10 YEARS OF MOBILE ONAIR - CELEBRATING A DECADE OF INFLIGHT INNOVATION

News / Airlines

SITAONAIR is celebrating a decade since the first ever inflight cellular data transmission and the birth of Mobile ONAIR.

Since that initial transmission was made onboard an Airbus A318 flight on 17 December 2007, it has been installed in more than 550 aircraft, serving the changing needs of commercial, VIP and governmental flights alike.

Over the past decade, and with support from SITAONAIR's industry partners, the service has been made available across all aircraft types, from single-aisle to long-range – with more than 20 million passengers connecting for voice, SMS and data transmission in 2017 alone.

Reflecting on that first flight, Veronique Blanc, CTO at SITAONAIR (then OnAir) in 2007, says: "The launch of Mobile ONAIR and the first cellular data transmission was very exciting for everyone involved. Back then, even before the widespread use of smartphones, we knew that what we were doing was hugely innovative, and paving the way for the future of inflight connectivity."

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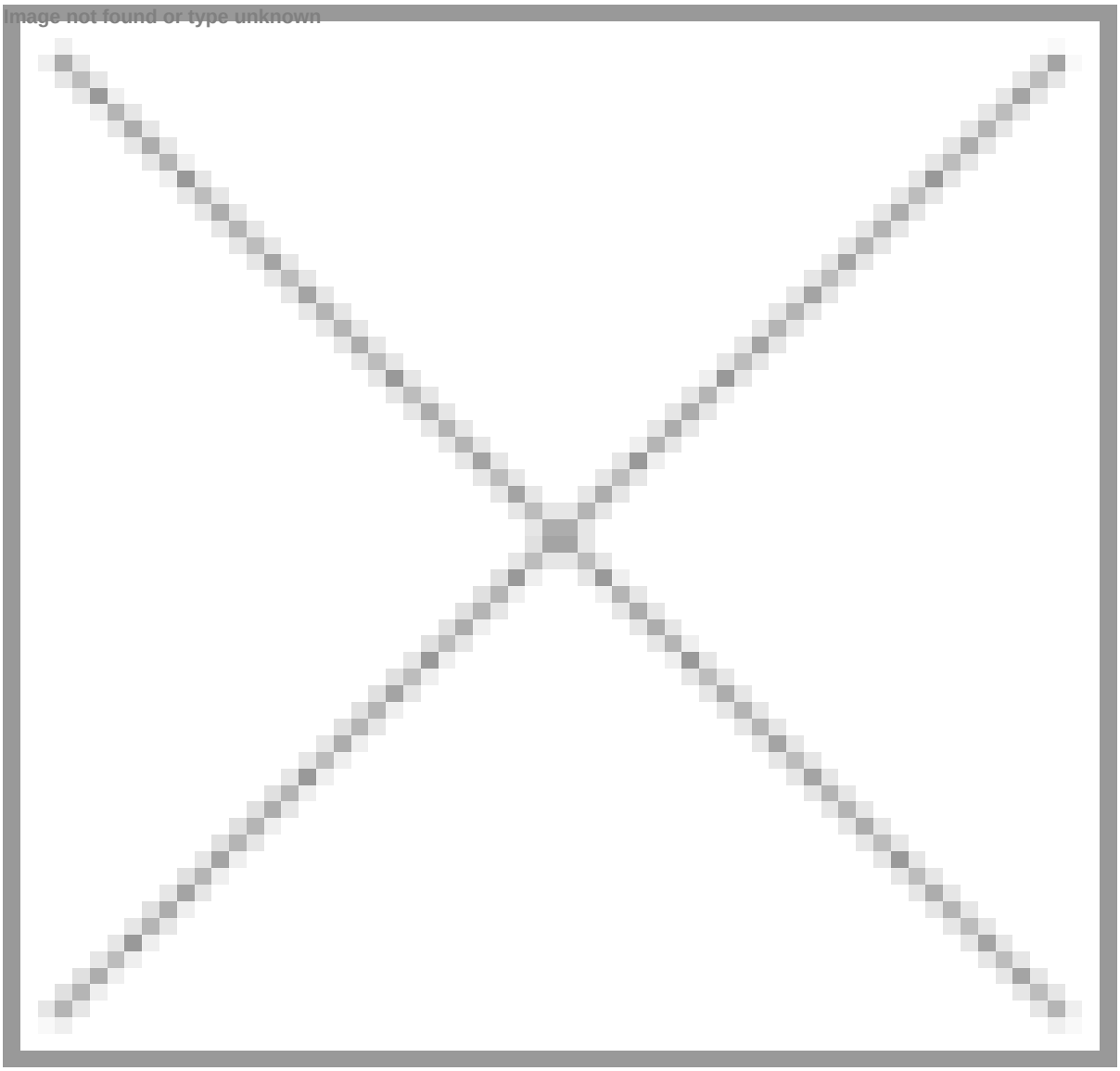

SITAONAIR and satellite communications provider Inmarsat worked in partnership on that milestone flight ten years ago, and since these exciting early days, the service has continued to evolve, with developments such as the recent deployment of cutting-edge inflight 3.5G mobile network services over the high-speed broadband satellite connectivity of Inmarsat's GX Aviation. This aviation industry first sees passengers and crew benefit from high-speed and seamless connectivity, which is comparable to the home experience.

Mobile ONAIR also enables passengers to utilize simple, secure and reliable connections that contribute to 43% of frequent fliers citing cellular connectivity as their primary choice. This is complemented by the continued evolution of pricing models, from the comparatively expensive price-per-use model that dominated until 2013, to the unlimited mobile data bundles commonly seen today, and the 'Roam Like at Home' model, which is set to become the norm across Europe.

Thanks to SITAONAIR's work in obtaining regulatory approval and securing mobile operator partnerships, the Mobile ONAIR service is truly global. It is easy to forget a time, not so long ago, when passengers turned off mobile phones onboard an aircraft. SITAONAIR, together with partners and customers, has helped secure the regulatory approval, at state and industry level, to make the dream of inflight mobile connectivity a reality for the whole industry.

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Passenger experience

SITAONAIR’s latest infographic highlights how cellular data is a crucial ingredient for a first class passenger experience, cementing Mobile ONAIR's relevance in the connected airspace.

Gregory Ouillon, Chief Technology Officer at SITAONAIR, says: “It’s remarkable to think that it was just ten years ago that SITAONAIR launched the world’s first inflight mobile service onboard an international flight.

“Ten years is a long time in aviation, however, and the solution now has evolved to become an essential component of the full cabin connectivity experience, allowing passengers to use their mobile phones as they would on the ground.

“One major shift has been the trend towards the convergence of Wi-Fi and cellular technologies, which delivers the best of both worlds. Passenger expectations can be met by offering a hybrid experience that can leverage the advantages of both a Wi-Fi and a cellular connection. Importantly, SITAONAIR is one of the few industry players with the knowledge, assets and skills base to make this convergence happen.”

This convergence is essential to meet the demands of the modern passenger. With 50-100 billion Internet connected devices expected to be in circulation by 2020, ranging from fitness trackers to thermostats, mobile network operators will play a central role in connecting these devices, both on the ground and in the air.

Moving towards the future

From supporting this burgeoning IoT movement, to the introduction of wider cellular trends like ‘Roam Like at Home’ to the air, our new infographic examines the future of Mobile ONAIR and inflight passenger communication, as SITAONAIR and its partners see it.

Frederik van Essen, Inmarsat Aviation Senior Vice President says: “Passenger expectations around inflight connectivity have dramatically evolved over the past decade. Inmarsat worked shoulder-to-shoulder with SITAONAIR ten years ago to pioneer the first ever inflight mobile phone call and data connectivity on an international flight.

“Today, we are together introducing unprecedented new capacities with GX Aviation, ensuring that airline passengers can browse the internet, stream videos, check social media and more during flights, with an onboard connectivity experience comparable to the mobile broadband services they may receive on the ground.”

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