

Mainstage interviews unfold in Long Beach

Last updated: Monday October 28, 1:24 p.m. Find updates below.



APEX/IFSA CEO Dr. Joe Leader on the Mainstage on October 28, 2024

8:45 a.m.: Welcome, introduction and Mainstage executive interviews

The first morning of APEX/IFSA Global EXPO in Long Beach has taken off with a welcome and introduction from [APEX/IFSA](#) CEO Dr. Joe Leader and APEX President & [Delta Air Lines](#) Senior Vice President, Alliances and International, Perry Cantarutti. Both took to the stage this morning to officially welcome attendees to the annual event, followed by Kurt Weidemeyer, Vice President Product Management, Thales InFlyt Experience and Xia Cai, Senior Vice President Product Development, Qatar Airways, taking the stage to discuss [this morning's announcement](#) with [Thales](#) to equip [Qatar Airways'](#) new A321 NX fleet with FlytEDGE, Thales' IFE system.



(Left to Right) Kurt Weidemeyer, Vice President Product Management, Thales InFlyt Experience; Xia Cai, Senior Vice President Product Development, Qatar Airways; Dr. Joe Leader, Group CEO, APEX

BBC Correspondent and Anchor Michelle Fleury then sat down to speak with Michael Rousseau President and CEO Air Canada. Rousseau discussed the role of AI in the airline's post-COVID plans, the target to have Wi-Fi on 350 aircraft by the end of this year, and the feeling of "renewed optimism" in the industry with the pandemic well behind it.



BBC Correspondent and Anchor Michelle Fleury (left) with Michael Rousseau President and CEO Air Canada

Next, Leader invited Fiona Kiesel, Chief Guest Officer, Breeze Airways, to the stage to chat about the airline's "seriously nice" reputation and the role its team members play in this recognition.

"First we focus on hiring nice people, then we give them the technical training. It's really about setting our people up for success," Kiesel tells Leader.

Kiesel joined Breeze after a 24-year career at United Airlines, and says this experience deeply informs her role as Chief Guest Office at Breeze.

"I learned how critical the people are, the front line employees. If you don't have the hearts and minds of all the team members, then things just don't work right," she explains, giving the example of reducing the airline's reliance on delayed codes.

"We stopped looking at fault. We're one team, everybody needs to work together and we're looking at the process. If processes are not successful for the team, it's likely because we're not setting them up for success. So we evaluate the process, the timing, what our team members have and what we can give them, to make them more effective and efficient," she says.



APEX/IFSA CEO Dr. Joe Leader (left) and Fiona Kiesel, Chief Guest Officer, Breeze Airways

Next on the mainstage, Leader spoke with Matthew Klein, Executive Vice President and Chief Commercial Officer, Spirit Airlines.

Following a challenging year for [Spirit Airlines](#), Klein says, "We knew that we needed to rethink our business and the products that we offer to our guests."

Leader details the updated class offerings for passengers, unveiled in July of this year: Go, Go Savvy, Go Comfort and Go Big. According to Klein, the transformation had been in the works for a while and is a way to elevate the passenger experience.

"What you're experiencing from a guest experience perspective [with the Go classes] is the type of service Spirit employees have always wanted to deliver but couldn't due to the model. Now that we have given them the opportunity to deliver a better guest experience, they are."

When Leader asks what Klein sees for Spirit Airlines in the next five years, he says, "What we can do is chip away at some of the issues we have right now but really focus on brand experience and delivering to the guest."



APEX/IFSA CEO Dr. Joe Leader on the Mainstage with Matthew Klein, Executive Vice President and Chief Commercial Officer, Spirit Airlines

Following Klein's interview, Fleury spoke with Con Korfiatis, CEO, [Oman Air](#). Korfiatis explained that Omani culture and the warm hospitality associated with visiting Oman is brought onboard the airline and becomes a key aspect of the passenger experience.



Michelle Fleury, Anchor, BBC, speaks with Con Korfiatis, CEO, Oman Air. Korfiatis

Next, Leader welcomed Samson Arega Bekele, Group Vice President Customer Experience, [Ethiopian Airlines](#), to the mainstage. Leader noted how Ethiopian Airlines is recognized for its IFE delivery, with Bekele explaining the current push for the airline is to personalize the IFE experience. The airline is working with [Panasonic](#) to acquire the IFE services and are reinvesting in the existing aircraft to further elevate the IFE delivery.

"We are configuring our IFE to personalize service and customize the content for passengers," Bekele says, adding that the airline is working with content service provider Anuvu to expand its IFE library and has already tripled its IFE offering.

He also explains that Ethiopian Airlines services various hubs in Africa with the hubs being important to the airline so it can serve the different travel paths in the region. Now, Ethiopian Airlines is tracking the regional preferences of passengers to better customize content delivery experience for specific routes.

"Our passengers have been very happy about the options we are providing," Bekele concludes.



APEX/IFSA CEO Dr. Joe Leader on the Mainstage with Samson Arega Bekele, Group Vice President Customer Experience, Ethiopian Airlines

For the final session on the Mainstage for the morning, Anton Vidgen, Vice President, Guest Experience at Riyadh Air, took to the stage to announce that [Riyadh Air](#) has selected Panasonic's Astrova for the airline's IFE system.

Vidgen started by sharing some of the core elements of the airline's brand strategy, citing "excessive attention to detail in guest experience" as being integral to the brand identity.

He also noted that Riyadh Air is also a "digitally native airline," explaining this means that how things translate in the digital space will be at the core of the services and operations. As well, a frictionless and seamless guest and employee experience supports a passenger journey that is fully integrated and holistic.



Anton Vidgen, Vice President, Guest Experience at Riyadh Air

Following the sessions on the Mainstage, delegates moved upstairs to the ballroom for a networking lunch, sponsored by Panasonic.



Networking lunch, sponsored by Panasonic

Concluding the morning, Leader gathered APEX/IFSA and FTE officials and organizers in the lobby of the Long Beach Convention Center for the annual ribbon cutting to officially open the exhibit floor.



Ribbon cutting ceremony on October 28 to officially open the exhibit floors at Global EXPO 2024

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