

Inside Etihad's Plan to deliver a seamless, connected passenger experience

This is a special feature from the [April 2026 AIX Hamburg issue](#) of *PAX Tech*, on [page 14](#).



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[Etihad Airways](#) is flying high. Last year, the airline carried a record 22.4 million passengers, had a load factor for the full year of 88.3 percent and expanded its capacity with the addition of 29 aircraft – the largest single-year fleet expansion in the airline's history, bringing the fleet to 127 aircraft. The year also saw an ongoing network expansion, with multiple new routes to Asia, Africa, Europe and North America.

But it is not just improved connectivity to a range of destinations that the airline is committed to. As Chief Digital Officer Frank Meyer tells *PAX Tech*, inflight connectivity is central to the airline's broader transformation, enabling everything from a personalized digital passenger experience to operational efficiencies.



Frank Meyer, Chief Digital Officer, Etihad Airways

“The Middle East has become one of the world’s most dynamic and competitive aviation markets, with multiple carriers vying for the same premium passengers and connecting traffic. In this environment, differentiation comes down to the details of the guest experience, and connectivity has emerged as a genuine differentiator,” he says.

“Business passengers make carrier choices based on connectivity reliability,” Meyer continues. “They need to stay productive in the air, join virtual meetings, access company systems. Leisure passengers want to share their experiences in real- time, stream their content and stay connected with home. [Viasat](#)’s proven performance gives us a competitive edge in both segments.

Seamless stability

In November 2025, Etihad announced it was extending its partnership with Viasat with the rollout of the supplier’s next-generation IFC solution, Viasat Amara, across the majority of its wide- and narrow-body fleet, including line-fit for all aircraft on order and retrofit for its existing aircraft.

In bringing connectivity to its short-and long-haul routes, Meyer says the airline is ensuring consistency and reliability as it grows. The keyword being consistency.

“One of the challenges in aviation is that passengers do not think in terms of aircraft types or route lengths; they think in terms of their experience with Etihad,” voices Meyer. “Viasat’s comprehensive fleet certification was a decisive factor. They hold the certifications that we need for our fleet mix [787s, A350s and A321LRs]. This meant we could deploy immediately across our expansion aircraft without lengthy certification processes that would have created service gaps or inconsistent experiences.”

He adds that Viasat's technology roadmap, particularly the simultaneous multi-orbit solution planned for 2027/2028, aligns perfectly with Etihad's long-term vision.

"As we look ahead, we will be positioned at the forefront of aviation connectivity technology, which reinforces our premium positioning and innovation credentials," he says.

According to Meyer, what really sets Viasat apart is its approach to bandwidth management.



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"Their technology guarantees bandwidth per passenger, not per aircraft. This is crucial because it means whether we have 160 passengers online on a regional A321LR flight or 400 on a long-haul 787, each passenger receives the same consistent, high-quality connectivity. There is no degradation during full flights."

Beyond the raw connectivity, Meyer explains that Etihad is building a personalized digital ecosystem. "The reliable, high-bandwidth connection enables us to deliver tailored content recommendations, personalized entertainment options and customized service offerings based on passenger preferences."

To this end, the airline is investing in "excellent seatback IFE systems and robust personal device streaming."

Meyer says Etihad is also exploring hybrid experiences, such as using seatback screens for certain functions like flight information, moving maps or interactive features, while enabling streaming to personal devices for entertainment.

“The key is flexibility. Some passengers want to use their tablet, others prefer the seatback screen, and many will use both at different points during the flight. Excellent connectivity is what makes that flexibility possible,” he explains.

Etihad is also looking beyond the passenger Wi-Fi experience.



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New service categories

On the commercial side, advertising and digital media on seatback IFE screens represent an opportunity Etihad is actively exploring, with the prospect of more dynamic, targeted content rather than static campaigns. The airline has also identified significant potential in retail and e-commerce, with the ability to deliver personalized offerings at relevant moments during the journey, transforming how passengers interact with ancillary services and travel products.

For Meyer, connectivity also creates the foundation for deeper integration with travel ecosystem partners, whether hotels, ground transportation or destination services, turning the aircraft into a platform for collaborative value creation.

Operationally, connectivity drives enhanced efficiency and cost savings. Real-time aircraft-to-ground data enables more efficient flight operations and better crew communication.

As Meyer muses, a successful IFEC strategy “means our passengers genuinely feel more connected – 4

to their loved ones, to their work, to their entertainment, to the world below - when they fly Etihad. That emotional connection, enabled by technical connectivity, is what builds long-term loyalty and differentiates us in an increasingly competitive market."