

Guest Column: Navigating the changing landscape of onboard services



The Hamburg Messe in Hamburg, Germany

As the travel industry enters a transformative era, evolving passenger expectations and emerging trends are redefining onboard services. Changes are afoot as the current dynamics and future trajectory of the industry transforms. Key areas include the rise of low-cost carriers (LCCs), the increasing prominence of Premium Economy travel and growing trends in buy-on-board services. Another consideration is the critical role of digital experiences and personalization in this evolving landscape and how suppliers and airline, rail and cruise operator buyers can leverage these trends to enhance passenger satisfaction.

The rise of low-cost carriers and premium economy travel

The emergence of LCCs has been a game-changer in the airline industry, democratizing air travel and making it accessible to millions worldwide. LCCs have not only provided cost-effective travel options but have also restructured the passenger experience by introducing customizable travel packages through buy-on-board services. This allows passengers to choose services and amenities that align with their preferences and budgets, enhancing the overall journey.

The Premium Economy Class has simultaneously gained momentum, appealing to travellers who seek comfort and service beyond Economy but at a lower cost than Business Class. Airlines are investing in Premium Economy seats by offering enhanced comfort, better culinary experiences and additional amenities. This trend reflects a broader shift toward personalized travel experiences as passengers

increasingly seek value beyond mere cost savings.

The importance of digital experiences and personalization

In an era where curated digital experiences are pivotal, personalization has emerged as a cornerstone of passenger satisfaction. Airlines are leveraging technology to offer customized experiences that cater to individual passenger needs. From digital booking platforms to personalized inflight entertainment systems, the focus is on creating seamless and engaging passenger journeys.

Digital experiences are not only enhancing passenger satisfaction but are also crucial for operational efficiency. With the use of big data and analytics, airlines can optimize their services, reduce waste and streamline onboard processes, contributing to sustainability and cost-efficiency. Revenue generated via inflight entertainment and connectivity is expected to account for 95 percent of all onboard purchases by 2031, underscoring the importance of digital solutions.



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Catering to health, wellbeing and sustainability

The modern traveller is increasingly conscious of health, wellbeing and environmental sustainability. There is a rising demand for nutritious, sustainably sourced onboard meals that cater to diverse dietary needs, including vegan, gluten-free and allergen-free options. Airlines and service providers are responding by offering menus with fresh, organic and locally sourced ingredients.

Sustainability is a significant driver in passenger choice. Airlines are adopting eco-friendly practices, such as minimizing single-use plastics and implementing comprehensive waste management systems. According to the [IATA Cabin Waste Handbook](#), 5.7 million tonnes of cabin waste were

generated in 2017, highlighting the urgent need for sustainable practices. These initiatives not only appeal to environmentally conscious travellers but also align with global sustainability goals.

Leveraging trends: opportunities for suppliers and operators

Onboard and travel catering suppliers and operator buyers have a unique opportunity to capitalize on these trends and work together by offering innovative products and services that meet modern passenger expectations.

By collaborating with airlines, rail and cruise operators to deliver sustainable solutions, suppliers can create competitive advantages in the marketplace. Whether developing digital platforms that enhance passenger interactions or offering eco-friendly packaging, vendors can position themselves as industry leaders.

Personalized marketing strategies can also play a crucial role in increasing brand loyalty and driving sales. For instance, suppliers providing digital solutions that offer personalized travel experiences can significantly enhance passenger satisfaction and retention.

Embracing the future of onboard services

The future of onboard services lies in embracing innovation and change. By prioritizing personalization, sustainability, and passenger wellbeing, airlines and service providers can address the evolving demands of the new passenger. As the industry continues to evolve, the focus will be on delivering exceptional experiences that resonate with travellers and contribute to a sustainable future.

By understanding and adapting to these trends, suppliers and operator buyers can play a vital role in shaping the future of travel catering and onboard services. It is essential that companies embrace the opportunity to innovate and lead in this dynamic industry to ensure that they remain at the forefront of passenger expectations and market advancements.