MEBAA SHOW 2026 HIGHLIGHTS GROWING DEMAND FOR INFLIGHT CONNECTIVITY AS BUSINESS AVIATION PRIORITIES EVOLVE

News / Business aviation, Events / Festivals



As demand for seamless onboard connectivity continues to grow, aircraft owners and operators are placing increasing emphasis on selecting connectivity solutions that align with their operational needs, mission profiles, and long-term investment objectives. Reliable high-speed internet access is rapidly evolving from a premium amenity to a core expectation among business aviation passengers, making inflight connectivity a critical factor in fleet planning and aircraft value retention.

These evolving market dynamics will be among the key topics explored during the 11th edition of MEBAA Show 2026, taking place from 8 to 10 December at Dubai World Central (DWC), Dubai.

Bringing together the global business aviation community, MEBAA Show will serve as a platform for industry leaders to examine the latest technological innovations and emerging trends shaping the sector. The event is expected to attract aircraft manufacturers, operators, charter providers, FBOs, MRO organizations, and connectivity specialists, fostering discussions on how advancements in digital infrastructure are transforming the passenger experience and operational

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efficiency.

With participants from more than 100 countries, MEBAA Show 2026 will provide a strategic forum for stakeholders to explore the opportunities and challenges associated with the next generation of connected business aviation.

The growing importance of inflight connectivity

As business aviation embraces greater digitalisation, inflight connectivity decisions are no longer driven solely by advertised internet speeds. Aircraft owners and operators are increasingly evaluating solutions based on a broader range of factors, including network coverage, cybersecurity, system reliability, lifecycle costs, scalability, and future upgrade potential.

The growing focus on onboard connectivity reflects both evolving passenger expectations and the operational need for seamless, dependable communications throughout every phase of flight. Today's business aviation passengers expect a connected experience comparable to that available on the ground, making connectivity an important factor in aircraft utilisation and customer satisfaction.

This trend is particularly evident in the Middle East, where operators have reported a significant increase in the number of connected devices onboard. In some cases, aircraft that once supported around six connected devices per flight are now accommodating more than 30, placing greater demands on onboard networks and connectivity infrastructure.

As a result, connectivity providers are being challenged to deliver solutions capable of supporting multiple users and bandwidth-intensive applications while maintaining consistent performance. The industry's focus is increasingly shifting toward tailored connectivity ecosystems that align with specific aircraft missions, operational requirements, and passenger expectations, ensuring long-term value for both operators and owners.

Caroline Cresp, Managing Director, Lunajets Dubai, commented: "Over the past two years, we've seen onboard Wi-Fi evolve from a 'nice to have' into an increasingly important consideration for charter clients across the region. Passengers expect reliable, high-speed connectivity that allows them to work, join video calls, and stay productive throughout their journey, even on shorter flights. Connectivity influences aircraft selection, particularly for clients with demanding schedules. This reflects a broader shift towards viewing connectivity as an essential part of the private aviation experience."

Simon Cooper, Head of Sales & Marketing at Gama Aviation Group-owned charter brokerage Hunt & Palmer, stated: "Our clients' perception of onboard Wi-Fi has shifted dramatically. It is no longer just a desirable amenity, but a strict non-negotiable requirement, regardless of flight duration."

Glyn Tookey, Regional Director, EMEA & India at Duncan Aviation, said: "We continue to see strong demand for inflight connectivity upgrades across a wide range of aircraft make and models. Based on the activity we are seeing today, we expect that demand to remain strong well into 2027 and 2028."

Nate Klenke, Modifications Sales Manager at Duncan Aviation, further explains that such upgrades often occur during scheduled maintenance of the aircraft: "Many operators are taking advantage of scheduled maintenance events to incorporate connectivity upgrades and minimize additional aircraft downtime. At the same time, we also continue to perform a significant number of

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connectivity installations as stand-alone modification events. We do have a healthy backlog of connectivity projects."

Growing passenger expectations for seamless onboard connectivity are driving a significant increase in demand for inflight connectivity upgrades among business aviation aircraft owners.

From network performance to operational requirements

Chris Moore, CEO of Gogo stated: "It's important to look beyond headline speeds to the aircraft's real mission, consistency and cybersecurity vigilance, long-term costs and upgrade paths, as well as the support behind the system."

The rapid evolution of inflight connectivity technologies has provided business aviation operators and aircraft owners with a wider selection of solutions than ever before. Traditional geostationary (GEO) satellite networks, leveraging Ku- and Ka-band services, continue to offer proven global connectivity capabilities, while emerging Low Earth Orbit (LEO) constellations are reshaping the market with lower latency and enhanced broadband performance.

Yet, choosing the most suitable connectivity platform involves far more than comparing bandwidth speeds or technical specifications. Operators must assess how each solution aligns with their aircraft's mission profile, geographic operating environment, coverage requirements, installation considerations, and long-term operational objectives.

As connectivity increasingly influences aircraft acquisition decisions, cabin experience expectations, and asset value retention, a comprehensive approach to system selection has become essential. For owners and operators alike, inflight connectivity is no longer simply a passenger amenity. It is rapidly becoming a strategic component of an aircraft's overall value proposition and operational capability.

Connectivity options extend to smaller aircraft

Advances in antenna technology are making high-speed satellite connectivity accessible to a broader range of business aircraft, extending capabilities beyond traditional large-cabin jets. The emergence of electronically steered antennas is enabling smaller business jets and turboprops to benefit from reliable broadband connectivity, significantly expanding the options available to operators.

Among the solutions driving this evolution is Gogo Galileo HDX, which leverages Eutelsat OneWeb's Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite network to deliver broadband performance of up to 60 Mbps. Designed specifically for smaller aircraft platforms, the system is compatible with models such as the Pilatus PC-12, Pilatus PC-24, Embraer Phenom 300, and select Cessna Citation aircraft, offering operators access to connectivity capabilities previously associated primarily with larger business jets.

The adoption of these advanced technologies is already gaining momentum across the region. Dubai-based aircraft management and charter specialist Action Aviation recently became the first operator in the Middle East to install a Gogo Galileo FDX antenna aboard a Boeing Business Jet (BBJ), marking another milestone in the region's growing commitment to next-generation inflight connectivity solutions.

"We've had 15 to 20 devices online, all streaming, and it's been flawless. The Gogo system is even better than what I have at home," Action's CEO Mark Butler says. "The ability to stay

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connected at any stage of flight is essential for today's business aviation clientele. Whether it's holding face-to-face video meetings, or communicating in real time, passengers expect connectivity that is fast, reliable and seamless."

Multi-network architectures and future aircraft requirements

Connectivity providers continue to advance technologies aimed at delivering greater network resilience, enhanced coverage, and improved performance across a wide range of flight environments.

A notable example is Honeywell Aerospace's JetWave X satellite communications platform, which employs a multi-network architecture capable of connecting across multiple Ka-band satellite constellations and seamlessly switching between available networks. Honeywell is targeting certification of the system across a broad spectrum of business aviation platforms, ranging from the Bombardier Challengerfamily to larger-cabin business jets.

These innovations highlight the growing importance of future-proofing connectivity investments. Beyond meeting current operational and passenger requirements, operators are increasingly seeking solutions that can evolve alongside emerging satellite networks, changing mission profiles, and rising expectations for onboard digital experiences.

For aircraft owners and operators, selecting a connectivity solution has become a strategic decision that extends well beyond internet performance alone. Factors such as aircraft compatibility, installation complexity, service coverage, scalability, and long-term operating costs are now central to evaluating the overall value and effectiveness of a connectivity platform.

Aircraft principals take a more active role

Inflight connectivity is becoming an increasingly important consideration for aircraft owners and principals, who are looking beyond technical specifications to evaluate how connectivity solutions enhance the passenger experience, support operational needs, and protect the long-term value of their investment.

Recent industry research conducted by Viasat in partnership with Corporate Jet Investor highlights this trend. According to the survey, 99% of aircraft principals reported being involved to some degree in connectivity decisions, while 43% described themselves as actively or decisively engaged in the selection process. The findings underscore how connectivity has evolved from a largely technical discussion into a strategic business consideration that directly involves aircraft owners.

"Connectivity can no longer be sold, specified, or defended without the Principal in mind," said Claudio D'Amico, Vice President, OEMs, Partners and Fleets, Business Aviation at Viasat.

The growing influence of aircraft principals is reshaping how connectivity solutions are evaluated and implemented. Owners, charter clients, and frequent passengers increasingly expect connectivity investments to deliver measurable value, whether through enhanced productivity, a superior cabin experience, or stronger aircraft market appeal.

As a result, connectivity decisions are no longer focused solely on which system can be installed. They are increasingly centred on how a solution supports the aircraft's mission, aligns with user expectations, and contributes to the aircraft's long-term operational and financial value.

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A wider industry conversation at MEBAA Show 2026

As inflight connectivity technology continues to advance, business aviation stakeholders are faced with an increasingly complex set of decisions that balance passenger expectations, operational demands, cybersecurity considerations, and long-term investment objectives.

“Connectivity has undoubtedly become a standard expectation in corporate aviation,” said Steve Varsano, President of Flexjet and founder of The Jet Business. “While some passengers may tolerate limited connectivity on shorter flights, the reality is that technology is evolving rapidly, and expectations are rising even faster. For longer missions, high-speed internet access is increasingly viewed as essential rather than optional.”

Varsano will be among the featured speakers at BizAv Talks, the flagship conference programme of MEBAA Show 2026. Taking the stage on Tuesday, 8 December, the opening day of the event, he will offer his perspectives on the transformation of the business aviation industry and discuss the opportunities emerging from changing customer expectations, technological innovation, and evolving ownership models.

Through both its extensive exhibition floor and the BizAv Talks conference programme, MEBAA Show 2026 will provide a platform for industry leaders to examine how emerging technologies are reshaping aircraft operations, ownership strategies, and passenger experiences. Among the most prominent themes will be the expanding role of inflight connectivity and its influence on aircraft acquisition, fleet management, and asset value.

Beyond connectivity, BizAv Talks will address a broad range of topics impacting the future of business aviation, including financing, infrastructure development, sustainability initiatives, technological innovation, regulatory developments, and the industry's long-term growth outlook. Together, these discussions will offer attendees valuable insights into the trends and challenges shaping the next generation of business aviation.

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