

Listen up



Linstol's LSTN in-flight noise-cancelling headsets developed for Delta One features premium finishes and were designed to enhance comfort during extended use on long-haul flights

While noise-cancellation and comfort top the headset priority list, airlines are paying more attention to modern styling, improved performance and models that closely resemble those offered in the retail market

BY MELISSA SILVA

especially during extended use on longer flights.”

Although airlines are looking for the same attributes as passengers — as a means of meeting their needs — they are also as always, conscious about cost, compatibility with their IFE systems and refurbishment.

Some of the trends airlines are paying particular attention to at the moment says Russell, include moving away from basic, plain black headsets toward more modern styling, with more attention being placed on how the look and feel of the headset coordinate with the cabin interior, all of which the company has incorporated into its own designs.

“Linstol headsets are produced utilizing RoHS ([Restriction of Hazardous Substances](#)) materials,” explains Russell. “Wood, machine-polished aluminum and a soft touch plastic are some of the finishes we are happy to bring to the market.”

Linstol is currently looking forward to the mid-July launch of its [LSTN in-flight noise-cancelling headsets in the Delta One cabin](#). The headsets feature a sleek design with wooden earpieces and premium audio components. Equally important as the style and function of the headsets themselves, is the opportunity that has been realized through fostering a partnership between Delta and [LSTN Sound Co.](#): part of the proceeds from Delta’s partnership with LSTN will benefit [Starkey Hearing Foundation](#), enabling thousands with hearing loss to receive the gift of hearing. “Giving back has always been close to Linstol’s heart, so it is a great honor to be a part of such an amazing win-win scenario,” says Russell.

Linstol’s most recent headset is the

[high-end noise cancelling 275 headset](#)

targeted for upper class cabins. This new high-performance headset features premium finishes and has been designed to enhance passenger comfort during extended use on long-haul flights.

Also recent is the success of [Linstol’s enhanced PE-95 premium earbud](#) in Saudia Airline’s Economy Class cabin. “Designed specifically with Saudia as a special gift for their guests, the PE-95 premium earbud brings improved performance and exceptional passenger comfort,” explains Russell. Bespoke logo print and color scheme complete the offering.

Russell says that for the most part, the advancements made in technology for onboard headsets follow those advancements that occur in the retail market.

“In our new 275 headset, we have focused on comfort and noise cancellation for long-haul usage to reduce listening fatigue,” he says. In addition, Linstol has worked extensively with industry-leading acoustic engineers to improve the drive units. Another focus has been on integrated circuitry that enhances surround sound effects and audio ranges typical in movies. The result is higher sound quality without increasing volume.”

At the upcoming [Airline Passenger Experience Association Expo \(APEX\)](#) this fall, Linstol plans to showcase the LSTN for Delta headset. “In addition, we will unveil another relationship with one of the world’s leading high-end audio brands. More information will follow,” says Russell.

Custom appeal

In addition to clear sound, effective noise reduction or cancellation, reusability and comfort, [AVID](#) has also noticed an increased demand from passengers for branded headsets.

If you ask some passengers, the one thing they cannot be without when traveling is a good pair of headphones. For some that means ergonomically-fit in-ear earbuds, while for others it is a noise-cancelling over-ear headset or for the tech-savvy passenger, perhaps Apple’s wireless [AirPods](#).

Despite the many variations available, passengers tend to care the most about two features: noise-cancellation and comfort — few want to travel with heavy, cumbersome headphones. Size — coupled with the ability to fold or collapse — tends to be another deal breaker, as there is only so much room in a carry-on.

Priorities in check

“Today’s passengers are looking for headsets that are on par with retail headsets they might have at home,” says Mark Russell, CEO of [Linstol](#). “Sound quality and noise cancellation are extremely important while flying, but comfort is also of high importance

AVID incorporated passive and active noise reduction technologies in its NC-series headphones, including the NC113 model (pictured)



The supplier says airlines are looking for new revenue streams and are also expanding their buy-on-board programs, which means better sound quality headsets have become more readily available to passengers.

“Headphones being exclusively designed are trending heavily within the market,” says Christine Contant, AVID Travel Sales Director. “Airlines are finding numerous ways to differentiate themselves from their competition and these exclusive designs allow for alignment with style cues from their cabin interiors, while enhancing their corporate brand direction.”

Contant says she is also seeing the emergence of new materials in headset development including silicone, which AVID has begun using in its headsets. “We are always looking for ways to incorporate not only eco-friendly materials, but additionally eco-friendly methods in the manufacturing process.”

Contant says her team has observed the development of advanced Bluetooth, wireless capabilities and noise reduction being integrated into today’s headsets, which much like the new materials, AVID has also incorporated into its own headsets, specifically passive and active noise reduction technologies in its NC-series headphones.

AVID has continued to grow its custom headphone collection, as well as the continued expansion of its noise-cancelling family. “Within the past year, AVID has increasingly

developed new headsets and is currently excited about a couple projects in the prototype phase,” says Contant.

Small changes, big results

Industry veterans [Inflight Direct](#) has noticed airlines are focusing more on the quality of headsets rather than just the cost as of late, and specifically models that incorporate the airline color scheme that will essentially become a souvenir from the flight and consequently, an effective marketing tool.

As for materials, the supplier has noticed a continued interest in the rubber-tipped earbuds. “We are taking entry-level earbuds, adding the silicone ear tips and providing a low-cost earbud at a very competitive cost,” says Thomas G. Mockler, President and CEO of Inflight Direct. “Years ago, these would be uncomfortable during a long flight; however, by making a simple change like adding sound-dampening ear tips, the passenger will have a more enjoyable experience with the lower-end earbuds.”

In reference to the headband style models, Mockler says Inflight Direct is continuing to improve its speaker drivers to increase sound quality.

“We are working on using dual voice coils in the upper-class models, which will give a theater experience with a passive noise reduction model to keep costs to a minimum,” he adds.

Mockler says that with this added pressure of keeping costs to a mini-

mum — due in part to the large volume of headsets being purchased — airlines are looking for a reliable and dependable supplier, in addition to minimizing storage space onboard.

Inflight Direct recently introduced two new headset models. The first, incorporates the popular angled rubber ear tip, while the second model does not. “The angled ear tip has been widely popular in the retail markets for the past several years and was only just introduced to the airline market,” explains Mockler.

The angled feature of the first model provides added noise reduction and improved sound quality, whereas the second model offers a sleek, yet simple design and is small, lightweight and comfortable to wear.

Paying close attention to the trends and developments happening in the retail market appears to be the consensus among suppliers when determining the next steps to take with headsets in the passenger experience industry. “The headphone design, production, and distribution continues to be an interesting part of our industry,” says Mockler. “It changes as the retail trends and electronic gadgets evolve. In order to stay fresh, we need to watch these trends and incorporate them into our industry.”



One of Inflight Direct's new headset models features popular angled rubber ear tips