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# Panelists weigh the possibilities and burdens of risk

By **Rick Lundstrom** on April, 4 2016 | Inflight Entertainment



*HAMBURG* – Visitors to Aircraft Interiors Expo and World Travel Catering and Onboard Services Expo held this week will roam the massive halls and see cutting edge ideas and innovative entries to this year’s Crystal Cabin Awards – all designed to improve the passenger experience.

However, whether any of the innovations developed in the chain that links OEM’s to designers to airlines and finally to the passenger will ever make it into the cabin hinges on small word that was repeated throughout the daylong sessions that made up a portion of the Passenger Experience Conference. That word is “risk.”

Airlines are jittery about the long-term risks of adopting out-of-the box ideas. Companies that work with partners on a project for an airline customer take risks by acting on their own without important collaboration and communication and also risk losing important intellectual property in the design process. Even with the possibility of increasing passenger comfort by a design that has been shown to airlines for more than a decade, the risks inherent in being the early adopter has kept those concepts on the drawing boards and out of scheduled service.

Discussions of the inherent risks were part of one of three themed sessions today. Visitors to the conference had the chance to attend sessions that were built around hospitality, retail and service; inflight entertainment and connectivity; and cabin interiors space and comfort.

However the talk of the inherent risks came earlier, during the first address by Jason Chua, Project Executive at [A3 \(known as A-cubed\)](#) the Silicon Valley outpost for the Airbus Group. During the morning address called *Blue Sky Talk*, Chua outlined the mission of A3 which is to “disrupt things” while at the same time make products that would not attempt to mask the onboard experience to

turn it into something else.



“We do ourselves a disservice when we forget about the magic of air travel,” said Chua.

The A3 group sees a tremendous amount of opportunity to improve the passenger experience, said Chua. Airlines are slowly moving away from the concepts that tie sole revenue production of a flight to seating passengers and are looking at ways to lay out airline cabins that are more comfortable. However, he said carriers are still reluctant to take a chance on an expensive cabin product change that they may be forced to live with more up to a decade.

Suppliers also run risks, and some of those were discussed during the second morning session, which brought together five panelists that represented OEMs, design and refurbishment companies and an airline. During the session, the panelists discussed the process of collaboration and how they can make working together easier for airline clients and partners involved in a project.

Much of the solutions and the pitfalls seemed to involve communication between various parties in the collaboration process. Companies involved often find themselves working in “silos” said Baden Smith, Vice President of Business Development at AIM Altitude, a well-known design and cabin development firm. Success of a project involving several companies hinges on getting the right people involved in the process early and keeping the lines of communication open up and down the process.

Still, the creative and design process may be stifled by one or more of the partners being afraid to take a risk, said Gary Senechal, Senior Manager of Industry and Supply Chain for the Boeing Seat Integration Team.

The panel agreed on the inherent risks of working in too isolated a fashion on a collaborative project. They also agreed on the importance of putting together a team with management that can keep the project focused for all the partners.

“Business is not done between two companies, it is done between two people,” said Smith.

Another fear of risk is keeping airlines from making needed advancements in the economy class cabin. Acumen, the company that worked with British Airways to launch the first lie-flat seating arrangement, convinced the airline that its revenue would not slow down, even though it eliminated several seats in its front cabin product to make room for fully reclining seats. However, since Acumen began showing potential customers two radical seating concepts for the economy class 10 years ago, they have yet to have any takers.

Acumen developed the [Cozy Suite](#) with Thompson Aero and its [hexagonal seating](#) layout developed with Zodiac Aerospace. Both layouts increased seat pitch and gave passengers more control over

their space in the cabin.

Though there are as yet no takers the company has not given up on the concept, said Anthony Harcup, an Associate at the company. However, reluctance comes when airlines look at developing a product in an economy class environment that gives them a space per passenger of three to five square feet and a weight limit of 12 to 15 kilograms. To make a true important change in economy class, Harcup said the incentive must start with the airlines themselves, and how they will handle the growth that will put thousands of aircraft and billions of passengers in the air over the next 20 years.

“Airlines must own it,” he said. “You cannot buy a revolution off the shelf.”

One company that did take risks was Bombardier, which will debut its C-Series narrow body aircraft with SWISS International and Air Baltic. Christine de Gangé, Product Marketing Account Manager for Bombardier Commercial Aircraft said the company went through several cross-section designs before settling on a fuselage that allowed for that allowed designers and builders to straighten the walls giving passengers more shoulder room. It also pushed the design of the lavatories to give passengers up to 6 feet 2 inches enough room to stand comfortably.

The designs resulted in an important configuration that resulted in more passenger comfort and baggage space in a 3-2 configuration.