LEARN ON THE FLY WITH VIRGIN AUSTRALIA'S WIRELESS INFLIGHT EDUTAINMENT SYSTEM

News / Airlines



"On your next flight, why not pass the time as you learn a new skill whilst flying above the clouds?" Virgin Australia asks as it launches its latest inflight entertainment innovation: short hour-long modules on a variety of subjects delivered via its wireless streaming inflight entertainment system.

"Are you interested in learning a new skill, but just don't seem to find the time to get started? Why not use your next flight as a unique learning opportunity," the airline suggests, noting that "This month [January 2016], we have teamed up with Open2Study, Open Universities Australia's online platform, to deliver short courses catered for travellers who are seeking to get the most out of their time in the air. This Australian-first will provide in-flight education courses on our wireless entertainment system."

"This 'edutainment' innovation," Virgin Australia says on its blog, "allows guests to gain a fast-tracked understanding across various topics, with topics ranging from photography to financial planning. Each course offers 4 x 1 hour modules, providing conveniently timed content for a wide range of domestic and short haul international flights. With a new course added each month, we aim to deliver knowledge-hungry flyers with a taste of new disciplines throughout the year."

It's a smart move for the carrier, leveraging the Lufthansa BoardConnect-based wireless entertainment systems that the airline started trialling in 2012 and later rolled out across its

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mainline Boeing 737-800 and Embraer E190 fleets.

Documentaries have always been the quiet success story of the inflight entertainment world. Qantas is currently showing a thoroughly fascinating Japanese-language travel foodie guide to the Japanese donburi rice bowl, for example, which is well worth a watch (not least because the hosts wear hilarious yet inexplicable berets).

But as wireless entertainment systems become more mainstream over both iOS (iPhone plus iPad) and Android apps, this is a smart (if first-step) expansion into learning-based content. OpenStudy's course list ranges from Basic Physics to Chinese Language and Culture, Midwifery, Mining Engineering, Online Advertising, Sociology, and World Music. Courses are delivered by instructors from a variety of institutions ranging from Swinburne, Curtin and RMIT Universities to TAFE SA, New Zealand's Massey University, and even the South China University of Technology.

Unlocking interactivity, though, is another matter entirely. One-way learning options like the Khan Academy, iTunes U, Lynda and other services have been around for the best part of a decade — Apple's iTunes U[niversity] was announced in 2007, for example, and had secured more than a billion downloads from the best part of a thousand institutions by 2013.

But the rise of interactive educational (and indeed edutainment) apps like the gamified language-learning Duolingo, which require an Internet connection, could provide an opportunity for airlines like Virgin Australia and Qantas to leverage their maturing wireless entertainment systems, even without air-to-ground connectivity.

Further developments could also include on-board tie-ins with Virgin Australia. Home haberdashery or style tips from uniform designer Juli Grbac? Interior décor hints and tips with Hans Hulsbosch, the airline's creative guru? Summer recipes from celebrity chef Luke Mangan's team? Management and corporate turnaround tips from John Borghetti – or indeed sartorial suggestions from the ever-snappily dressed CEO?

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