

Stellar Entertainment talks content strategy and tracking trends

This is a special feature from the [September 2025 APEX Global EXPO](#) issue of *PAX Tech*, on [page 26](#).



Stellar also looks to the global film festival circuit for clues about what video content might perform well onboard

From TikTok dances to surprise box office hits, pop culture trends can take off overnight and passengers expect their inflight entertainment to keep up. Content service providers, such as [Stellar Entertainment](#), are increasingly attuned to viral and pop culture trends, using these insights to curate content ranging from short-form videos and audio to feature-length films that resonate with passengers and boost engagement onboard.

Viral versus evergreen



(From left to right) Vanessa Pennisi, Manager, Video Programming at Stellar Entertainment; Sophie Leahy, Senior Manager, Client Service & Programming at Stellar Entertainment; Samah Ali, Manager, Video Programming, Stellar Entertainment; Sebastian Conde, Manager, Audio Programming, Stellar Entertainment

While some viral trends influence what airlines bring onboard, the extent of this influence is more nuanced. As Vanessa Pennisi, Manager, Video Programming at Stellar Entertainment, explains, “It depends on the type of content that is going viral.”

If the content is appropriate for the airline’s demographic, then she is more likely to program it. Samah Ali, Manager, Video Programming, Stellar Entertainment, adds that the process often begins earlier with identifying content that could go viral and securing it before the trend takes off.

“We strive to predict potential trends earlier in the trend cycle, that way they are in full swing by the time content is onboard,” she tells *PAX Tech*.

For example, major blockbuster releases or anniversaries for classic movies and series are often announced months in advance, so, “We work to build on that potential hype by ensuring content is onboard when the spotlight is on that IP,” Ali explains.

Global events can also elevate certain titles. Ali cites “Conclave” as an example of a film that saw renewed interest earlier this year following the news of Pope Francis’s passing, prompting an extended onboard run.

“For some clients, it remains in the top 10 movies of 2025,” she reveals.

The sound of success

When it comes to audio programming, viral trends can have an even greater impact. Sebastian Conde, Manager, Audio Programming, Stellar Entertainment, says social media now serves as a barometer for what specific demographics are engaging with.

“Social media has changed the way the industry works more broadly than almost any other factor. Listeners have never had as much influence as they do now over what charts or is perceived as popular,” he says.

TikTok dances and songs featured in celebrity Instagram stories have become more than just viral moments; they are now cultural benchmarks. For a content programmer, this shift has been a game-changer.

Audio programming also lends itself to a more unique balance of evergreen and viral content. As Conde points out, for audio, short-lived trends can evolve into larger successes within the industry.

“It is important to pay attention to these trends on social media and analyze the audience of each one in more detail,” Conde explains. “Using the Grammys as a reference, last year, seven out of the eight Record of the Year nominees had significant TikTok trends associated with them.”

For audio, Conde says industry buzz and conversations with labels help identify artists who may soon gain traction. While social media can amplify that momentum, he cautions that not every boost translates to a viral hit.

So, how do you separate a flop trend from a hot trend? Conde recommends looking at which albums are resonating with demographics similar to the airline’s passenger base and tracking how streaming numbers evolve once the initial hype fades.

Trends on film

Beyond viral social media trends, popular blockbusters and TV series, Stellar also looks to the global film festival circuit for clues about what might perform well onboard.

Pennisi explains that film festivals play a crucial role in shaping content choices, particularly prestigious events like the Cannes Film Festival. Winning titles often go on to collect nominations or awards at major ceremonies such as the Academy Awards.

Sophie Leahy, Senior Manager, Client Service & Programming at Stellar Entertainment, adds that the festival circuit helps balance onboard selections between commercial blockbusters and critically acclaimed indie films.

“Film festivals give smaller movies a profile before passengers are onboard, so they’re more likely to choose a ‘challenging’ film if they know it was a critical darling on the festival circuit,” she explains.

At Stellar, a festival favorite or a rising artist is not chosen simply because they are trending. They are selected because the numbers, the audience insights and the cultural context suggest they will matter to passengers when it counts.

“Timing is everything. When the right story, song, or scene meets the right moment, it can turn a few hours in the sky into something passengers will remember long after landing,” the Stellar Team tells *PAX*.