
Blessings and burdens of growth discussed in Dubai

By **Rick Lundstrom** on February, 5 2016 | Inflight Entertainment



DUBAI, UAE – This city, an ancient trading crossroads, is hurtling toward a future of intense growth in commercial aviation, along with much of the rest of the region. The advantages and burdens were discussed in the stands and sessions of the Aircraft Interiors Middle East and MRO event held February 3 and 4 at the Dubai World Trade Centre.

More than 275 suppliers from around the world displayed products and touted capabilities during the two-day event organized by *Aviation Week* and F&E Aerospace. Organizers placed airline attendance

this year at more than 700 from approximately 100 carriers. Altogether more than 4,300 people were expected to attend the two-day event.



The Middle East region has been producing impressive travel and airline growth over the years. However, behind the numbers are serious challenges as aircraft deliveries continue and dropping fuel costs leave competitive airlines flush with funds for upgrades and in need of staffing in highly specialized areas from management in the offices, to technicians and mechanics in the field to personnel at the growing airports.

In the Middle East demand for maintenance, repair and overhaul is expected to grow apace as a new fleet of wide bodies and narrow bodies are delivered. [According to a study by aerospace consulting firm ICF International](#), Middle East MRO demand will grow from US\$4.6 billion to US\$8.8 billion in the next 10 years, driven highly by the additional twin aisle aircraft that have flooded the region in the last decade.

Part of that demand is being met by projects like the one currently in completion phases in Jeddah where Saudi Aerospace Engineering will increase its maintenance space from seven to 11 hangars in a project that will top US\$1 billion. The region's four main carriers, Emirates, Etihad Airways, Qatar Airways and Saudi Arabian Airlines are all growing their respective maintenance centers and expecting increases in third party maintenance.



However, the burden of specialized maintenance, notably the work in cabin interiors will also fall on independent operations such as SR Technics and others that specialize in end-to-end projects, and the numbers of such organizations are small. To meet the challenges will require contributions and increased communication between original equipment manufacturers (OEM), suppliers and operators. Such upgrades require more time to complete and can often result in increased down time for an aircraft.

“A handful of MROs can justify a proven track record in complex cabin upgrades,” said Oladi Olukolu, Sales Director Aircraft Engineering Service at [SR Technics](#), in a morning session the first day of the event.

The issue of staffing took up a mid-day round table session on the second day. During the hour-long discussion representatives from airline maintenance divisions, engineering companies, airframe builders and others talked about the continuing effort to find and train departments that still rely heavily on expatriate staff. Additional training will also present a challenge as the region’s fleet of aircraft coming on stream demand more technical training.

Such shortages must be addressed across several segments of aviation and airport development to produce “the skills sets required to keep up with the growth of the aviation industry,” said Kashif Khalid, Campaign Manager for the Gulf Region of the International Air Transport Association. Khalid was moderator of a roundtable session where delegates discussed skilled workforce challenges of the region.



Several news announcements and new products could be found at this year’s event. Here is a rundown of the few of the more recent developments:

Italian seat manufacturer [Aviointeriors](#) announced that TUIfly Netherlands and Jetairfly have selected the company’s economy class Columbus Crew Rest seat model for the provisioning of two 767-300s. TUIfly Netherlands and Jetairfly are part of TUI Group, with leisure flights with a fleet of more than 140 aircraft. One or multiple seats in an aircraft cabin or flight crew compartment can recline 40 degrees from the vertical, and provide leg and foot support. The seats are separated from passengers and a curtain provides darkness and sound mitigation.

Two exhibitors at this year’s AIME/MRO concluded a joint partnership to work together on the aircraft cabin retrofit and refurbishment markets.

[Diehl Aerosystems](#) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Valencia, California based [Regent Aerospace](#), for the companies to offer a greater range of products and services from one single source. The agreement will enhance the sales opportunities for Diehl Aerosystems in the market segments for LED interiors lighting, floor-to-floor lining and monuments such as lavatories and galleys. In addition, the joint efforts of the two will include services for refurbishment and repairs for F2F lining parts and monuments.

Two representatives from the French start-up company [Skylights](#) were meeting with potential

customers for the company's VR headset. The company is offering the headset as turnkey solution that can give passengers an “immersive cinema experience onboard.”

The company has developed the SkyTheater product that is now in use on several airlines. Passengers can see films in two and three dimensions on a wide-angle screen with a black background, high definition image and large depth of field, giving users auditory isolation from the cabin. The company combines its glasses with software, flight servicing and device management, handling logistics outside the aircraft, with glasses conditioned and ready for passenger use.

Below one of its custom-made VIP leather seats [Boxmark](#) had on its stand one of its latest products – flooring it developed with a company called F/LIST®.

The leather floor for VIP aircraft is available with a customized tiling concept in a range of colors and structures and meets all applicable certification requirements for flammability and slip resistance.

“As with all leather products, the material improves with age, and does not suffer from wear and tear,” said a release from Boxmark. “F/LIST® Leather Flooring develops a rich texture that looks beautifully lived in, greatly enriching the style and charisma of the aircraft cabin.”



[Lufthansa Technik](#) used the show to introduce its new Falcon Master, a transport device allowing falcon owners to carry birds on VIP commercial flights safely and hygienically.

“Falconry is an important part of the Middle East’s culture and heritage, it’s a popular sport in the region,” said Ziad Faisal Al Hazmi, CEO of Lufthansa Technik Middle East in an announcement of the new product. “We met with one customer who had been removing rows of seats to create space for falcon transport. With this new Falcon Master he can save all that effort and cost.”

