

Seatback Cameras Giving Flying Public the Creeps

April 30, 2019 - Video cameras are pretty much everywhere these days but that doesn't mean that the public accepts them being everywhere. In fact, we all know that there are places that they turn up that are definitely off limits. In retail store dressing rooms and restrooms for instance. But what about when you hop on flight. Should that small flat screen monitor in the seat-back in front of you have a camera in it? And if it does, who is using that camera and for what purpose? That's a question that Delta, American and United Airlines are trying to address right now. And it is likely to come up with other airlines soon.

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You may think that the seatback displays in airplanes are custom made just for aircraft. That's apparently not the case though. According to statements from United Airlines, they are using off the shelf electronics for video displays. And those displays come with built in cameras and presumably microphones too. According to the airline, they are not being used but could eventually allow passengers to make video calls.

Why anyone would want to place a video call from an airliner is beyond me. And it doesn't require a tremendous amount of imagination to know what it would be like sitting next to a passenger making such a call. Can you imagine? There you are, trying to take a nap while the guy next to you proceeds to yell into the seatback in front of him. Oh joy! Sounds like an awful idea that only an airline could come up with. Just another way for the airline to punish everyone on the flight. Small seats, limited reclining capabilities, no peanuts because someone else on the flight might be allergic, movies that haven't been in theaters for eons and now this.

Fortunately, video calling isn't available yet. But that also means that the cameras in these seatbacks serve no purpose right now, so why have them in the first place. That question is raising a lot of eyebrows, and creating PR problems for the airlines.

American, United and Delta are now making moves to cover up the seat cameras already installed. United is saying that they have already covered the cameras with stickers. And American is saying they are going to cover them up. Of course, there is no word on whether or not these systems also contain microphones, but one can presume that they do.

Bottom line here is that the next time you fly, you may want to bring along some electrical tape of your own. That way you can cover the camera and any microphones even if the airline you're flying doesn't.

by Jim Malmberg

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