

Bluebox and Virgin Atlantic launch first full-fleet IFE for visually impaired

By **Rachel Debling** on November, 27 2017 | Tech & Hardware



Beginning December 1, [Virgin Atlantic](#) will offer an accessible IFE (named aIFE™) across its entire fleet. The [Bluebox](#)-developed platform will allow travelers with visual impairments to enjoy the same in flight entertainment selection as their fellow passengers on flights to North America, Africa, China, India, the Caribbean and the Middle East.

American Sniper

Frozen - Audio Described

Child 44

Exodus: Gods and Kings

Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies

In The Heart Of The Sea

Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb

The Gambler

The Imitation Game



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Virgin Atlantic and Bluebox collaborated with Britain's [The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association](#) (Guide Dogs) to develop the platform to ensure that the design addressed the needs of the passengers and the airline. For example, the end result is more advanced but costs less to the carrier, since a fleet's IFE system does not need to be updated ahead of the impending government legislation surrounding accessible IFE. aIFE™ is iPad-based and uses many of the features already built in to Apple's iOS.

Bluebox also released [a video](#) explaining how this system will aid both travelers and Virgin Atlantic.

"Nearly thirty years ago, Virgin Atlantic was the first airline to offer seat-back entertainment in all cabins, so it's apt that we should be the first to ensure our entertainment is fully accessible across all flights," said Mark Anderson, Executive Vice President - Customer at Virgin Atlantic, in a November 27 release. "Working with Bluebox and Guide Dogs, we've been able to create a world first that ensures customers with sight loss can experience the full range of onboard entertainment including the latest blockbusters, TV shows and albums."

James Macrae, CTO, Bluebox Aviation Systems Ltd. and contributor to the IFE Accessibility Working Group (ACCESSWG) of the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX), was equally pleased with the outcome. "We distilled the most critical elements of our [Bluebox Ai](#) IFE platform into a simple design that someone with sight loss can easily and consistently navigate, enriching this with additional background functionality," he said, in the same November release. One of the differences between this version and a traditional screen reader, he went on to note, is that synopses are read

aloud with a tap of the film title. "By putting these in the background, we kept the interface uncluttered and simple to navigate, but still providing information to help the passenger choose their selection.

The user experience-based decisions were made after feedback from people who would be using the system on a typical flight. At the beginning of the project, Bluebox was connected to Guide Dogs by Virgin Atlantic, and the companies worked with a number of people with varying degrees of visual impairments during development.

John Welsman, Policy Business Partner for Travel and Transport for the charity Guide Dogs, expressed satisfaction with the collaboration. "We know that something as simple as an in flight entertainment system with voiceovers and audio descriptions will help passengers with sight loss to enjoy flights just like anyone else on board," Welsman stated. "As someone with sight loss who flies quite often myself, I think it'll be wonderful to access entertainment and information on Virgin Atlantic planes without needing to ask for help. Not having to call for cabin crew, or disturb fellow passengers around me who might be sleeping, will be great."

The fact that real users of the system were relied on for input went a long way in creating a product that far surpassed expectations, according to Catherine Brown, Head of Marketing, Bluebox Aviation Systems Ltd., saying that the project "would have a huge impact on their overall passenger experience - offering them independence and control, as well as entertainment."

Brown summarized the partnership by saying, "Gathering relevant input is fundamental to good product design. But helping to deliver those more intangible benefits of accessible IFE? That's made this project extremely satisfying for Bluebox."