by FSA seeking approval to yield contact details. With email approval received, the applicant is supplied with the relevant details.

From thereon, FSA has fulfilled its role and all further communication between members is at their own initiate and discretion. As a courtesy, the applicant informs FSA that contact has been established, with whom and of any outcome. If a group is established, FSA will provide website space for group information and activities.

Where to from here?

A number of Australian flight simmers have already registered. A small cluster in Melbourne has already emerged. The potential of establishing local groups going forward is dependent upon as many Aussie flight simmers being on the register.

So, if you are interested in the possibility of meeting up with like-minded people in your region, apply to go on the *Register of Australian Virtual Pilots and Cockpit Builders*.

Similarly, if you are a registered member, and wish to initiate contact with another registered member or cluster of members with the view of forming a group in your region, contact us and the wheels will be set in motion to enable that to occur.

What's your view?

Do you have a view on this proposition? If you would like to comment, email me at fs.au@optusnet.com.au.

