

# Digitalization as the catalyst for recovery

As the air transport industry's first major digital trade show kicked off today and has already covered important topics facing the industry, including how digitalizing IFE can play a key role for a successful return to travel. In session nine, entitled '*The digitalization of inflight experience as catalyst for sustainable recovery*,' experts from [Inmarsat Aviation](#), [Qatar Airways](#) and [Panasonic Avionics](#) discussed how connected service innovations can help rebuild passenger confidence in the short-term, and support long-term recovery by bringing passenger preference and ancillary opportunities to the forefront.

Digitalization within the passenger experience is the key to moving forward, said Philip Balaam, President, Inmarsat Aviation. He said there are three key components at play: building trust with the passenger, meeting the growing expectation for passenger services and expanding opportunities for monetization and new revenue streams.

According to an earlier survey by Inmarsat Aviation, more than 70 percent of travelers think the pandemic has spawned evolution across all industries, including digital transformations. Results from a separate survey that reveal 71 percent of passengers would welcome using their own mobile devices, and 40 percent think that Wi-Fi is more important than ever before.

Balaam said Inmarsat considers itself a partner to the industry that can support the reset and recovery through innovation and resilience. The company launched its next-generation GX5 satellite last fall to meet the growing demand for global, mobile broadband communications. The GX5 satellite is deployed specifically to assist the aviation industry in the Middle East region.

"It took a pandemic for the industry to realize how important digitalization is to the industry," said Babar Rahman, Vice President - Global Marketing, Sponsorships and IFE, Qatar Airways.

Increase in bandwidth will help facilitate end-to-end digitization as well as operational efficiency. Benefits include 360-degree data integration and a super fast Wi-Fi experience. Passengers also want a touchless and seamless experience from check-in to arrival, Rahman adds. Onboard connectivity has been the key differentiator for airlines that want to adapt to enhance the passenger experience. Ancillary Revenue Generation (ARG) offers cloud-based integration with e-commerce partners, enabling airlines to diversify their ARG as well as the inflight experience. Higher bandwidth gives airlines big data analytics, with the opportunity to harness data to improve operations, plus a cost benefit to things like maximizing fuel efficiency.

Joe Bentley, Chief Technology Officer of Panasonic Avionics since [July 2020](#), said during the session that he believes the transformation of digitization lies in engagement and content. Understanding how passengers are watching onboard is a key component, he said, referencing a report that reveals that 1.4 trillion onboard engagement minutes were calculated last year.

Panasonic Avionics' IFE offering features live sports - which hold a large engagement with more than one hundred million passengers watching onboard, he said. He also referenced other content and engagement findings from the company, including that 92 percent of passengers can recall an ad they saw inflight and 90 percent are influenced by advertising in their purchasing decisions. To drive revenue, Bentley suggested choosing a platform that can deliver content, data and revenue.