Emirates reimagines accessible air travel

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Emirates A350-900 aircraft

In October 2025, Emirates unveiled a suite of new services edition of the AccessAbilities Expo in Dubai World Trade Centre. These updates included new accessibility features for the airline's inflight entertainment system, *ice*.

"Over 30 years ago, Emirates was the first airline to introduce TVs at every seat, in every cabin class, on every aircraft, giving access to inflight entertainment. We were also the first airline to introduce Closed Captions (CC) on movies, nearly 20 years ago, and then Audio Description (AD)," explains Patrick Brannelly, SVP Inflight Entertainment & Connectivity, Emirates.

Appealing to all passengers

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Patrick Brannelly, SVP Inflight Entertainment & Connectivity, Emirates

As part of its commitment to accessibility, Emirates now offers more than 600 movies with CC and, to improve accessibility for passengers with visual impairment, 200 movies with AD. Emirates headphones are also compatible with hearing aids when set to the “T” position.

“Where the CC/AD assets are available for a movie, we take them. As a licensor, we are not free to create them, thus we are dependent upon what is available,” Brannelly explains.

He tells *PAX Tech* that introducing these accessibility features was not a simple process, as aircraft IFE systems did not follow the same standards as domestic televisions, and none of the inflight content available at the time included audio description or closed captioning assets.

“The response from passengers with hearing or visual impairment was delight and surprise,” he

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reveals.

On Emirates A350-900 aircraft, an accessible user interface (UI) on *ice* has been introduced in partnership with Thales and American Printing House for passengers who are blind or near blind, to ensure all users have an intuitive, high-quality IFE experience. The UI speaks directly to the passenger with audio-cue navigation assistance, guiding them through the airline's IFE system independently. To navigate through the UI, passengers can use up to 13 swiping and tapping motions, creating a seamless experience for those who are blind or have low vision. Brannelly says Thales collaborated with accessibility experts to design a system that feels intuitive and meets user expectations.



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The airline's IFE selection also aims to help passengers relax and unwind, offering 12 channels of Well-being TV and 31 channels of Happiness and Well-being podcasts and playlists, featuring meditations and calming soundscapes.

Emirates also seeks to ease pre-travel anxiety through its new Accessible & Inclusive Travel Hub. Developed over the course of a year, the digital platform provides passengers with the information they need to plan an accessible and inclusive journey. The website features a carefully tested color palette and supports assistive technologies such as screen readers, voice control and keyboard navigation.

Becoming the first Autism Certified Airline

Last year, Emirates launched its journey to becoming the world's first Autism Certified Airline™, along with its airport hub (DXB) and Dubai becoming the first Certified Autism Destination™ in the Eastern hemisphere.

Emirates worked with the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) to conduct a comprehensive audit and create a blueprint for serving passengers with accessibility requirements. Emirates is following this road map to put these standards into practice in aviation for the first time.

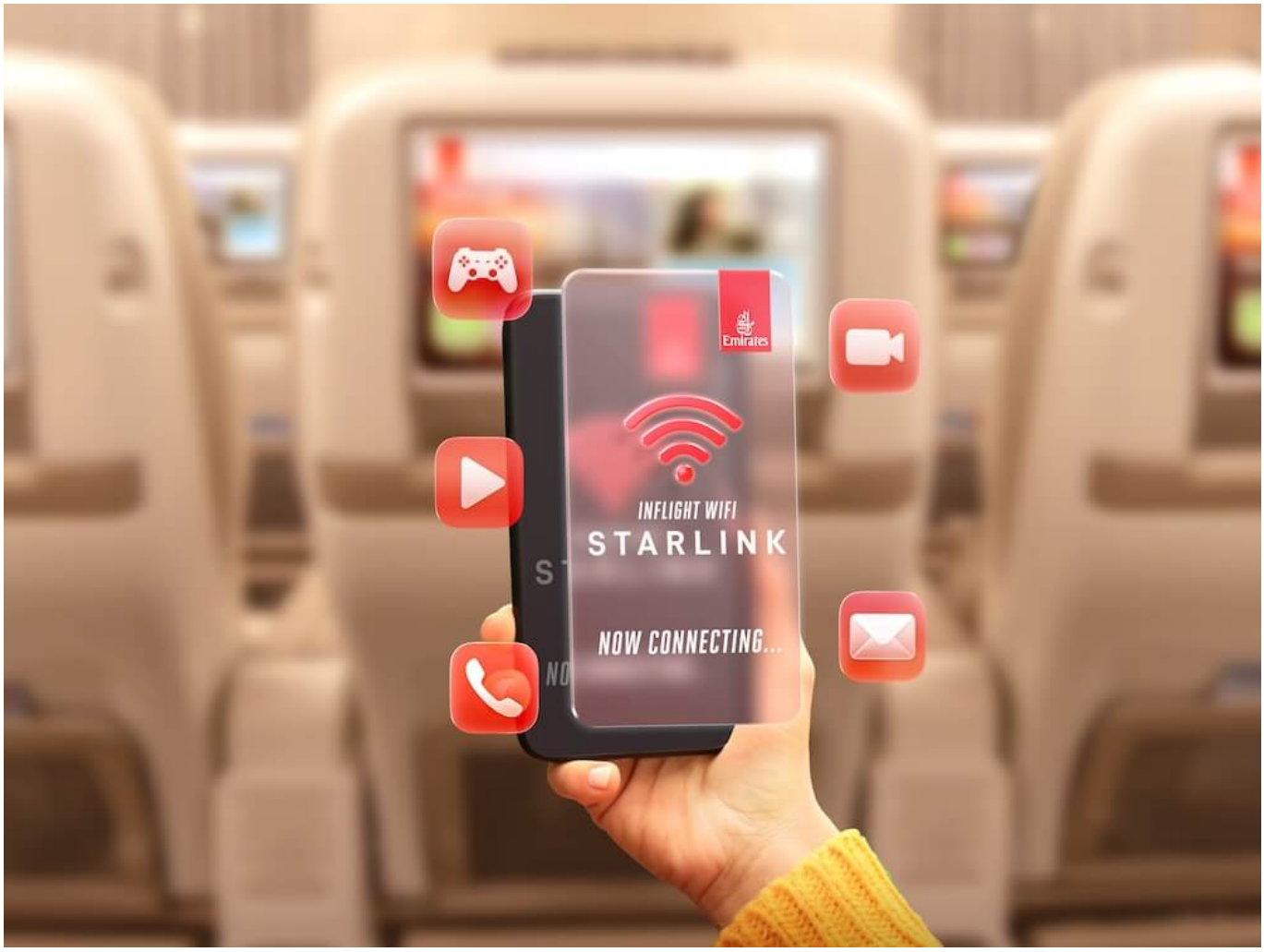
As part of these improvements, Emirates will be introducing standards and services for passengers with autism and sensory conditions, including sensory guides, designed to support passengers in

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making informed decisions throughout their journey. These digital guides measure sensory inputs in public areas such as sound levels, lighting and potential sights and smells.

“This has been a huge initiative to make travel seamless for people with autism and sensory sensitivities who can travel on an autism-certified flight, to an autism-certified airport, stay at an autism-certified hotel and enjoy at an autism-certified attraction in the city,” Brannelly affirms.

Empowering passengers with connectivity



Emirates announced in November that it will bring Starlink Wi-Fi onboard entire its in-service fleet

In November, Emirates announced that it will bring Starlink Wi-Fi onboard its entire in-service fleet, beginning with 777 aircraft and completing the rollout by mid-2027.

In terms of the advantages of this partnership for passengers, Brannelly says Starlink will offer vastly improved connectivity, as good as what travelers are used to at home.

This will allow them to access any personal services they on the ground, such as apps, while in the air.

“We are confident it will deliver consistent, ultra-fast, ground-quality service at 40,000 feet, so our customers can stream, enjoy online gaming, video call friends and family, work and scroll social media for free. Today, 12 Emirates aircraft are already installed with Starlink and the experience is excellent. We are making progress every few days with installations,” Brannelly says.

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