

Founder of market research agency www.airlinetrends.com, Raymond Kollau, reveals the latest trends in the air in the first of his new regular features



Bring your own device

Raymond's research reveals how tech-toting travellers are influencing airline seat design

ACCORDING to a recent survey by FlightView among flyers in North America, more than 80% of passengers today carry a smartphone, nearly 40% carry a personal computer, and 37% have a tablet with them while up in the air. Another recent survey by *TripAdvisor* also found that one-in-four passengers in the US call their tablet device a 'carry-on essential'.

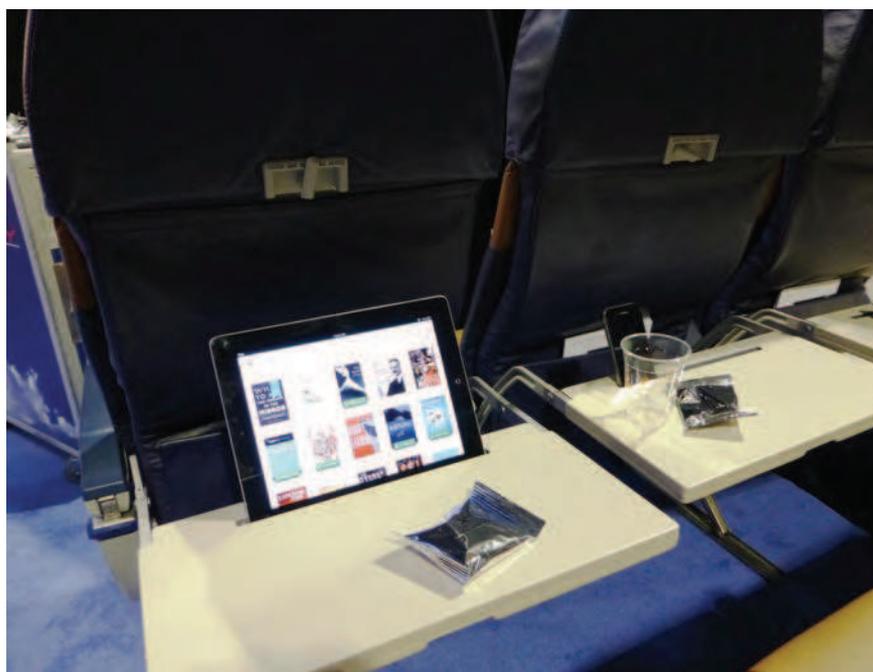
Airlines are responding to this explosion in passenger use of smartphones, notebooks, tablets and e-readers, plus the increasing expectation that these devices can be connected inflight, by incorporating power sockets and USB ports in aircraft seats (including Economy) and introducing onboard Wi-Fi, while several carriers have also introduced wireless inflight entertainment (IFE) systems.

Being referred to as BYOD (bring your own device), an alternative eco-system to today's traditional fixed IFE systems is emerging, which sees tech-savvy passengers bring their own digital devices, and airlines provide in-seat power, onboard Wi-Fi, as well as access to a wireless IFE system, so passengers can use their own device to connect to an onboard server and stream content from it.

BYOD and seat design

Besides rolling out new technologies to cater to today's tech-toting passenger, a number of airlines and interior suppliers are also looking how to integrate passengers' own devices with the design of the seat.

Says Daniel Baron, managing director of Tokyo-based brand and cabin design firm LIFT Strategic Design: "The PED storage trend is definitely in full bloom, and will likely become a design requirement in the near future. Once inflight connectivity becomes ubiquitous, the dedicated storage will as well. And it gives airlines an additional message for marketing communications, ie: "A dedicated place for the items that matter most during your flight."



The SmartTray X1 table design featuring a built-in groove for holding tablets, e-readers and other portable electronic devices

Adds John Walton, who travels the globe for *Australian Business Traveller*: "We're seeing this trend right across the board, from the very back of the plane to deluxe suites in the pointy end. Airlines are realising that nearly everyone carries a phone with them, and that it's useful to be able to stash it somewhere safe yet convenient. Some airlines are going for special cut-outs in the seat in front of you, especially in Economy, while in Premium Economy there's often a larger shelf or side storage compartment. In Business it's surprising how many airlines still haven't figured out that business travellers notice handy additions like these."

Positive exceptions include airlines such as Qatar Airways and Cathay Pacific, who have taken the needs of passengers working on

"Interior suppliers and airlines are looking at how to integrate passengers' own devices into the seat design"

laptops into consideration in their latest seat designs. For example, passengers in Business on Qatar Airways' new 787 Dreamliner can dine and work comfortably with a large wood-trimmed sliding table. When dining begins, passengers can use a separate side table to rest their laptops. On a similar note, Cathay Pacific's new Business seats feature a bi-fold table swinging out from under the cocktail table, large enough to comfortably hold a laptop or notebook.

On a related note, airlines such as Turkish Airlines, Virgin Atlantic and Condor provide

Right top: An amenity bag that doubles up as an iPad case; below left to right: JAL's new Economy seat and Economy smartphone holder

passengers in Business with amenity bags that can be re-used as an iPad case, which is a clever way of branding and a nice airline souvenir for passengers.

Cell phone seat pockets

Storage space for personal electronic devices (PEDs) is not only reserved for the more spacious seating arrangements in Business class. Several seat manufacturers are beginning to incorporate smartly-designed spaces in Economy where passengers can store their mobile device.

For example, passengers travelling in Economy on Air France's A380 and select B777-300s can easily store their cell phone into a 'small belongings stowage', which is located just below the in-seat USB port to allow for easy recharging of the device. Japan Airlines' new Economy seats (manufactured by ZIM Flugsitz), which will make their debut on the airline's B777-300s in January 2013, have been designed with a conveniently-placed smartphone holder which is also located near the USB port.

LIFT Design's Daniel Barron sees some design challenges for dedicated PED storage areas though, particularly in Economy where space is very limited. For example, he asks: "Is some other feature going to be sacrificed for the dedicated storage? When is a personal electronic device considered too large to be placed in the pocket during take off and landing? Does using the meal table or personal TV hinder access to the stowage? And if the storage is too well contained, will customers forget items when they leave the aircraft?"

A similar concern is voiced by John Walton from *Australian Business Traveller*: "With some airlines' storage spaces closing up completely, it's easy to miss your phone or tablet in a tucked-away compartment, especially if arriving at night or after a tiring red-eye."

Tablet holder

Besides providing easy storage or placement for passengers' digital devices, a number of firms are also coming up with innovative design solutions that allow passengers to place their digital device in a convenient position when



watching a video or movie.

At the recent APEX conference in California, a start-up company called SmartTray unveiled a new tray table design that features a simple yet smartly designed built-in groove for holding tablets, e-readers and other portable electronic devices upright. According to SmartTray, the X1 tray table costs about the same amount of money as the standard tray, and the groove is easy to clean of any debris and/or accidentally spilled liquids.

Says SmartTray ceo Nick Pajic: "From the airline carrier's perspective, with more and more travellers bringing on board personal electronic devices, including expensive tablets for entertainment, why not give their customers something as simple as a tray table with a groove? The X1 tray table features a hands-free experience. No longer will travellers have to

hold, prop or contort themselves to view their devices. And they can leave their holders and stands at home, so there is less to carry and fidget with."

For the latest news on *OnBoard Entertainment* turn to pages 60 – 67 in this issue.

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Having been part of the leading consumer trend firm trendwatching.com since its inception, Raymond founded airlinetrends.com to focus on trends and innovations in the global airline industry. He has been quoted as an industry expert in a range of media as diverse as CNN, MSNBC, and The New York Times and is also known for his high-level and colourful presentations.
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