

# AIX issue: Viasat delivers connectivity as a conduit

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Passengers using PEDs inflight

Viasat has announced several new and expanded partnerships so far this year, with more and more airlines looking to integrate inflight connectivity (IFC) solutions to meet growing passenger demand. *PAX Tech* spoke to Don Buchman, VP & GM, Commercial Aviation, Viasat, about how the dynamic between IFC and inflight entertainment is evolving and where airlines are focusing their resources to enhance the passenger experience.

## Leveraging connectivity



Don Buchman, VP & GM, Commercial Aviation, Viasat

“We view connectivity as a conduit for entertainment, and, increasingly, airlines have certainly recognized this too,” Buchman says, noting that many travellers bring their own content and devices onboard.

He points to the results of Viasat’s 2023 Passenger Experience Survey, which found that 83 percent of passengers would rebook with an airline offering quality Wi-Fi while 81 percent said Wi-Fi was important to their onboard experience.

The same survey found that 47 percent of passengers want unlimited social media access in the skies.

“Like in our living rooms, the ability to provide high-quality streaming unlocks a lot of possibilities for airlines and passengers,” Buchman explains.

Viasat has announced agreements with several airlines in recent months, all of which plan to leverage connectivity so that passengers can access streaming options on their Personal Electronic Devices (PEDs) inflight. These airlines include Qantas, Icelandair, Royal Jordanian and Korean Air. Lufthansa Group has also selected EAN from Viasat for Lufthansa, SWISS and Austrian Airlines.

### **Viasat inflight**

Viasat was selected by Royal Jordanian for multiple fleets in March. The company’s connectivity service will provide passengers with a high-quality online experience inflight, delivering access to fast internet speeds, entertainment streaming and real-time digital communications.

Since Viasat has seen positive responses to its existing connectivity services, many of its airline customers are now choosing to expand or introduce the company’s connectivity services to additional fleets.

This is the case for Icelandair, who recently selected Viasat’s IFC solution for its Airbus fleet, following the success of its connectivity onboard the 737 MAX fleet.

“We’re excited to take our learnings and apply them to the service on the new fleet,” Buchman explains. “While providing fast inflight connectivity across popular flight corridors and busy airport hubs, Viasat will employ a combination of high throughput satellite capacity and the ability to flex that capacity, to meet demand where it peaks and is most concentrated.”

This partnership will allow Viasat and Icelandair to provide a consistently high-speed inflight Wi-Fi experience, even during times of intense demand.

Qantas also saw an extremely positive response to its domestic Viasat IFC solution, leading to its selection of Viasat’s IFC for international routes in March.

“Qantas has an incredible story regarding passenger engagement with Wi-Fi,” Buchman reveals. “The speed and reliability of Qantas’ domestic Wi-Fi service has driven average take-up rates to 75 percent, with some flights having [uptake] rates of more than 100 percent.”

### **Cultivating global connections**

As Viasat gears up for Aircraft Interiors Expo (AIX), Buchman says, “We always prioritize our customers and providing the best service so they can accomplish their goals, so that will always be a cornerstone of our efforts this year and beyond.”

Viasat continues to focus on adding satellite capacity and coverage to support the expansion of the inflight Wi-Fi market globally, including regions that previously did not have a high penetration of IFC where passenger demand is growing.

Buchman emphasizes that Viasat has an established process for supporting airlines’ implementation of connectivity services, adhering to their specific visions of success, whether that is purely the delivery of IFC solutions or supporting the airline’s entertainment offerings through enhanced connectivity.

“An exciting change just beginning to take hold is the convergence of the seatback screen and connectivity,” Buchman concludes. “At Viasat, we have expected this, and are seeing the first real use cases that are bringing meaningful value to airlines, passengers and travel partners. It is early innings, and we are excited to be a vital part of this next innovation wave.”