

Reaching out, but touchless

This is a special feature from *PAX Tech's* [October 2020 digital edition](#).



dnata has long sought ways to best leverage inflight purchasing, and has recently partnered with several companies

A spate of announcements from purveyors of portable and onboard digital IFEC, along with cooperation from airline caterers and booking companies, holds the promise that when a changed commercial aviation industry returns, the opportunities for additional ancillary revenue will be waiting and available at the touch of a finger.

When airlines reach out to passengers in the future, much of that reach will mean touchless interaction, with passengers placing orders for food, drinks and other shopping not from a seatback screen from a printed menu, but from their smart phone or tablet.

Even though layoffs and closings have forced many behind closed doors, work has not stopped and product development has remained top of mind. Additional opportunities for revenue will be important in the years to come.

The first of the fall announcements by providers occurred in early October in the form of a memorandum of understanding between [Bluebox Aviation Systems](#) and [dnata](#) Catering Australia to develop food & beverage and other retail purchases that can be made via the wireless inflight solutions on flights across Australia and New Zealand and other Pacific Ocean territories.



Bluebox Aviation will be partnering with dnata catering capabilities in Australia to supply food and beverage and other options to passengers

Also this fall, the caterer announced it will be working in the Netherlands with [iFLEAT](#), an airline innovation and technology company and [Thuisbezorgd.nl](#), a food delivery company.

The partners will bring high-end, meals and snacks to airline passengers flying from [Schiphol Airport](#) through the 'Takeaway' app up to one hour before boarding. Passengers can choose from a range of fresh salads, poke bowls, sushi platters and hot meals and have their order delivered to the aircraft before departure.

Companies like Bluebox, with an easily deployable system that be installed quickly will have an advantage in the new environment says, Kevin Clark, the company's CEO. During the spring and summer, he says Bluebox remained working at 100 percent capacity while spending much of the time contacting customers and building up what was an informal arrangement with dnata into a firm offering that could be implemented easily and offer airlines and array of options on the back end for ordering and processing payments.

"We took the view going into this that the world would reemerge at some point, so let's plan for the future," Clark tells *PAX Tech*. "We retained all of our staff and applied our energies to the evolution of our solution capabilities so that we are well placed to service the needs of the markets as they recover. This included relationships with markets leaders such as dnata and Retail inMotion."

In Asia-Pacific, Bluebox has maintained an office in Sydney since 2012 when it began supplying the company's tablet products of [Jetstar](#). Now, the office handles much of the company's business in the Asia-Pacific region along with operations in Singapore. Among the customers in the area are [ANA](#) which has Bluebox platforms on it domestic routes, and [Cathay Dragon](#) in Hong Kong, which ceased operations shortly before *PAX Tech* completed this issue.

Bluebox and dnata will support each other in product customization and processes for delivering joint solutions to customers in the region. Clark says the partners have developed a range of options that would give airlines a retail experience from several sources with and array of options that could accept payment. Onboard ordering could bring drinks and food to passengers, while other goods could be collected at destinations. Entertainment options could also be available for purchase.



Transavia is the launch airline in Amsterdam for the new meal delivery option by dnata and iFLEAT

In addition to providing ancillary revenue, partnerships like the dnata/Bluebox agreement give airlines a much-needed connection to their passengers in a cabin where interaction with crew is at a minimum.

“So we’re really delivering an inflight engagement platform for enhancing the passenger experience on board – still ‘IFE’, but well beyond entertainment,” said David Brown, Business Development Director, Bluebox in the announcement of the partnership.

Destinations and guides

The next two developments hold the promise of passengers learning much more about where they are flying and having goods and services ordered online or waiting for them when they arrive.

In mid-October Spain-based [Immfly](#) announced the launch of an onboard digital service developed in partnership with [GetYourGuide](#), the booking platform. Immfly says the new service will allow passengers to book destination experiences from more than 60,000 options like immersive food and beverage tours, cooking and craft classes, bucket-list experiences, and niche offerings. They will all be available even if the aircraft is out of range of onboard Internet access.

A number of airlines have already signed on the feature, said Sotiris Damianos, a spokesperson for Immfly.

“Our platform has been uniquely designed to facilitate rapid third party integration. Our framework and architecture enables any new third-party service to integrate seamlessly, Damianos says. “The GetYourGuide module has been designed in a way which allows quick implementation, practically making it a plug and play option for our customers.”

Damianos says the new service can be easily customized to airline specifications and the Immfly technology currently allows all that is required in terms of inventory updates, payments and other data reconciliation.

Like other platforms, Immfly is seeking to help airlines make that connection between themselves and a passenger that may be less engaged in the future.



Destination news through GetYourGuide is now available from Immfly

“From a passenger perspective, we enable customers to browse and get inspired with activities they can enjoy in their destination, while en route,” Damianos adds. “The variety customers can choose from is breathtaking and the privilege to book skip-the-line tickets and experiences they will not find anywhere else, are both powerful added incentives.”

The other major announcement of the fall brought together two of the largest players in IFE hardware and global onboard media. They have developed a cloud-based system that promises to be the “next wave of inflight entertainment and connectivity” with a range of smart options that reach directly into a trove of passenger information through cutting-edge technology.

The collaboration between onboard media giant [Spafax](#) and portable wireless IFEC provider [AirFi](#) will give passengers access to cloud-based inflight entertainment tailored not only to their flight, but also provide content geared to specific nationalities and regions via the AirFi VENUS third generation portable IFEC system.

On a typical A320 with 180 passengers, airlines will deploy up to three portable IFEC units, said Jean-Marc Thomas, Managing Director of Spafax Asia in Singapore. For an aircraft that will be flying from Singapore to Bangkok, content and advertising would be uploaded specifically for the route the previous evening. The VENUS unit has a 24 hour battery, making it useful through the day, on aircraft that may fly to several cities.

Passengers would access the content through their devices. The servers could read settings from the devices and deliver content in their native language. Once logging on, airlines can market duty free products or goods and services that are accessible at the passengers destinations, such as rides from [Grab](#) in Asia or [Uber](#) in other parts of the world. The VENUS system from AirFi has a number of other capabilities. Through it, passengers can access Hollywood approved digital right management (DRM) entertainment without the need for a specific app. Storage in the AirFi units is approximately 1 terabyte as standard equipment and with ground connectivity in 3G or 4G.

The touchless aircraft cabin that is quickly eliminating printed material and other potentially hazardous elements. Add to that the ability of airlines to access information about passenger demographics and other data and both Spafax and AirFi see the partnership as a way to finally unlock the growth potential for onboard digital sales.

“The revenue generation opportunity from digital platforms inflight are still massively untapped,” said Job Hiemerikx, CEO of AirFi in the announcement of the partnership. “Inflight entertainment has been well established for over 30 years since the days of Hi-8 tapes, but remains a cost center.”