

# Connecting the dots

The in-flight moving map has transformed over the years from a simple journey-tracker to a resource for rich content, entertainment and even education, particularly when it comes to catering for younger passengers. Kimberley Young tracks the pioneering suppliers that are mapping the way ahead.

**As access** to air travel has improved and become more affordable, it is now more commonplace for families to journey to far-flung places, keen to explore the world and learn from their experiences. It is also true that people appear to be travelling at a younger age than previous generations, with surveys suggesting the average British child goes on two overseas holidays each year, takes their first flight three times earlier than their

parents did, and will have travelled to four different countries by the age of 10.

Despite this, many parents worry about the journey, particularly how to keep youngsters entertained during the flight. Family travel company Tots to Travel found that 69% of parents (of under-fives) worry about the journey before they have even arrived at the airport, and almost a third would not consider flying for over three hours with their children.

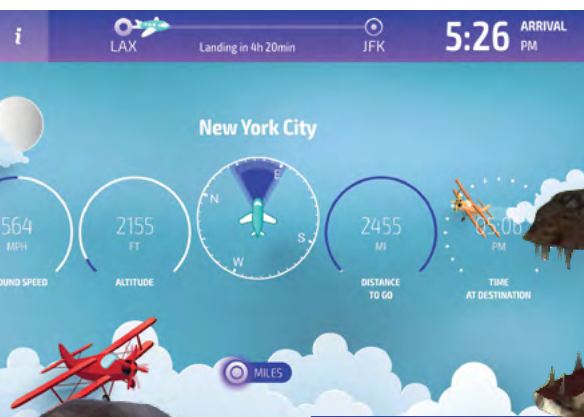
“I think the biggest thing here is fear,” Wendy Shand, founder of Tots to Travel, told Inflight, such as “fear of the unknown, of upsetting other passengers, or if their baby were to start crying. I think they also worry about being in a contained place for a prolonged period of time. Their normal strategies such as taking the kids to the park for some fresh air don’t apply, so the stresses associated with flying can be profound!”

A well-stocked in-flight entertainment (IFE) channel for children could alleviate some of the pressure, but after several rounds of cartoons or fending off the dreaded question – “Are we there yet?” – parents might wish for a different activity to engage young travellers.

## A WINDOW ON THE WORLD

First introduced on commercial airlines in 1982 (KLM and Swissair were the earliest of early adopters), the moving map offered passengers an opportunity to track their journey and understand more about their flight path.

The Airshow 100 system was launched by Airshow Inc (which later became part of Rockwell Collins – now known as Collins Aerospace). Derrick Parker, Principal



Helping to both entertain and educate children in-flight, FlightPath3D launched a themed map for kids in 2014, using animated 3D animals to bring the moving map to life.



“According to FlightPath3D, on one US domestic carrier 1 out of 7 passengers used the map to check points-of-interest (POIs).”

Program Manager at Collins Aerospace, explains: “In 1982, the moving map was a low-resolution, very basic picture of the world with a plane overlaid on the map. The map gave very basic inputs from the flight management system such as time to destination, altitude and ground speed.”

Of course, the technology has evolved, now providing detailed maps with multiple points of data. “Today a user can not only see the details of the map, but they can control the layers of information and use touchscreens to control where and what the map does,” says Parker.

Systems such as Airshow now offer points-of-interest that can be customised to an airline or turned off and on based on the end-user interaction with the map. Parker adds: “More recently, we have found the map being used as an educational tool as well. Kids use the map to see where a city is and find points-of-interest on the map.”

As well as an evolution in the appearance and content of the map, it seems the map is becoming a platform in itself, a trend Parker has identified across the consumer market, such as in how televisions are operating: “Applications are embedded into a larger ecosystem that act as one environment for the user. Airshow is similar in this aspect as it is just one application in a larger picture of

the user experience. It has hooks to fit into multiple ecosystems or can act as an independent system. This trend will continue and expand.”

#### INTERACTIVE LEARNING

Map provider FlightPath3D has offered a Kids Map since 2014. It features interactive 3D animals (the only one to do so, the company says) as well as geographical information and landmarks.

“The map remains the most watched piece of content displaying on any IFE system,” FlightPath3D’s Vice-President of Marketing, Jon Norris, explains. “The kids map development was sparked by our desire to provide rich and entertaining ‘geotainment’ content to children and to show how our platform can deliver both standard and customised themed-map services, using a similar content update process to that used to deliver movies, TV programming and music to IFE systems.”

The Kids Map is currently flying on a long list of airlines including Air Canada, El Al and Norwegian, to name just a few, and several new customers have also selected the map for deployment in early 2020.

“The volume of information displayed on the map has been simplified and optimised to aid children’s learning about different

countries, continents, their location relative to each other, large bodies of water (seas and oceans) as well as the animals of course,” Norris tells Inflight. “It really is all about entertaining and teaching children through play.”

The map is available on seatback IFE screens and FlightPath3D expects it is a service that children will likely “access intermittently throughout the flight” but could also find absorbing enough to hold their interest from take-off to landing.

Recent months have seen new entrants to the map market and discussions of new child-oriented map platforms. Norris comments: “We see that there are other providers launching a children’s map five years plus after we did, and I believe that this is just a delayed reaction to the growing need to provide a richer, deeper experience to all passengers, not just adults.

“In parallel, over the past 2–3 years there has been an exponential increase in location-based services, geo-tagging, experiential travel and social media-hyped locations that is driving an increasing appetite for map-based services.”

This boost in demand for location-based services could suggest why map providers are looking to meet new requirements from travellers, particularly as demographics evolve.