

In-flight Wi-Fi Brought to You By...



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Big names are hopping on the broadband wagon, sponsoring in-flight Wi-Fi in hopes of gaining new customers in the air.

BY HOWARD SLUTSKEN

Up in the air, sponsored promotions have been finding their way into the aircraft cabin. And although it's still early days, increased onboard connectivity bandwidth is becoming a reality, opening up opportunities to develop creative partnerships that enhance the passenger experience.

"The foundation of all this is the deployment of more bandwidth," says Ash Eldifrawi, chief commercial officer for in-flight connectivity provider Gogo. "What you're going to continue to see is more and more sponsorships as we move from a constrained to a more abundant environment of megabytes."

Earlier this year, Gogo teamed with T-Mobile for a special promotion, where the mobile carrier's users are offered one hour of free full connectivity to use their smartphone however they like. "People have been really loving that – it's really been a very popular sponsorship from T-Mobile," says Eldifrawi. And during a

weekend in June, all smartphone users, no matter the mobile service, were offered the same promotion. "That's the kind of 'surprise and delight' things [brands like T-Mobile can] do for everybody," he says. On the other side of the world, China Airlines partnered with Chunghwa Telecom to offer six hours of free Wi-Fi powered by Panasonic Avionics' in-flight connectivity service.

Content providers have also partnered with airlines in free streaming cross-promotions. JetBlue first announced a partnership with Amazon Prime in May last year, followed by Virgin America's announcement at APEX EXPO of a partnership with Netflix, each service supported by ViaSat. This past June, Aeroméxico selected Gogo's 2Ku service to support a free Netflix streaming trial. According to Eldifrawi, sponsorships like these give airlines "an opportunity to delight passengers and improve the passenger experience with well-known brands."

Subscribe and Wi-Fi

Spurred by promotional partnerships, fleeting moments of Wi-Fi may have passengers wanting more.



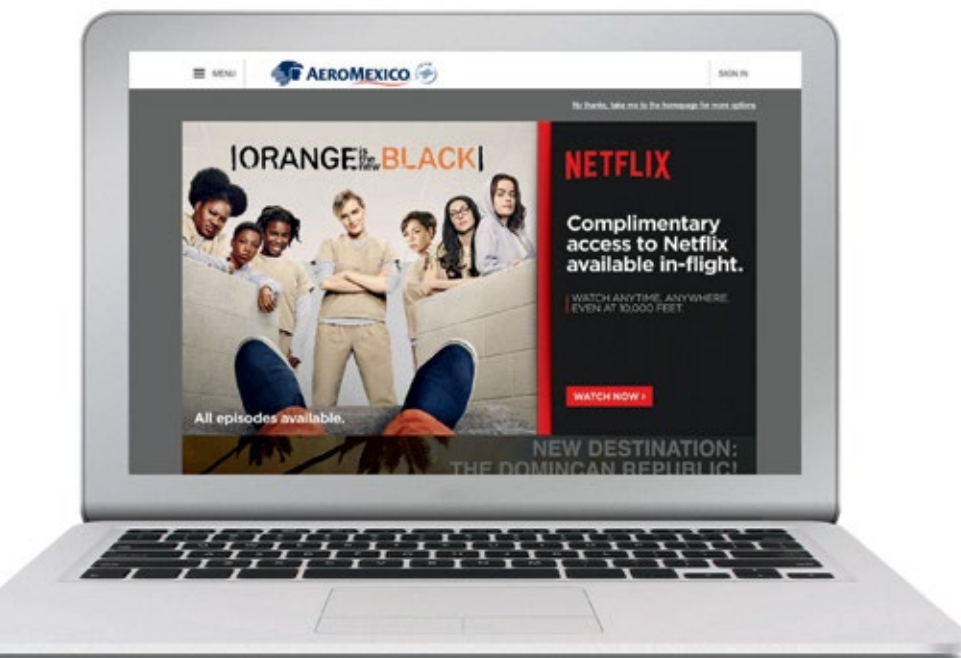
Subscribers of the global Wi-Fi aggregator iPass, powered domestically by Gogo and Deutsche Telekom, and overseas by Panasonic Avionics, are able to stay connected on the ground and in flight.



Google's Internet browser, Chrome, sponsored free in-flight Wi-Fi during the holidays in 2010 on Gogo-connected aircraft from AirTran, Delta and Virgin America, enabling passengers to check e-mail, watch videos and surf the web.



Passengers aboard Virgin America's A320s were able to sample Lynda.com video learning content for free through the seatback system, while subscribers had access to the full catalog using ViaSat powered in-flight Wi-Fi.



Beyond potentially offsetting the costs for the airline or Internet service provider, effective brand alignment in these sponsorships improves the potential gains for all stakeholders involved in the collaboration, including the passenger. "All the content streaming companies, like Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime and HBO, want everybody to have access to their content anytime, anywhere," Eldifrawi says, and in-flight sponsorships connect them directly with captive prospective subscribers.

For the airline and Internet service provider, affiliation with a business that relies on top-notch Internet speed is another means of humble bragging about in-flight connectivity services – and breadth of entertainment to boot. "At the end of the day, the way I see this going, the ground is going to extend to the air," Eldifrawi adds. "And what unlocks that is more bandwidth." ■

PHOTO: GOGO