

exporeview

WHAT WERE THE KEY TRENDS FROM THIS YEAR'S AIRCRAFT INTERIORS EXPO IN HAMBURG?



seating

MARKET SEGMENTATION: Super first class, first class, high-density first class, premium class, business class, high-density business class, premium economy, standard economy, low-cost/short-haul economy – the airline sector continues to invent new product solutions and market niches to drive improved revenue. This has led to a proliferation of seating configurations and models, from luxury suites, to high-density herringbones, to a new wave of economy models.

NEW PLAYERS: Continuing segmentation has also provided opportunities for new seat manufacturers to ply their wares, particularly in the ever-widening economy sector, where high-volume production runs help justify the initial manufacturing investment required. It remains to be seen just how many of these new companies will still be around at future shows, as existing suppliers step up their game or buy out potential rivals.

REDUCED WEIGHT: Fuel prices may have softened for now, but as soon as the economy picks up, they are expected to rise. Carbon fibre has an important role to play in reducing weight, but its use will rely on design software and virtual simulation and modelling technology to better manage manufacturing and certification costs; and to ensure the most efficient use of material to provide structural stability and strength where required. However, it will be a few years yet until carbon fibre replaces aluminium altogether.



textiles/lighting

MOOD FOR CHANGE: LED mood lighting systems are firmly established as the mainstream. But now the industry is turning to the less glamorous but equally vital business of saving airlines cash by supplying LED and fibre-optic reading and other types of individual light fixture that last longer, take less power and pump less heat into the cabin.

SOFT FURNISHINGS: A new generation of easy-to-clean lightweight leathers are set to challenge the preconception that fabric seat covers are always lighter. Meanwhile textiles continue to get... lighter. But airlines shouldn't be influenced by weight and price alone – durability and quality are equally important. For example, cheap flame-retardancy treatments can cause seat corrosion headaches further down the line.



ife/communications

BROADCAST IFE: Thales is currently Panasonic's only real challenger in the market for AVOD IFE systems. But until this year it seemed content to let the industry Number One contest the digital broadcast business with Rockwell Collins. All that changed in Hamburg, where Thales unveiled a new product – TopSeries Digital Single-Aisle – designed to raise the broadcast formula to new levels.

AVOD IFE: Over the years several would-be vendors have been lured by the siren call of AVOD, only to crash on the rocks of airline conservatism. But still they come. One – California's Lumexis – has even got as far as trialling its fibre-optic-based system with US Airways. Two brand-new hats – from Illinois-based InFlight Entertainment Products and ASL of the UK – sailed into the ring at this year's Expo.

HANDHELD IFE: With next to no installation costs and turnkey offers aplenty, handheld IFE looks like the answer to a recession-hit airline's prayers. But for some reason the fizz seems to have gone out of the sector. Top two suppliers The IMS Company and digEcor didn't have too much to say at this year's Expo, and a number of second-level players were conspicuous by their absence.

CONNECTIVITY: 2009 will be remembered as the year that connectivity came of age. But it brought disappointment for one aspiring Ku-band satellite broadband supplier. T-Mobile and its partners finally came out of the closet at this year's show, revealing they were in contention to replace Connexion by Boeing with Lufthansa. Alas, in the weeks following the show the German carrier decided in favour of Panasonic's eXconnect.



galleys/lavs

WHAT'S COOKING: Airbus continues to push ahead with SPICE – it recently completed caterer facility tests with GateGourmet and Servair. Galley suppliers are adding pull-down screens and dedicated storage/display areas to units for use in 'public' areas of the cabin. Induction heating and RFID technology continue to grow in influence, allowing a wider range of meals to be delivered more efficiently. Meanwhile luxury washrooms with 'boutique' designer fittings and even showers are finding a home on board some leading long-haul carriers, but elsewhere it's all about easy-to-clean surfaces, less parts and improved maintenance.