

Video Clip: Building better ways to buy onboard with dnata

[dnata](#) is helping airlines enhance passenger engagement and strengthen brand loyalty with well-executed inflight retail programs. This spring, at the [Airline Catering Association](#)'s inaugural Leadership Symposium in Amsterdam, *PAX International* sat down with Robin Padgett, Divisional Senior Vice President of dnata Catering & Retail, to discuss the latest trends in inflight retail and his vision for its evolution beyond the aircraft cabin.

Detail in every step

Airlines curate high-quality inflight F&B offerings that balance variety with brand identity. As passengers become more familiar with international cuisine, airlines can expand inflight retail menus to include diverse global dishes while maintaining a strong brand connection. Rather than focusing on quantity, these selections emphasize quality, featuring thoughtfully chosen boutique items that enhance the passenger experience and drive future purchases.

"We work with airlines to assess their demographic data and what their strategic plan is to drive menu design, built around their brand," Padgett explains. "We workshop what an airline's strategic plan is and expand that into their individual dish design."

Cabin crew play a vital role in assessing how passengers are responding to the meals inflight.

"They provide a critical feedback loop of what is working, and what is not. If they can provide that in a timely manner, we can make appropriate changes," he explains.

Padgett cites [Emirates](#)' LICC (Live Inflight Cabin Crew Communication) instant messaging system & KIS (Knowledge Information System) CRM function as a good example of how crew feedback can quickly affect dishes inflight.

"The crew all have tablets and can insert this rapid passenger feedback into the system," he says. "Food adjustments can then be made quickly in the kitchens."

The airline passenger demographic and brand strategy, coupled the passenger preference data, inform the design of the inflight retail program. Padgett adds that an airline's catalog massively differs by region.

dnata plays a key role in the intricate process of supply chain management and operational support for inflight retailing.

"We run supply chains for many airlines," he says. "Our aim is to take very complex issues and make it easy for our airline customers. dnata loads all goods in a safe and secure manner, abiding by all local health and safety laws."



Inflight retailing is shifting toward a more digital and contactless approach

Quality over quantity

Padgett highlights a key trend in inflight retail: passengers prioritize long-term value in their purchases.

“Passengers are happy to pay for quality products, recognizing that they are getting good value for money,” he explains. “We are seeing sales records being broken by numerous airline customers because their catalog range is meeting passengers’ needs.”

dnata leverages data and technology to curate inflight retail offerings based on passenger demand. The data provided by inflight retail allows suppliers like dnata to examine demographics and individual sectors, and tailor detailed offerings more specifically to that sector.

“We have sophisticated digital tools that monitor down to the cubic centimeter of profitability, of each product that goes onboard,” Padgett continues. “We can therefore advise suppliers of how best to increase revenues, such as reducing their packaging sizing. That ensures airlines can maximize their profitability while passengers receive an excellent, valued experience.”

As inflight retailing shifts toward a more digital and contactless approach, dnata is anticipating a shift in when passengers engage with onboard offerings.

“We foresee more pre-ordering as a significant change to the inflight experience,” Padgett predicts. “Retail will morph into e-commerce and onboard retail will become more of a wider e-commerce environment. An airline’s brand therefore becomes more important in people’s lives outside of simple point-to-point travel.”