

OnAir links airborne phones to ground net

by Bernard Fitzsimons

Demand for in-flight connectivity is snowballing, according to Stephan Egli, chief commercial officer with on-board communications provider and first-time MEBA exhibitor OnAir (Stand E105).

The Geneva-based company, a joint venture of aeronautical IT/communications specialist SITTA and Airbus, has contracts with 30-plus airlines, more than 10 of them here in the Middle East. Its service enables passengers to use their own cellphones to

connect with the terrestrial telecommunications network via a satellite link. And demand is just as high among private aircraft operators.

Originally, OnAir restricted its offering to airlines, but it has responded to demand by expanding availability of the service to include government, VIP and corporate operators. In 2008 Jet Aviation agreed to install the equipment on a range of business and VIP jets, and a similar agreement followed with

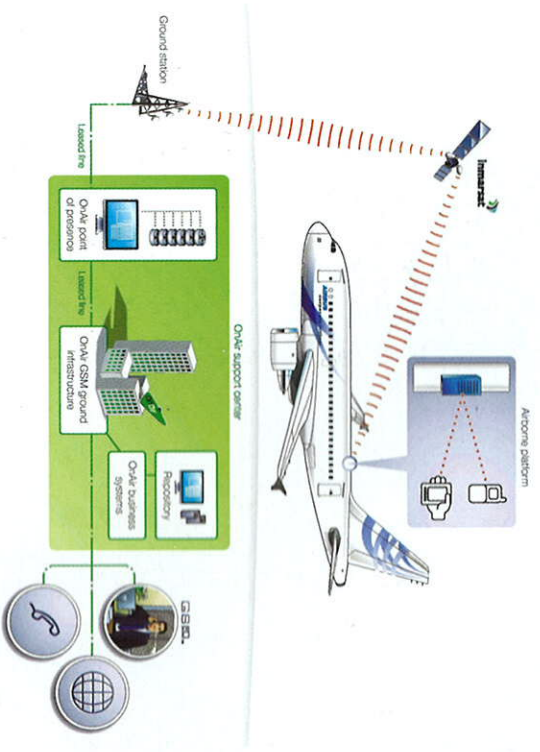
Aviation Center Cologne (now ACC Columbia). The company is also talking to additional potential installers.

"From a technology point of view it's essentially the same equipment on a private or commercial jet," said Egli. "It wasn't very difficult to adapt." The four items of on-board equipment for the GSM/GPRS service that is most popular with private operators

are the picocell that acts as the cellphone base station; an onboard channel selector that is required to ensure compliance with all the regulations; a small server that establishes the call between the ground network; and the onboard network, and a modem that connects with the satellite.

"We also have a WiFi service," said Egli, "but we see the demand much more on the GSM/GPRS side. Passengers on a private jet are typically not people who travel with laptops and want to mess around with WiFi connections. They just want to turn on their phones and use them." Even without WiFi on board, smartphone users can access the Internet in the same way that they would on the ground.

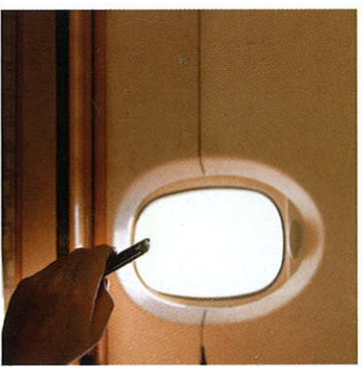
Installation costs can range from \$200,000 to nearly \$1 million depending on the size of the aircraft and its existing equipment. "Normally we try to install all these things during C checks," Egli explained.



OnAir enables passengers on airlines and private aircraft operators to use their own cellphones to connect with the ground telecommunications network via a satellite link.

OnAir is also an Inmarsat reseller, Egli said. "We are an Inmarsat SwiftBroadband distribution partner, so if an operator simply wants a satellite connection using SBB we can provide it. That is something that can be done within a day or two, as long as an SBB-capable satcom is installed in the aircraft."

Although the satellite coverage is global, the need for regulatory approval from individual countries before aircraft can use the service in their airspace means there are still some gaps in OnAir's provision. The other big exception is



U.S. airspace, where the Federal Communications Commission bans the use of cellphones on board aircraft. "The rest of the world has embraced it, so we hope that will change fairly soon," Egli said. "In Europe we have essentially 100 percent coverage; Asia is improving, so it won't be long before you can use the service pretty much anywhere." □

OnAir Gets Bizjets Connected

OnAir equipment is available as a catalog option on Airbus Corporate Jets and can also be installed on larger classic business jets as well as airframe-based private aircraft, including the:

- Bombardier Challenger and Global Express
- Boeing Business Jet
- Gulfstream GIV, GIV-SP, GV and G550
- Embraer Lineage 1000 and Embraer aircraft in VIP configuration
- Boeing aircraft in VIP configuration
- Cessna Citation 10 and Excel

Weight is a barrier to installation on smaller aircraft, acknowledged OnAir's Stephan Egli. "It's also a question of range. If you are in a very small aircraft and you hop from one place to the next and you're airborne for an hour there's much less need to be connected than if you're flying six or seven hours." So far, only BBJs, ACJs and larger VIP aircraft have been equipped, he said, but deals for installations on smaller jets are under negotiation. —B.J.F.

Brendan Gallagher discusses
VIP connectivity market
possibilities with OnAir's
David Bony

Shipping satellite technology to MEBA

What is a provider of satellite connectivity for cruise ships, super-yachts and experimental round-the-world solar-powered aircraft doing at MEBA? Answer: telling the world about its growing success in also serving the operators of VIP and government aircraft.

"The Middle Eastern airlines lead the world in adopting our on-board mobile phone service for air transport," said David Bony, head of VIP, corporate and government aircraft for Geneva-based OnAir (stand E105).

"There has also been strong demand from the region for installations on government and VIP air-

craft. Of our total of ten contracted customers in this sector, half come from the Middle East."

OnAir's customer base also includes German cruise ship opera-

"Let's face it, the average super-yacht owner is likely to have an aircraft too – we can put almost exactly the same equipment into both"

David Bony//head of VIP, corporate and government aircraft

tor Hapag-Lloyd, which offers the company's service aboard the liner Europa, and Solar Impulse SA, the company developing an aircraft designed to fly round the world on solar power alone.

OnAir has been contracted to supply an Inmarsat SwiftBroadband 432kbit/sec satellite terminal for installation in the Solar Impulse HB-SIA aircraft, and to develop the associated ground infrastructure.

In the airline market, OnAir's tally of announced customers exceeds 20. One of the most recent additions to the list is Emirates, which plans to offer the service in its growing fleet of Airbus A380s.

Other Middle Eastern and North

African air transport customers include Egyptair (one Airbus A330-300 in operation, with another seven to be equipped), Oman Air (six A330s), Qatar Airways (five A320s), Royal Jordanian (two A320s), Watanyia Airways (six A320s), Saudi Arabian Airlines (A330s) and Libyan Airlines (A320s).

Bony expects his side of the business to make a growing contribution to the company's fortunes. "I have ten meetings with potential customers planned for my time at MEBA and eight of them are with Middle Eastern operators," he said. "The more visibility the company obtains with the airlines of the region, the more our cred-

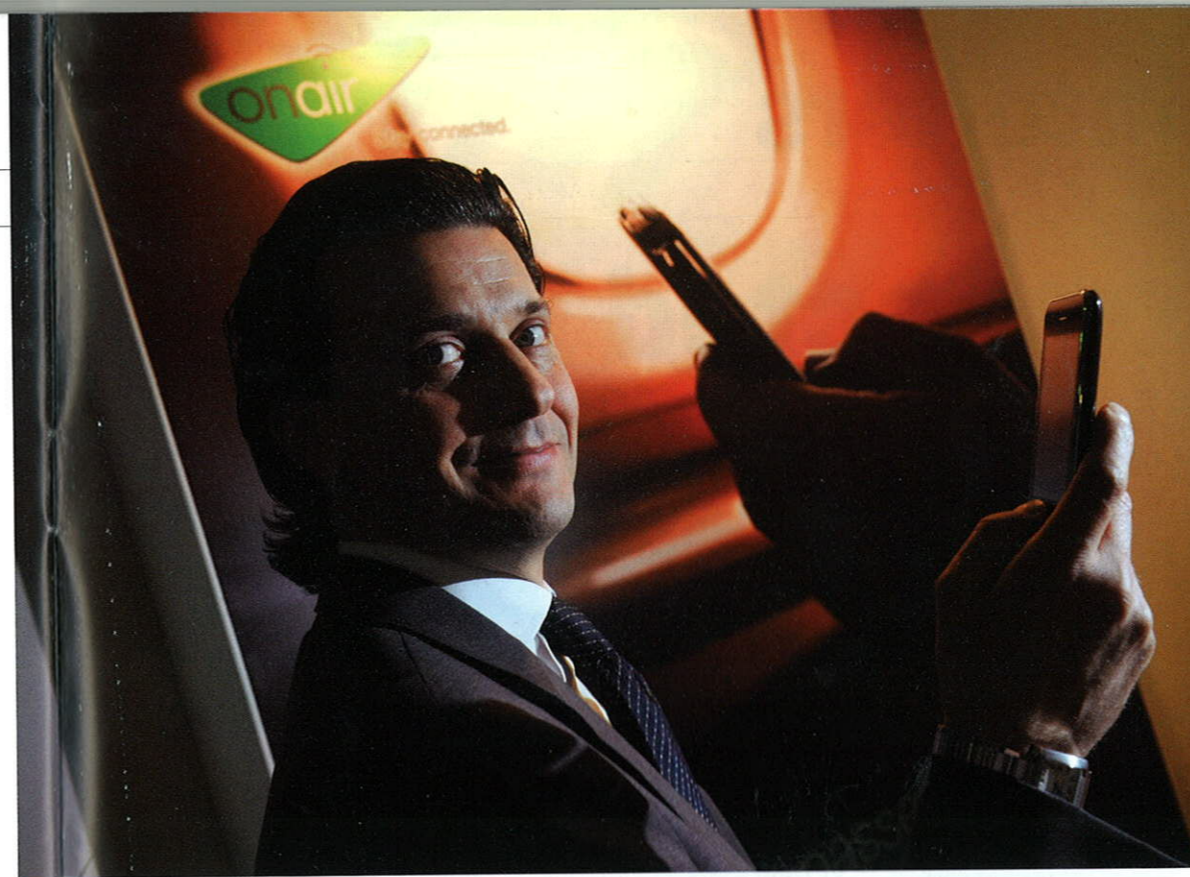
ibility grows with the government and VIP community. Our status as an Inmarsat distribution partner means we can react quickly to provide them with the satellite airtime they need."

He believes the OnAir maritime

business could also benefit from contacts made here.

"Let's face it, the average super-yacht owner is likely to have an aircraft too – we can put almost exactly the same equipment into both."

Mobile phone leader OnAir is now also making rapid progress in the corporate and VIP market, says David Bony head of VIP, corporate and government aircraft



CONNECTIVITY

Airbus completions centre signs for CFM support

Airbus Corporate Jet Centre (ACJC), the Toulouse manufacturer's in-house completions facility, has teamed with powerplant maker Snecma to offer full support of CFM International CFM56-5B engines to VIP, corporate and government customers.

Capabilities include engine condition monitoring, shop visits, protection against foreign object damage (FOD), repair and access to line-replaceable unit (LRU) pools, and spare engines.

Engine support is the last element needed to complete VIP Pass, ACJC's recently launched package of services for Airbus Corporate Jet customers. It also includes cabin upgrades and refurbishment, airframe maintenance, and cabin and airframe spares.