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Is This The Future of In-Flight Retail?

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Photo courtesy of Finnair

The days of flipping through a SkyMall magazine to pass time during a flight are long gone. You still might run into the occasional cart filled with duty free items on an international flight, but in-flight shopping is not what it once was. At its peak, SkyMall had a circulation of about 20 million. That meant nine out of every 10 fliers in the United States could find a copy of the magazine in their seat whenever they flew.

Taking in-flight shopping online

The next trend for in-flight shopping will most likely make use of airlines' (relatively) new wireless internet connections. More and more planes are being outfitted with Wi-Fi capabilities, and airlines are looking for ways to monetize this service (beyond simply charging their passengers a fee to connect).

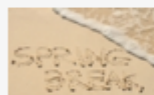
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With an in-flight connection, fliers can theoretically shop at all their favorite online retailers while they are in the air. However, one airline wants to give its passengers access to an exclusive shopping experience while they are flying, and in doing so, entice them to make purchases through its official internet portal.

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Finnair is offering a new shopping feature on its Airbus A350s. A Finnish clothing label is selling its designs through the carrier's Nordic Sky Wi-Fi portal. Helsinki-based Makia Clothing Shop will have an online catalog of its men's and women's apparel that will be offered through the service. Fliers can order clothes and have them delivered to their address or hotel.

Other services too

Nordic Sky is free to access for Finnair passengers in all classes. They can use the service with their laptop, phone or tablet. In addition to the designer clothes shopping, the portal has other features. Passengers can contact a taxi service so that their ride is waiting for them after they land and collect their baggage. They can also access travel services, make reservations or buy event tickets through the Viator Travel Services app.

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People who aren't flying through Helsinki won't be able to benefit from the Nordic Sky services or shopping options. However, this is one of the first examples of an airline using its in-flight connection to offer specific services and offers. JetBlue does have an enhanced version of Amazon Instant Video that fliers can use via its Fly-Fi portal (though they can access any website via the Fly-Fi connection).


An idea that could take off

Finnair takes this idea a step further by offering things that are either not widely available or are very destination-specific. Could these kinds of niche shopping and destination-based service offers find their way into other airlines' in-flight entertainment offerings? It certainly seems likely.

Services tailored to fliers or to people traveling to certain destinations would have a higher chance of selling than generic SkyMall items. Also, specific brands or offers that are *only* available to fliers would get more people to make purchases than offers that were widely available on the internet. It appears that smaller carriers like Finnair are on the cutting edge when it comes to developing these services. If they are successful, you can bet that larger airlines in the U.S. and around the world will follow suit.

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