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# Connectivity's promise still alive

By **Rick Lundstrom** on May, 6 2020 | Connectivity & Satellites



Much of the industry may be locked down at home, but when people return to work the complicated and opportunity-filled task of making inflight connectivity available and profitable will await solutions when the office doors open again.

Industry experts, speaking from various rooms of their home or home office, answered submitted question on the future prospects of broadband Internet aboard aircraft during one of the final sessions of [FlightPlan](#), sponsored by [Inmarsat](#) and the [Airline Passenger Experience Association](#) held in the digital space last week.

During the afternoon session, representatives from Inmarsat, Deutsche Telekom, Honeywell, Ogilvy UK and other companies batted around possibilities for making money, whether through standard charges for service, roaming plans or third party associations as a way to cover the expense of installation and use of Wi-Fi on board aircraft.

## Should it be free?

Wi-Fi on board aircraft free of charge has long been a predicted direction by many industry watchers as they see the policy unfolding at hotels. [Rory Sutherland](#), Vice Chairman of [Ogilvy UK](#), said that copying the hotel model should not be the first place an airline should go. Once something is marketed and given out for free, it's very hard to go back, he pointed out.

"Don't make Wi-Fi free by default," he said. Airlines could market and bundle inflight Wi-Fi with other services, such as baggage check, through subscriptions or through upgrades in speed and capacity.

Teaming Wi-Fi with shopping and destination purchases amounts to a "second Christmas" said Sutherland, later on in the session. It's a time when passengers have low-level pressure to shop. For many leisure travelers, their holiday begins on the aircraft, and offering services such as rental car upgrades can be in front of the passenger for duration of the flight. With passengers in a holiday mood, indulgences can be had at the touch of a finger on the screen.

"You actually become an extraordinarily potent retailer the moment your planes are connected," Sutherland said.

Another important way to make inflight connectivity work better is by making it easy. Easy access without passwords or log-ins or the ability of the passenger to pay for the service without a credit card would mean more passengers willing to part with money to pay for the service.

"Everything is a sales opportunity," said [Phil Harvey](#), Senior Director of Marketing and Communications at Inmarsat. "And that does not mean you make it horribly commercial or very awkward for the passenger."

One of the companies that is making strides in seamless, simple connectivity in hand is Deutsche Telekom which is bringing on-the-ground simplicity into the cabin of [Lufthansa Group](#) aircraft. David

Fox, Vice President of Inflight and Connectivity at [Deutsche Telekom](#) said the answer to getting passengers to log on when in the air can be accomplished through roaming packages that have been in use in Europe for years. The company has one in service called Connect App that can be programmed into a user's electronic device and accessed at any Internet hot spot by pushing a single button.

This month, the company began taking subscribers in the tens of thousands in Croatia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Soon, subscribing passengers in Germany and the rest of Europe will also be able to use Connect App on aircraft in the Lufthansa Group.

"I think that is a major step change for inflight connectivity," Fox said. The next step for the company to do away with the app and make use of a protocol called Hot Spot 2.0. As people move around the world, their device would connect you to available public hot spots automatically through a phone's sim card.

[John Peterson](#), Vice President of Services Connectivity at Honeywell said that by 2035 online shopping on aircraft could come to US\$6 billion through a process called "white label." With a captive audience aboard the aircraft with nothing to do, it creates a "perfect marketplace" with the airline taking a portion of what is purchased. The aircraft network can also benefit from the same network through capturing data and real time weather, optimize routes and have disruption management tools that will save money, fuel and lost time

How to get passengers' attention and entice them to log on depends on the time, the place and the medium used to call it to their attention, said Asbjorn Christofferson, Vice President of Airline Connectivity at Inmarsat. Flight attendant announcements are among the best tools to announce the availability of connectivity, but to entice further, logging on could be accomplished with the help of third-party participants. Sponsors at the focal point of Wi-Fi service (such as a recent association between an airline and toymaker Lego) could be a better tool to get passengers interested in signing up for Internet service onboard.