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# Innovation driving Interiors and MRO prospects eastward

By **Claire Malcolm** on January, 31 2018 | Cabin Maintenance



*The company's line of lighting systems was a highlight a the stand of digEcor*

*Dubai* — The hub for the region's aviation industry, Dubai was once again the focal point for key players in the interiors and MRO sectors as the January 2018 edition of Aircraft Interiors Middle East (AIME) and MRO Middle East, registered record attendance last week.

Officially opened by HH Sheikh Ahmed Bin Saeed Al Maktoum, President of the Dubai Civil Aviation Authority, Chairman of Dubai Airports, and Chief Executive and chairman of Emirates Airline and Group, the two-day event January 23-24 beat last year's figures, hosting 320 exhibitors and welcoming 4,541 trade visitors.

Innovation was the overarching theme as international exhibitors and visitors connected with existing partners, explored new business potential and pinpointed market growth opportunities.

For Paul Thorpe, President EMEA & Vice President Global Sales for IFE experts [digEcor](#), recent FAA certification approval for the company's cabin lighting solutions represents a new opportunity. "We

offer a full color suite, a mid-range two-color option and low-cost version. There's a strong business case for the lower end of the market especially for airline fleets where there is a mishmash of older aircraft with fluorescent lighting and new LED-fitted aircraft," he says.

"A lighting change makes a surprising difference to the cabin interior, is a cost-effective solution and creates a more cohesive look for a mixed fleet," he adds.

Also exciting Thorpe about the region is growth in demand for in-seat power, as he explains: "This is especially relevant for operators focusing on Wi-Fi streaming, whether it is to drive ancillary revenues or simply part of the ticket price service. Interesting to us is the content model that goes with it as an area where our past revenue sharing experience may well give us a niche."



Gogo Vision has been making waves since its launch last fall

The primary focus for [Gogo](#) this year is 2Ku, its latest generation inflight connectivity technology. Steve Nolan, Vice President Public Relations and Communications, elaborates: "Already live on 500 aircraft, including a number of planes flying in and out of this region, we will more than double the number of connected aircraft in the next year.

"We also recently launched live television and Gogo Vision Touch, which is a wireless seatback solution that we believe will disrupt the seatback IFE market. It's basically taking a commercial-grade tablet and hanging it on the back of a seat, and is very maintenance-friendly."

A "vitally important" region for Gogo, with Nolan flagging major carrier systems' transition strategies as a key demand driver in the Middle East, he confirms that interest in moving eastwards with the recent signing of a Cathay Pacific deal and "huge" market opportunities in ASPAC and China specifically. "India is also one of the last countries to have regulatory approval for IFE system connectivity and there's been a lot of positive movement, making it an important future market for us," he adds.

Over at first-time AIME exhibitor and portable IFE solutions developer, [Bluebox Aviation Systems Ltd](#), its iPad-centric IFE solutions are already onboard a coterie of high-flying carriers including Air Astana, Etihad Airways and Virgin. "We're also uniquely qualified for early window content as well as content integration, and are Apple approved," says Mark Stevens, Director of Sales.

Its latest product evolution, the Bluebox Wow, is a fully self-contained portable device that can stream to 50 passengers. "It can now handle 1.6TB of data, which is a lot of content, and is approved for both early and late window content," notes Stevens. Available on a three-year leased basis, this means that customers have ongoing access to tech updates and Bluebox recently added moving maps as well as 3G/4G capability and Wi-Fi hotspot connectivity.

On board with [Air Inuit](#) in Canada, Japan's [Solaseed Air](#) and in use as a gate entertainment service by a major unnamed U.S. carrier, it is specifically targeted for single aisle or rigid aircraft operators, but Stevens also touts its suitability for twin aisle. "Put four to five boxes on an A330 and it's significantly

cheaper than building in your own IFE system,” he says.



The Columbus Three long-haul seating at the Aviointeriors stand

Good IFE deserves a decent seat and [Aviointeriors'](#) Senior Sales Manager, Gianluigi Mormile, was showcasing the Columbus Three (C3) long haul economy class seat with key features including a cradle, 15-inch armrest and IFE video installation option. Weighing in at 13.5kg per passenger, the C3's latest customer is Icelandair, with installation on the carrier's new 737 MAX fleet imminent.

“Our Middle East customers have very high expectations and we are open to any kind of customization from detailing to leather covers. More importantly, we can still commit to delivery targets of seven months for economy and 12 months for business,” says Mormile.

Similarly, high-level expectations are business bread and butter for Claire Besançon, President and CEO of Paris-headquartered uniform designers, [Création & Image](#). She says: “What is trending now is a move towards washable and more comfortable fabrics. In terms of style, a more feminine cut and shape is popular, which is a challenge when it comes to creating a uniform to fit all figures; and we are also seeing more clients wanting to visualize elements of their history through uniform design.”

Looking future forward, the spare parts sector is also undergoing something of a transformation thanks to online marketplace, [Aerobay](#).

A two-year old business, the free-to-use platform was designed to automate a lot of the tasks involved in spare parts purchase. Buyers can search from thousands of parts, get detailed technical information and make a bid or buy direct with Aerobay sellers' guaranteeing real time availability.

Comparisons to the Amazon business model are a compliment as far as Richard Hervé, President, Aerobay, is concerned. “We offer a full-solution marketplace that aims to simplify the interaction

between buyer and seller and offer a completely digitalized spare parts channel. There's no comparable platform and we currently have more than 900 aerospace partners," he says.

"We also work a lot with airline overstock and have signed major agreements with Airbus Helicopters and Leonardo to be their online distributor for rotatable parts, and [Saint-Gobain](#) for windshield distribution. In addition, the platform functionality allows OEM to promote and sell their new factory parts through us," he adds.

From the literal nuts and bolts of aviation to customer-facing finishes, another French entity targeting Middle East growth is aerospace coatings firm, [Mapaero](#).

"We specialize in cabin applications from galley to technical seats as well as aircraft corrosion protection. We're known for our water-based structural coating and were the first company to introduce the option to Europe, back in 2001, and now have subsidiaries and office around the world from Seattle to China," says Alexia Apostolou, Key Account Manager.

In the beginning it was Mapaero pushing its environmental and health-friendly solution, but now Apostolou reports that more and more clients are interested, so much so that they now sell more water-based than solvent based paint. "The Middle East is very important to us and we already work with airlines such as Oman Air and Gulf Air, as well as indirectly through equipment manufacturers," she adds.

For [SR Technics](#)' Oladi Olukolu, Director, Commercial Engineering & Business Development, 2018 is shaping up to be an extremely diverse year. He says: "We are focusing on our expansion into complementary services, supported by our Malaysia facility, and new products ranging from airframe services to EASA/FAA engine design certification. We'll also be unveiling a new IFE system in Hamburg and this has already been installed for a Dubai customer.

"In the Middle East, we really want to demonstrate how we can add value beyond our scope of routine services. If you look further east, with China and ASPAC set to dominate in terms of forecasted fleet growth in the next two to three years then this is where we see tremendous opportunity."



Semmco recently opened an office in Dubai to market its wide range of products

The decision to open a dedicated office in Dubai to service the region has further cemented the capabilities of access platform and ground support equipment company, [Semmco](#), as Stuart McOnie, Managing Director, explains: “We’ve been present in the region for 12 years and it got to a point where it was becoming too expensive to ship product so we set up a facility with a local manufacturer.”

While Semmco has established relationships with the region’s legacy carriers, from Etihad Airways to Saudia and Qatar Airways, McOnie says that the company really needed on-the-ground presence to be able to offer a 24-hour response and service additional client needs. And there’s also been a cost reduction benefit, upping the advantages for the region’s airlines.

Its product range is underpinned by a twin commitment to quality and safety. Innovation is also important from special access platforms with outward rotating railings to a range of products that can service four different wide-bodied aircraft in a mixed fleet scenario.

“As well as servicing the region in its entirety we are also seeing quite a lot of interest from India, which is easily accessible from Dubai. And we are also perfectly situated to access Africa and as far as Australia,” he comments.

The retrofit and cabin upgrade expertise that [Diehl Aerosystems](#) is known for brought Arend Wedekind, Senior Vice President Sales and Marketing back to the Dubai show floor with densification solutions front of mind.

“We are seeing a global trend towards aircraft modification for densification. This means that you can have six more seats in a single aisle aircraft. Our SKYPAX solution for the A320 family was developed in partnership with [Lufthansa Technik](#). In the Middle East there has previously been more of a focus on premium, but carriers here are also moving slowly in this direction with more seats to drive

revenues," he remarks.

Diehl is also pushing boundaries when it comes to cabin interiors branding with a digital print solution using a powder coating that comes in the full CMYK color spectrum and is applied as a digital print as either a geometric pattern, rendering or full-color picture.

Says Wedekind: "This can be personalised with anniversary styled branding or a city skyline motif just two examples. It's incredibly flexible and we expect it to really take off in the next two to three years as a great way to achieve differentiation."

Ancillary revenue generation was on the agenda at the Inflight Pavilion Workshops where Kimberly Creaven, Vice President Global Advertising, Sponsorships and Partner Marketing - [Global Eagle Entertainment](#), shared her insight on how airlines should exploit connectivity to boost income, pointing out that out of global advertising revenues totaling US\$600 billion, airline advertising accounts for just US\$200 million.

"[For airlines] it's all about understanding how they can fix [systems] to be relevant, smart and know how to deliver. Advertising buys eyeballs and it's our job to monetize those eyeballs, so the more premium and targeted you can make it, the better," she notes.

"Data can be monetized. We know that airlines are crazy about data privacy, but if we can prove that we can turn data into a dollar, then that's priceless. The big winner will be audience segmentation. Once we can do that, and I mean by talking to 12-year-olds as well as 40-year-olds - so as to segment them - then we can monetize that and communicate with them throughout the travel journey," she adds.

According to Philippe Combe, Portfolio Manager, [SITAONAIR](#), improving the passenger experience stems from harnessing connectivity. "In the past, all service providers offered a 'one size fits all' experience to every traveller, but we are working with airlines to develop tailored offers, integrated with passenger profiles, through co-innovation.

"Last year we worked with Emirates to deliver personalized inflight connectivity for airline customers through SITAONAIR's Internet ONAIR portal, on more than 200 aircraft. This was expertly integrated with Emirates Skywards, the airline's award-winning loyalty program, to offer special benefits to members, enabling passengers to connect simply using their Skywards' credentials."

This is the starting point for a world of e-commerce activity, whether it's inflight retail goods, seat upgrade suggestions or WiFi services. Says Combe: "We've seen good adoption and improved monetization of Wi-Fi services, and are beginning to see a steady increase in demand."

SITAONAIR is also working with Saudia, equipping the airline with its enhanced Internet ONAIR inflight Wi-Fi portal, aboard 86 aircraft flying to more than 80 destinations worldwide. This features a 'world-first' e-ticket solution, enabling First and Business Class passengers access to free inflight Wi-Fi by entering their e-ticket code.

"It's a real partnership journey with the airlines. Our vision - and what we are already realizing - is of an open platforms system, enabling all kinds of connectivity solutions from Internet to mobile devices and inflight services, while achieving a harmonious connectivity experience. This gives airlines and passengers alike the ability to choose the way they want to use connectivity on board, and not to simply have it imposed on them," concludes Combe.