

Koddi

How to launch your airline media network

A strategic guide for modern airline leaders

A guide by Koddi

Monetise the entire journey, not just the destination



Airlines are poised to lead the next wave of commerce media

For decades, airlines have been pioneers in personalization, dynamic pricing, and loyalty—long before those capabilities became mainstream in other industries. They’ve mastered the interplay between data, emotion, and timing to meet travelers’ needs in highly variable environments.

Today, as digital advertising enters a new era powered by first-party data and commerce media, airlines have another opportunity to lead. Early adopters like United are already proving that commerce media isn’t just a marketing innovation—it’s a commercial strategy that delivers competitive advantage and incremental revenue in an increasingly constrained landscape.

The pressures facing airlines are real: fierce competition, rising fuel costs, and heightened traveler expectations. With operating margins razor thin, every opportunity to deepen traveler loyalty, increase trip frequency, and grow ancillary revenue matters. Commerce media allows airlines to do exactly that—transforming their digital touchpoints into measurable, brand-safe opportunities for advertisers while enhancing the traveler experience.

This guide is designed to help airlines navigate the journey from strategy to scale. You’ll learn what commerce media is, how to evaluate readiness, what teams and technology are required, how to go to market, and how to sustain growth once your network is live.

What commerce media means for airlines

Commerce media is the intersection of advertising, data, and transaction. It's what happens when media isn't just about reach, but about outcomes—when ads appear within the purchase journey and directly influence consumer behavior.

For airlines, commerce media represents a natural evolution of their digital ecosystem. Unlike traditional publishers or social platforms, airlines sit on a foundation of authenticated, first-party relationships. They know who their customers are, where they're going, and why. This context enables advertisers to connect with real travelers, in real time, at meaningful moments—without the noise or opacity that often accompanies third-party platforms.

Why it matters:

- + **Diversification of revenue.** Airlines can tap into high-margin media revenue that complements core operations.
- + **Traveler experience.** Personalized, relevant offers can make the journey smoother and more enjoyable, not disruptive.
- + **Advertiser value.** Brands gain access to high-intent audiences in a consented, brand-safe environment.
- + **Data utilization.** Airlines can finally activate the full potential of their customer data beyond loyalty and CRM.

Commerce media isn't about pushing ads—it's about integrating valuable, relevant offers into the traveler experience.

Assessing readiness—data, audience, and infrastructure

Launching a media network starts with understanding what you already have. For most airlines, the raw materials are already in place: audience reach, rich first-party data, and trusted digital channels. The challenge lies in connecting them through the right technology and governance frameworks. Here's what your team needs to consider:

1. Data accessibility

Your media network is selling ads to the anonymized customer data that you own. This data comes from your booking, loyalty, mobile app and digital marketing ecosystems. Key considerations for maximizing the value of your airline data are:

- + Is your customer data centralized, clean and actionable?
- + Do your consent and privacy structures meet regional and international standards?
- + Can you segment your audience data based on behaviors, actions or demographics?

Investing in the creation of strong data foundations will ensure that your media offering is credible, compliant and scalable.

2. Audience strength

Advertisers care less about volume and more about precision. A smaller but highly defined audience—say, “frequent business travelers to major financial hubs”—is often more valuable than a broad, anonymous one. Airlines can leverage:

- + Loyalty data (elite tiers, points activity, preferences)
- + Transactional data (routes, ancillary purchases)
- + Contextual data (trip purpose, timing, destination trends)

3. Technical readiness

The technology layer must support ad delivery, measurement, and reporting. Key components include:

- + **Ad serving infrastructure** for booking paths and digital surfaces.
- + **Data management and activation tools** for segment creation.
- + **Analytics and attribution frameworks** to measure outcomes.

Even if you start small, with a single data source or audience type, getting these fundamentals right will set your airline media program on the path for scalable, long-term success.

Defining your media network strategy

An airline media network is more than simply showing ads: it requires clear positioning, goals, and a roadmap. Here are key considerations for getting started:

1. Define your strategic objective

Decide early whether your network's purpose is:

- + **Revenue-first:** Prioritizing monetization and media sales.
- + **Experience-first:** Enhancing traveler relevance and engagement.
- + **Balanced:** Integrating both to create sustainable growth.

Your objective will influence everything—from pricing to product design to team structure.

2. Articulate your value proposition

Your value proposition answers the question: *Why should advertisers choose your airline network?*

Consider:

- + What makes your audience unique?
- + What brand-safe, high-quality contexts can you offer?
- + How can advertisers measure performance beyond impressions?

For example, a network positioned around “global, high-value travelers” might emphasize premium partnerships with luxury, finance, and hospitality brands.

3. Build a measurable framework

Advertisers expect transparency. Establish early on how you'll report campaign outcomes—whether through conversion tracking, brand lift, or incremental revenue impact. You'll need to think about how you want to visualize this: is it through a dashboard advertisers can log into and access? Will you send them individualized reports? Imagine how you'd like to do this for your first 10, 100, and even 1,000 advertisers.

A strategic framework ensures that your media business aligns with the airline's broader commercial and brand goals.

Building the right teams and governance

Commerce media is a cross-functional endeavor. Airlines that succeed treat it as a partnership between data, marketing, and technology.

1. Core teams

- + **Commercial & marketing:** Set strategy, pricing, and go-to-market positioning.
- + **Sales & partnerships:** Build relationships with brands, agencies, and demand platforms.
- + **Product & engineering:** Integrate ad formats across digital surfaces and ensure operational reliability.
- + **Data & analytics:** Drive audience segmentation, performance tracking, and optimization.
- + **Legal & privacy:** Ensure compliance with global data standards and customer trust.

2. Governance Model

Establish clear ownership of the media business—ideally under a dedicated commerce media or advertising division reporting to the Chief Commercial Officer or Chief Marketing Officer.

You'll need to define how ad inventory is prioritized against internal promotions, how pricing is set, and how revenue is attributed.

A transparent governance model prevents internal competition and keeps the media business aligned with the airline's core brand values.

Designing the media offering

The next step is to design what you'll actually sell, and how you'll sell it. Airlines have the advantage of owning multiple, high-value touchpoints that span the entire traveler journey. Here's what that looks like throughout the traveler journey.

1. On-site advertising

- + **Sponsored listings** within flight or ancillary search results.
- + **Display placements** on web and app surfaces (homepage, confirmation pages).
- + **Contextual recommendations** ("You might also like" or destination add-ons).

2. Off-site extensions

Using your audience data to reach travelers across external platforms—social, display, and video—through secure, privacy-compliant data partnerships.

This expands advertiser reach and gives you incremental media revenue without crowding your owned channels.

3. In-flight and physical environments

Your aircraft and airports are premium, captive environments. Opportunities include:

- + Video ads or interactive offers in inflight entertainment and WiFi splash pages.
- + QR-enabled experiences in seatback content.
- + Lounge activations or destination promotions.

4. Measurement and reporting

Measurement is what transforms advertising into commerce media. Advertisers must see the impact of campaigns on outcomes like booking, ancillary spend, or loyalty engagement for their brands.

Providing real-time dashboards, conversion tracking, and incrementality insights establishes credibility and retention.

Taking your network to advertisers

Once your offering is defined, the next challenge is introducing it to the world. The most successful airline networks launch with purpose, not just presence.

1. Start with a pilot phase

Begin with trusted partners—travel brands, credit cards, or tourism boards—to test inventory, formats, and reporting. The good news: you likely have strong partnerships built in through your loyalty programs. Start here, get the experience right, and keep moving. This lets you refine processes, prove value, and generate early case studies before scaling.

2. Develop a go-to-market narrative

Your network launch should tell a story: *We're transforming the traveler experience through relevant, responsible media.*

Support it with:

- + A dedicated website or portal outlining ad opportunities.
- + Sales collateral tailored for endemic (travel) and non-endemic (finance, retail, tech) advertisers.
- + Early success stories showing measurable ROI.

3. Choose a monetization model

Common approaches include:

- + CPM or CPC pricing for display and native placements.
- + Fixed sponsorships for premium surfaces (e.g., inflight entertainment, loyalty newsletters).
- + Managed or self-serve models depending on maturity and volume.

Flexibility is key. As the network evolves, dynamic pricing and yield optimization tools can help maximize both advertiser results and airline revenue.

How commerce media strengthens the airline business

A well-run media network benefits far more than the marketing department—it becomes a strategic asset across the organization.

1.

Enhancing customer experience

Relevant offers and partnerships make the traveler journey more personal and valuable. When done thoughtfully, advertising becomes a service.

2.

Deepening data intelligence

Activating first-party data for media enables richer analytics that benefit revenue management, loyalty, and customer experience teams alike.

3.

Driving strategic partnerships

Media networks create new ways to collaborate with destinations, hotels, and global brands—extending your ecosystem and brand influence.

4.

Creating long-term value

Commerce media transforms an airline's digital footprint from a cost center into a profit engine. It also builds resilience—diversifying revenue streams beyond ticketing and ancillaries, and positioning the airline as a platform business.

Partnering for the journey ahead

Launching an airline media network is both an opportunity and a transformation. It demands a shift in mindset—from operating flights to orchestrating experiences, from selling seats to monetizing intent. The airlines that succeed will be those that approach commerce media not as an add-on, but as a core capability of their digital strategy.

No two networks will look alike. Some will start with simple on-site placements; others will integrate full-funnel audience activation and off-site partnerships. What matters most is control—over data, technology, and traveler experience.

At Koddi, we work with airlines at every stage of that journey: from readiness assessments and infrastructure planning to advanced monetization, optimization, and demand integration. Whether you're exploring how to begin or ready to scale, our mission is to help you turn your traveler relationships into lasting, measurable growth.

The future of airline media is already boarding. The question is—are you ready to take off?

For all commerce media.™

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