
Rockwell Collins positions for future of connected aircraft

By **Rick Lundstrom** on May, 26 2017 | Inflight Entertainment



Though the company has been in existence under one name or another since its founder supplied technology to track the Byrd expedition to the Antarctic in the 1930s, Rockwell Collins will be bringing what amounts to a new look to the aviation industry when it plants its flag at this summer's Paris Air Show.

New banners hang from the outside walls of the company's newly acquired plants, like the one *PAX*

International toured with other media last week in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Inside workers wearing black Rockwell Collins polo shirts quietly assembled the B/E Aerospace line of seating products. Among the customers with completed seating at the facility were American Airlines, Saudi Arabian Airlines, Qatar Airways and Virgin Australia.



Rockwell Collins completed the acquisition of B/E Aerospace April 13 after a process that began with the initial announcement during this year's Airline Passenger Experience Association event last October in Singapore. Final cost for the B/E Aerospace purchase came to US\$8.6 billion leaving the Cedar Rapids, Iowa-based Rockwell Collins a supplier powerhouse of 30,000 employees and annual revenue of more than US\$8 billion.

The purchase includes a rebranding of the B/E Aerospace line and the creation of a new Interior Systems business unit, under the direction of Werner Lieberherr, former B/E Aerospace President and Chief Executive Officer.



Lieberherr told the group of reporters last week that the new company division will continue its goals to be a provider of technology-based solutions that customers have come to expect from Rockwell Collins.

"Either you are a cost leader or an innovation leader," he said. That opportunity for innovation will now include a portfolio of products that take Rockwell Collins from the cockpit, where it specializes in avionics and communications on to cabin, where, over the years, B/E Aerospace has developed a wide range of cabin interior equipment for commercial aircraft and business jets including: seating, food and beverage preparation and storage equipment, lighting and oxygen systems, and modular galley and lavatory systems.

The Winston-Salem plant is one of 25 manufacturing facilities around the world. In 2016, 64% for the Interior Systems business was through line fit, while 36% was aftermarket retrofit.

Work at Winston-Salem goes on in two massive facilities. Seating assembly for the company's many customers takes place in one plant. In another building is the company's Dynamic Test Center and Advanced Design Group. Interior Systems is now the largest revenue producer for Rockwell Collins. The sector has achieved a 12.4% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) from 2006 to the end of last year.

In an afternoon session with reporters, Rockwell Collins Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer, Kelly Ortberg discussed strategy for the new acquisition and its fit within the company; and the development of aircraft that in the future will be connected digitally from nose to tail.

"We see great synergies, particularly as we move to a digitally connected airplane for us to leverage the collective strengths of the organization," he said. "It is going to bring us closer to the flying passenger as opposed to just the pilot."



The company's seating line will remain open to integration with other IFE industry hardware suppliers. However, Ortberg said Rockwell Collins sees a future where inflight entertainment, especially in single-aisle will be in the hands of passengers and connectivity providers.

He added, "More and more airlines are going to move to 'bring your own device' with no embedded wired IFE device. IFE is going to be delivered by wireless networks and streaming that information and that is being done in many airlines today. That is where we believe the market is going."

Where the company will remain an important player is the supply of inflight connectivity that has grown in importance since the 2013 acquisition of satellite communications provider ARINC. Rockwell Collins is also a value-added reseller of Inmarsat's new GX Aviation service, we're able to deliver the world's first global high-speed aviation broadband service.

"We are now expanding into the back of the aircraft providing broadband connectivity to the aircraft so that we can all live our mobile lives like we want to," Ortberg added.

For the immediate future, Rockwell Collins is planning a larger presence at this year's Paris Air Show. A number of announcements will be released as the event draws near.

Look for more coverage from the Rockwell Collins press event in the electronic Summer seating and IFE issue of PAX International