

From the Window to the Wall: In-Flight Destination Content Covers New Ground



Icelandair's Hekla Aurora aircraft features an LED mood lighting system that recreates the aurora borealis on the ceiling of its main cabin. Image via Icelandair

APEX Insight: Engaging a single passenger is a challenge; attracting the attention of everyone on board is a genuine feat.

Providing relevant content to passengers requires troves of data and sophisticated algorithms – unless airlines lean on what they already know. Every individual on a given aircraft has a vested interest in its final destination, and new platforms that hone that common ground are emerging.

Seatback screens and personal electronic devices have long been the loci of destination content, but airlines are beginning to take a more comprehensive, nose-to-tail approach to the dissemination of destination content. Icelandair and Etihad Airways are among the airlines redefining the cabin space into a vessel for destination inspiration. The Icelandic flag carrier's Hekla Aurora aircraft features an LED mood lighting system that recreates the aurora borealis – perhaps the country's single-greatest tourist attraction – on the ceiling of its main cabin. And for its part, Etihad radiates light through openwork panels and fixtures in its first- and business-class cabins to replicate the shadows cast by the moon through the fronds of Abu Dhabi's palm trees.

Recognizing the trend toward augmented interiors, aviation tech companies are thinking up alternative routes for content distribution. Vision Systems has developed an electronically dimmable window integrated with interactive information to offer rich – often remunerative – content to window-seat occupiers. The Acti-Vision Window can display close-ups of places the aircraft is flying over, interactive moving maps with tourist information, as well as discount vouchers for car rentals, hotels and events at specific destinations. According to Alexandra Martin-Devaud, manager of Marketing and Communications at Vision Systems, the proliferation of such surface technologies could ultimately rewrite the airborne experience from “a long, obligatory and boring step before being able to enjoy one’s holiday to part of the good time for the holidaymaker.”

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And in a move away from screens altogether, Panasonic Avionics, Boeing and Diehl Aerospace are experimenting with projection systems that can be used to shine value-added tourist information and visuals on different surface areas to get passengers daydreaming of what awaits at landing. Panasonic has brought to the table a prototype of a first-class suite that would enable passengers to navigate city maps, view local landmarks and preview food and wine pairings – all on an interactive tabletop surface.

Steve Sizelove of Panasonic’s Corporate Strategic Innovation division expects the technology to be brought to food trays, armrests, galleys and more, to work in tandem with seatback and personal screens. “As with nearly everything that we explore and ultimately incorporate,” Sizelove says, “it is the natural and instinctive blending of technology, content and consumption that we strive to achieve.”