

Q&A with Viasat's Don Buchman: Better together

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Don Buchman, Vice President and General Manager, Commercial Aviation at Viasat

Don Buchman, [Viasat](#) Vice President and General Manager of Commercial Aviation, tells *PAX Tech* the latest since acquiring Inmarsat earlier this year. Since then, Viasat has grown to a company of 8,000 employees with offices in 24 countries. While leadership structures are changing and new strategies are being put into action to ensure growth, Buchman shares updates about how the acquisition is opening new doors. He also details what passengers — hungry for fast, functioning connectivity — can ultimately expect onboard.

PAX International: In May, [Inmarsat reported](#) that the combined assets of the two companies were expected to “to increase the pace and scope of innovation in the global satellite connectivity sector, offering new and improved capabilities to customers that will address the ever-increasing speed, flexibility, reliability, coverage and security they demand.” Can you speak to some of the initial goals set early in the acquisition?

Don Buchman: Yes; from the outset, the company committed to an integration plan that would proceed methodically, with a focus on stability throughout the process. Some of the initial goals included setting the organizational structure and leadership team and, of course, diving deep technically into the top opportunity on everyone’s mind — interoperability of the networks and hardware. Since we couldn’t communicate that level of information (amongst the two companies) prior to the acquisition closing, those more technical conversations started in earnest on day one, which was really exciting.

PAX International: As APEX will mark the first time the combined company exhibits at a trade show, can you give us some insight into what will be on display or being showcased as the booth?

Buchman: Unlike AIX, which occurred immediately after the acquisition closed and where we had previously booked two separate booths, we are coming into APEX as a single, stronger entity — a new Viasat. It’s exciting and has breathed some fresh air into the process of preparing for the event, which spans everything from needing more meeting room space to the design of the booth.

APEX presents an opportunity for us to showcase in a new way the breadth of services we now offer to existing and potential airlines and partners at the show. Part of the integration process has been working to take the best of our service and product offerings to offer to customers. At the show, we’ll be able to highlight that in a way we weren’t ready to do at AIX since the deal had closed just a few days prior to the beginning of that show.

PAX International: In our discussion, you mentioned that passengers onboard Inmarsat-equipped aircraft will experience no service interruptions. In that vein, can you tell us if aircraft need any hardware updates to incorporate new capabilities?



Viasat is working to establish the bandwidth supply to provide a high quality, consistently fast connection in areas of peak demand

Buchman: This is a great question and is the crux of how the new company will manage interoperability, which is one of our highest priorities. There has been a lot of progress made in this area since closing the acquisition.

Ideally, there are no hardware changes and customers can access either network. We are in middle of that planning, though. We will work with our customers and their unique options available to access the full breadth of the newly combined company coverage and capacity.

PAX International: How will the combined capabilities of the acquisition ultimately benefit passengers? What can passengers look forward to in terms of improving connectivity inflight?

Buchman: Well, in broad terms, the new combined company will unite immense capacity with expansive global coverage for more customer choice and flexibility. This, of course, will benefit passengers and their onboard connectivity now and into the future.

Also, I expect our combined capabilities will fuel faster innovation and new solutions for our customers and the wider aviation community. I'm positive this will lead to experiences that delight passengers and enable them to continue to do whatever data-intensive activities they would like to do onboard.

Passengers can get excited about increasingly global service as regions that do not have high penetration of inflight connectivity start to react to passenger demand. Since we entered the inflight market with JetBlue in 2013, we have worked meticulously to set the bar incredibly high for service,

allowing streaming to every device on the aircraft, and now more than ever we're in a great position to raise that bar again.

Plus, we anticipate airlines will continue to express interest in expanding connectivity across aircraft types of all sizes, and I think that will be really well received by passengers.

***PAX International:* Can you describe how the addition of Inmarsat accelerates your global mobility strategy? How does bringing Ka- and L-band coverage and network redundancy expand your global distribution capabilities?**

Buchman: Combined we have 13 Ka-band satellites in space with another eight under construction (including ViaSat-3 F2 and F3). Five of those eight are expected to launch by the end of calendar 2025. That foundation of technology enables a lot of benefit, including, as you mentioned, important redundancy and coverage.

You mentioned L-band coverage, which opens some exciting opportunities for the new company as well. More to come on that down the road.

***PAX International:* You mentioned during our interview that in commercial aviation you are now able to offer a wider variety of services to existing and potential customers. What are those services?**

Buchman: We're really excited about leveraging satellite connectivity to continue unlocking algorithmic possibilities that help the airlines operationally. This can include applications for the crew, or predictive maintenance with all the data that is being derived from equipment onboard. This adds value for the airlines, and, ultimately, will benefit the passengers as well.

We're entering a time where airlines are looking to have everything on the aircraft being connected via Wi-Fi — seat screens, coffee makers, engines — so the possibilities in this space seem endless. We're quickly building a full digital playbook for the entire aircraft.



Viasat's inflight connectivity service combines coverage and immense satellite capacity, and now includes Malaysia Airlines as a customer.

Image Credit Viasat

***PAX International:* How does Viasat maintain its status as a global leader for inflight connectivity?**

Buchman: We can do this in several ways, but a few that jump to mind are:

Continue to lead in innovative solutions.

Continue our focus on solving the most difficult challenges for airlines as it relates to connectivity. Specifically, providing capacity in the highest areas of concentrated bandwidth demand.

And a third is focused on positioning our airline customers not only for the growing demand and expectations for connectivity, but for perpetually rising data requirements of the most bandwidth intensive applications of the internet — streaming video, live television, social apps and more. Just like our earth-bound lives, the plethora of new data hungry devices and applications drive more and more demands for bandwidth. The aircraft is no different.

***PAX International:* What new capabilities that benefit travellers are currently in the works?**

Buchman: I mentioned this earlier, but I think it's worth repeating that key to our future is the combination of immense capacity with expansive global coverage. And this leads to more customer choice and flexibility.

At APEX, one way we're showcasing this point is through and update to Viasat's Capacity Unleashed app. This is an interactive app that visually shows our combined satellite fleet, coverage areas, etc. It's worth coming by the booth to see it in person, or you can download it directly in the various app stores.

We're also highlighting at APEX new solutions that are evolving for our airline customers, including OneFi.

PAX International: Because the connectivity provider is not necessarily the brand or company passengers will remember, how do you build loyalty with travellers?

Buchman: We strive to exceed the expectations of our airline customers. As we continue to do that, we expect our airline customers are proud to have Viasat connectivity onboard because it represents the highest quality passenger experience. And it enables value such that it can be free, or free because it's sponsored, or is at a minimum affordable.

So, while we're not necessarily caught up in the having a customer-facing brand name, we are proud that Viasat service has over time become synonymous with the highest quality and best value for a fast, consistent connected experience onboard.