

Condor to Launch Wireless In-flight Entertainment System

German holiday carrier Condor will become the first airline to install Lufthansa Systems' new BoardConnect wireless in-flight entertainment (IFE) system on its Boeing 767 aircraft. Unlike conventional wired IFE systems, BoardConnect is essentially an intranet on a plane that replaces the several kilometers of cables, that are usually needed to connect every single seat, with a wireless network that allows passengers to connect to content on an onboard server with their own laptops, smart phones or tablet PCs. Alternatively, integrated seat-back screens or mobile devices provided by the airline can be used to access the Wi-Fi network.



Walled Garden

Passengers logging on to the wireless IFE system are shown a startpage that lists the available IFE programming, which can be fully branded and customized by the airline. BoardConnect uses standard software solutions. For example, multimedia content is served up via Microsoft Silverlight, a browser plug-in which comes pre-installed on most new devices. For iPhone, iPad or Android users, apps are being developed that will be available on the Apple App Store and the Android Marketplace. If an aircraft is also equipped with broadband access to the wider Internet, passengers can also surf and send and receive e-mails while in the air. Condor, however, will only offer wireless IFE to access the 'walled garden' content available on the onboard server.

Weight Savings

According to Lufthansa Systems, a subsidiary of the Lufthansa Group, the elimination of wiring and data distribution hardware could lead to weight savings of almost half a ton on a 767, reducing annual fuel consumption by around 20 tonnes per aircraft. The savings are even greater if no seat-back screens are installed, which is increasingly becoming an option as more and more passengers bring their own Internet-enabled devices on board. Lufthansa Systems says that thanks to the minimal installation effort (as no wiring is required) its BoardConnect solution is also interesting for smaller aircraft such as the A320 and B737, which fly medium-haul routes and generally offer very limited IFE options.



Condor

Lufthansa Systems expects the wireless IFE system to be available on the first Condor B767 by summer 2011. It is unknown at this point what kind of wireless device Condor, a wholly-owned subsidiary of travel giant Thomas Cook, will rent out to passengers and to what extent the content on offer can be accessed for free. A likely offer, however, will be a combination of free and paid premium content. For Condor, the wireless IFE is a relatively cheap upgrade of its current IFE offering which consists of movies shown on an overhead screen, while portable DVD players are handed out in Comfort Class. Says Rainer Kröpke, Head of Marketing at Condor, “In-flight entertainment is an important part of the travel experience and a way to stand out from the competition, particularly in the tourism industry.”



Wireless IFE

As Flightglobal reports, the concept of wireless IFE is not new, although it has yet to be implemented in commercial aircraft. Boeing, for instance, originally planned to offer wireless IFE on its 787 Dreamliner. Panasonic Avionics and Thales were successful in developing wireless systems for the 787 from a technical standpoint, but wireless distribution required too much sacrifice in functionality and didn't achieve the desired weight savings, so Boeing ultimately decided to offer wired in-seat IFE to 787 customers. Besides Lufthansa Systems' BoardConnect, aircraft manufacturers such as Airbus and Bombardier are currently also studying wireless in-flight entertainment systems.

<http://www.airlinetrends.com>

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