ARE STANDING AIRLINE SEATS THE FUTURE OF INCREASING SEATING CAPACITY?

News / Airlines



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Since the dawn of commercial aircraft seating has been mostly unchanged. Even up until today regardless of which airline or aircraft one flies in the seats all look and feel familiar. But in the pursuit of cheaper fares and cutting costs this might soon change.

Increasing capacity, reducing comfort

At the yearly Aircraft Interiors Expo, innovations in luxury interiors are common place. It is so saturated with new concepts or bigger seats that hardly any buzz is fixated on one concept alone. But at the most recent expo in 2018 seemingly everybody was talking about the SkyRider 2.0 seats. Not because they were lush but rather because they stripped away most creature comforts and are packed closer together than nearly any other aircraft seat. The Skyrider 2.0 puts the passenger in a hybrid position somewhere between sitting and standing. The passenger is still

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buckled into the seat but instead of a normal pitch the seat is slightly elevated and leaning forward so the passenger is forced to use their legs for support with the seating position being closer to leaning back on the seat rather than sitting in it. A questionable design when it comes to ergonomics but will undoubtedly increase seating capacity.

While the Skyrider 2.0 is not the only standing seat it certainly is the most prominent. Focused to appeal solely to ultra-low cost carriers who value the bottom line over passenger comfort. The premise behind these seats is simple; increase seating capacity to reduce ticket prices. While this is straight forward enough it sheds light on the troubling trend of airline operators increasingly trying to remove any comfort or service that is not absolutely necessary and seemingly making it a race to see who can provide the most basic service possible while still remaining legal. The company behind the Skyrider 2.0, Aviointeriors, are advertising these seats as increasing capacity by 20% and reducing the weight of the aircraft seat by 50%. Impressive statistics that will help airlines increase the amount of paying customers per flight and reducing maintenance and components costs on seats. Aviointeriors has stated they have received a good amount of interest from airlines for their new seat but so far no airline has announced publicly announced plans to implement these seats, possibly due to fear of backlash if they announced passengers will be standing during their flights.

Uphill battle

While the Skyrider 2.0 makes a compelling business case for standing airlines seats there are some problems that separates them from actually installing them on airlines. Most notably that these seats are called 2.0 because it is not the first time they attempted to implement this idea. The first iteration of the Skyrider seats were announced in 2010 but failed to get off the ground because of a lack of interest and orders. The question with the Skyrider 2.0 is now if the paradigm has shifted for this kind of seat to be accepted. Back in 2010 there were very little Ultra low cost carriers around but now they are common place. The same evolution of accepting less comfort while traveling may now also be true for the Skyrider 2.0 seats. But even if they are to be accepted by the public there is still a long road ahead before the seats can be installed in aircraft. Most notably safety regulations. In the event of a crash airlines seats must be able to absorb a certain amount of force and in the event of a fire on-board the entire aircraft needs to be evacuated in 90 seconds – a difficult task when the plane gets crowded. Of course the safety concerns only scratch the surface of potential problems. There are other factors at play such as the seats not having space under them to store baggage and that these seats may not be able to accommodate the elderly or those with disabilities.

Increasing capacity is the way of the future

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While standing airline seats have not yet been installed on any commercial airliner this may change in the near future. Not only is Aviointeriors pushing for this future but Ryanair’s CEO Michael O'Leary announced he was considering introducing standing only areas in his aircraft and Airbus filed a patent for “saddle seats” with no backrest. Most of the resistance these seats are receiving is coming from Europe and North America so if these seats eventually do make an entrance to the market it will likely be in Asia first where regulations are slightly different and where the passenger growth rate is quickly exceeding aircraft capacity. With the rise of Ultra low cost carriers providing only the most necessary services so the passengers can save a few euros on the price of a ticket the question that remains is where will we draw the line between a good price and comfort? Historically speaking, while resistant at first, passengers eventually except a less luxurious travel experience for a better price, but what passengers are willing to accept has limits. And while we have not yet approached those limits standing seats may just be one move too far.

Image: Inc

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