

No missed connections with Viasat

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Passengers using PEDs inflight with Viasat's IFC solution

Viasat is facing the inflight connectivity evolution head-on, helping airlines deliver what passengers crave—a totally seamless experience. *PAX Tech* spoke with Don Buchman, VP and GM Commercial Aviation at [Viasat](#), to learn more about the company's partnerships in the MEASA region and beyond that are reshaping the onboard experience in the changing digital landscape.

In 2023, Viasat acquired [Inmarsat](#) and was selected as the IFC provider for both [Ethiopian Airlines](#) and [Etihad Airways](#).

"Etihad Airways is a highly innovative, passenger-centric airline, consistently delivering stand-out passenger experiences to travellers across the Middle East and beyond," Buchman tells *PAX Tech*. "It has chosen Viasat as its connectivity partner on its new 787 Dreamliner fleet, demonstrating its trust in Viasat to deliver the connectivity its passengers want and need. Adding these aircraft in the Middle East to the connectivity we provide worldwide ensures that we can continue to meet our objective of bringing powerful inflight connections to passengers virtually anywhere."

Viasat is equipping Ethiopian Airlines A350-1000 aircraft with high-speed inflight broadband for passengers through the Airbus Airspace [Link HBCplus program](#). In addition to serving travellers on domestic and international routes from Africa, Ethiopian serves more than 20 destinations across the MEASA region, providing reliable connectivity for passengers transiting through.

“Passengers [can] stream videos, browse the internet, shop online and enjoy social media all from the comfort of their seats and using their personal devices,” Buchman says. “This means that Ethiopian can deliver the experience we know travellers crave, being as connected in the skies as they are on the ground.”

Evolving expectations for IFE and connectivity

According to Viasat’s [2023 Passenger Experience Survey](#), 97 percent of respondents use personal electronic devices (PEDs) to access IFE. Etihad’s Viasat-equipped 787 Dreamliners, set to enter service this year, will meet this demand with live streaming capabilities on PEDs.

Once in service, Etihad aircraft will be connected to Viasat’s global satellite network coverage of owned and partner satellites. Viasat will enable inflight streaming of four international channels and one Arabic channel; BBC Arabic, BBC World News, CNN International, CNBC and Sport24.

“We know from our *2023 Passenger Experience Survey* that the majority of passengers want access to Live TV and Live Sports inflight, so this is directly responding to this desire. After all, passengers want to be as connected in the air as they are in everyday life, and not miss out on the moments that matter even while they’re flying,” says Buchman.

He adds that Viasat surveyed more than 11,000 passengers worldwide in 2023. Results indicate that inflight Wi-Fi is now the most influential factor for passengers deciding who to fly with. Eighty-one percent of respondents said they would pay to access to Live Sport during a flight and said it is important to their onboard experience. Eighty-three percent of passengers said they are more likely to rebook with an airline that offers quality inflight Wi-Fi—demonstrating the value that airlines can reap from delivering on the experience their passengers want, Buchman highlights.

Seamless connection

As technology progresses, passengers are not only expecting access to seamless inflight Wi-Fi, but they also want the service to be complementary. And, according to Buchman, that’s just the tip of the iceberg.

“Nowadays, passengers expect a full entertainment experience during the flight, only possible with a seamless, reliable, high-speed connectivity service to power it,” he says.

Simply being able to stream a live game or access an IFE selection from a personal device is not enough. Viasat’s survey found that 47 percent of passengers want unlimited social media access in the skies, while 22 percent want to game while onboard.

“This shows how many passengers now expect entertaining, edge-of-your-seat experiences from the comfort of the cabin,” Buchman explains.

Meeting passenger demands for free IFC and features such as live streaming or access to an IFE library via a PED are key elements shaping the future of the onboard experience.

“For airlines, this means that keeping up with these expectations should be top of the agenda, to ensure they unlock customer loyalty and keep passengers coming back for more,” Buchman says.