TWO-THIRDS OF AIRLINES TO ENTER NEW ERA OF CONNECTED ONBOARD SERVICES BY 2020

News / Airlines

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More than 90% of airlines are set to ramp up investment in advancing wireless services for cabin crew and pilots over the three years to 2020 – an 18% increase since SITA's 2016 *Airline IT Trends survey*. This is according to award-winning connected aircraft services expert SITAONAIR, as it presents SITA's 2017 *Air Transport IT Trends Insights* into the connected aircraft.

Over a third (34%) of airlines expect to receive connected aircraft deliveries within the next three years, compared with more than a fifth (21%) in SITA's 2016 *Airline IT Trends Survey* . SITA's 2017 *Insights* also found 69% of carriers committing to a major program (40%) or R&D/trial (29%) to establish full satellite broadband connectivity to aircraft.

Enhancing the passenger experience is far and away the connected aircraft's biggest encountered and perceived benefit, according to 43% of airlines. A combined 31% meanwhile, cited operational benefits across maintenance and aircraft health monitoring, cockpit and cabin, as the chief advantages of a connected aircraft. In testament to this, 78% of surveyed carriers reported automatic aircraft data management as an investment priority – 33% through major programs, 45% in R&D programs – by 2020.

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Wi-Fi advancement focus for forward-looking carriers

When asked for their investment focuses up to 2020, 94% of airlines surveyed as part of SITA's 2017 *Air Transport IT Trends Insights* study cited wireless services for cabin crew or pilots (64% in major programs; 30% in R&D or trials). This was closely followed by 91% of carriers targeting investment in wireless inflight services for passengers (54% in major programs; 37% in R&D or trials).

SITA's connected aircraft *Insights* data also reveals airline ambitions to boost Wi-Fi data bandwidth in the years to come, with 60% of airlines surveyed planning to, or having already implemented, high-speed Wi-Fi by 2020.

Airline inflight connected services shopping list

Assessing airlines' most-coveted inflight entertainment and connectivity (IFEC) services, the insights found that providing a destination services app was the technological advancement that carriers are most enthusiastic to establish by 2020 (72% – up from 46% in 2016). This was closely followed by a Duty Free shopping app (61%, a rise from 48% last year).

Passengers' preference for enjoying inflight entertainment (IFE) via BYOD – e.g. with a 'second screen' of their own – was reinforced for a second consecutive year, with 24% having invested in Wireless IFE to passengers'-own devices and 46% planning to do so by the end of 2020. Providing infotainment to personal devices or apps – namely, news, magazines and books – and inflight communication services, proved similarly high in the airline IFEC shopping list, at an additional 47% and 43% each against the airlines that have already implemented.

On the hot topic of pricing for delivering onboard Wi-Fi passenger services, roughly the same proportion of 'tails' expressed ambitions to provide free (an additional 43%) and paid-for Wi-Fi sessions (an additional 42%) by 2020 – with many airlines already exploring business models.

"More mobile" experience

A significant proportion of operators revealed a desire to invest further in mobile technologies for passengers and crew, reflecting the "always available" trend on the ground, and with potentially transformational benefits for crew and passenger engagement and service on-board.

A stark 87% of surveyed carriers in 2017 (compared to 75% in 2016) have implemented or plan to implement mobile services to enhance customer relationship management in the next three years. 75% of surveyed carriers expressed ambitions to invest in major programs around apps for passenger mobile services. Around half (47%) of carriers are focusing investment on major programs for social media-hosted passenger services; and a total 44% plan on major programs or R&D/pilot programs for wearable technologies for staff.

Connected future

Reflecting on the findings, SITAONAIR's Vice President of Strategy, Dominique El Bez, said: "Our industry's connected aircraft vision, with its complete, connected inflight experience, is irrefutably here to stay. Airlines are increasingly aware of the value-added benefits presented by in-flight connectivity options that we at SITAONAIR are experts in delivering, to advance their RoI.

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“On the cabin connectivity side, these benefits span everything from enhancing airlines’ brand perception in the eyes of passengers, by enabling them to stay connected to their digital lives when they fly via Wi-Fi or cellular, to digitizing cabin crews to personalize the passenger experience with intelligent, CRM-integrated applications. From supporting airlines to monetize inflight connectivity services with clever onboard sponsorship partnerships; or supporting passengers’ choice to enjoy wireless inflight entertainment; to empowering passenger autonomy through delivering connected mobile applications and services to keep them informed and entertained on the move.

“For the cockpit, airline flight operations, management, and safety, connected solutions bring a significant lift to efficiencies and safety procedures. How? From deploying digital solutions that deliver the latest flight context information into the hands of pilots; ever-evolving our flight tracking and flight planning solutions to ensure airlines meet ICAO recommendations to frequently report fleet positions; to providing secure multilink communications to support every stage of flight.

“We also see accelerating industry interest in managing and harnessing the power of aircraft data. Such innovation advances flight and MRO operations with predictive and enriched aircraft operations. Amongst the emerging technologies reported by airlines, 67% plan to invest into initiatives around the Internet-of-Things, 52% around Artificial Intelligence and 44% on wearable technology for staff. All present amazing potential for enhancing airlines’ operations inflight and on the ground.”

Mr El Bez continued: “We at SITAONAIR want to see more airlines able to achieve their connected aircraft aims, however. We truly believe the air transport industry needs to work harder to empower the world’s airlines to get connected, by embracing our open platforms approach to inflight connectivity innovation. Our pioneering ‘open cabin’ attitude is already creating harmony across airline fleets and avionics, and data-rich customer relationship management systems, helping deliver airlines’ unique passenger experiences without expensively overhauling their fleets.”

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