



SEATBACK IFE'S MUCH-HERALDED DEATH FAILS TO MATERIALISE, AGAIN

News / Airlines



Harbingers of the demise of embedded **seatback** inflight entertainment have been prophesying its **death** for years, but two recent decisions by Lufthansa — for its own fleet and [for its new Eurowings subsidiary](#) — have swung the needle firmly back towards “embedded”.

For a start, Lufthansa is continuing to install Zodiac's RAVE seat-centric **IFE** product on its Boeing 747-400s, which are being refitted by Lufthansa Technik, and recently certified the system for its new premium economy seat. RAVE is already installed on the airline's older Airbus A340 and A330 aircraft, and the airline says it is pleased with the system's performance.

Yet more recently, RGN learned that Eurowings [will be including an embedded IFE product throughout its aircraft](#). Eurowings is the new name for an expanded Germanwings, Lufthansa's LCC that operates essentially all Lufthansa Group Germany services outside of the Frankfurt and Munich hubs, and which will be launching long-haul, leisure-market, full-service-optional flights this November. The Eurowings IFE will be complimentary for passengers booking Best fares (a premium economy product in the same ZIM seats as Lufthansa mainline premium economy) and an ancillary buy-up on board for everybody else.

Eurowings is a 2015 confirmation of the trend that Lufthansa has been pointing towards since it announced its selection of RAVE for its mainline widebody aircraft three years ago: BYOD is fine for an aircraft the size of an A321 (on a subfleet of which Lufthansa has been testing Lufthansa Systems' BoardConnect this year, but has yet to decide on whether to roll out the system) not yet

for a widebody flying longhaul.

And that's important for the industry, because Lufthansa and its subsidiaries are a bellwether for inflight entertainment trends for a number of reasons that mainly revolve around the airline having the capacity and the muscle to take whatever decision it likes: there are very few barriers to entry for Lufthansa.

First, Lufthansa the airline is itself one of the world's largest, operating a significant proportion of the aircraft types currently on sale, so is ipso facto a major IFE customer. With its decision to continue installing RAVE on the 747 fleet, the carrier is pointing the way towards embedded IFE, even if the content itself is both seat-centric and updated via streaming.

Second, the Lufthansa Group includes majority or minority stakes in numerous airlines, including Germanwings, Austrian, Swiss, Brussels, SunExpress, Luxair, Tui, and regional subsidiaries. Lufthansa has publicly stated its intent to realise more of the synergies from the size of its operations, while still maintaining the operational and brand individuality that meets the needs of their circumstances. That means both that it has the size to make systems scale, and the individuality to take the best decision for each airline.

Third, Lufthansa the airline has numerous plans for cost-cutting through the use of operational leasing, divestment and subsidiaries. The "Jump" sub-brand intended for leisure-heavy routes from its Frankfurt and Munich hubs, together with the Eurowings brand intended for regional and long-haul, low-cost, full-service flights from outside Lufthansa's hubs, show that Lufthansa has no qualms about cutting costs where it deems it sensible.

Fourth, one of Lufthansa's subsidiaries is Lufthansa Systems, a major player in aviation IT, which itself offers BoardConnect, a wireless streaming BYOD and/or semi-embedded tablet inflight entertainment and product. There's no tech barrier to entry for Lufthansa here, and given that BoardConnect uses commercial off-the-shelf tablets for its semi-embedded solutions, it's not that the solution wouldn't be scalable — especially since the specific bellwether is the six Eurowings A330-200 aircraft.

Fifth, Lufthansa has Lufthansa Technik, one of the world's largest MRO (maintenance, repair and overhaul) operators. With the world [having hit peak MRO requirements](#) thanks to increasingly reliable aircraft with longer periods between maintenance, and LHT looking at either a steady state or a decline in facilities requirements, it's not that Lufthansa doesn't have the ability to pull IFE out (or, indeed, put different wireless in) if it thought that the most efficient plan.

Sixth, Lufthansa Technik recently showed off [the latest version of its semi-embedded iPad solution](#), which is out for final certification for installation in business class on Qantas' two-class Boeing 717 fleet. Lufthansa could surely install this system for Eurowings if it wished to move down the semi-embedded route.

Seventh, Lufthansa also has LSG SkyChefs, a worldwide catering operation that has itself been involved in wireless streaming, with a system that uses a galley oven-sized insert for power and wheels tablets on and off with a galley cart. Clearly, there is an economy of scale for LSG to become involved if rental devices were an attractive option for Eurowings.

If Lufthansa had thought that wireless BYOD, a semi-embedded solution, a device rental system, or anything else in the non-embedded spectrum was an option, there were few barriers to stop the airline from selecting it. And then the [dominoes would likely start to fall as other low-cost, long-haul carriers followed suit.](#)

Airlines see embedded IFE in a number of ways: as part of their service offering, as an ancillary revenue stream, as a way to take some of the strain from inflight connectivity requirements, as a means to distract from shrinking seat size ([it's a comfort factor for passengers](#)), or as one of the few options to show early-window content. It is very much not dead.

The actual solution Lufthansa has chosen for Eurowings is not yet known, with the airline keeping its cards close to its chest but promising an announcement soon. There are numerous options, from RAVE through [Lumexis' ultralight iPAX](#) to Panasonic's eXLite (Lufthansa Technik did confirm that Panasonic will provide the Ku-band connectivity) and Thales AVANT-Lite.

Whatever system Lufthansa decides upon, it's clear that embedded IFE is here for the foreseeable future.

