JETBLUE MECHANICS CHOOSE IPAD MINI 3 FOR DIGITAL AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE TOOLBOX

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After putting iPad 4 into operation as an electronic flight bag in 2013, then iPad mini 3 for in-flight cabin services this year, U.S. airline JetBlue is turning to Apple's tablet platform to aid aircraft maintenance technicians.

In its new role at JetBlue, iPad will serve as a portable digital toolbox to help mechanics operate on sensitive aircraft systems safely and efficiently, *Aviation Week* reported last week. *AppleInsider* reader Timothy alerted us to the development.

The iPad mini initiative will allow mechanics to quickly identify and resolve technical issues without the need for desktops, thereby dramatically reducing or eliminating wait times caused by short-term technical delays, which are defined as mechanical problems that can be fixed in less than ten minutes.

"We look at mobile devices as a staple tool — much like a wrench — that a technician needs to do his job," said Tony Lowery, vice president of technical operations at JetBlue. "I believe our technicians will wonder how they did without mobile devices, just as we wonder how we did

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without cell phones for so many years."

Lowery said the decision to implement iPad mini 3 is the culmination of a comprehensive evaluation process that started in early 2014. A group of JetBlue technicians, and two quality control inspectors, vetted four comparable devices running iOS, Android, Windows and an unidentified open source operating system over a period of six months. After choosing iPad, JetBlue slowly rolled out test units to more technicians for further evaluation.

Testing took a number of potential issues into account, including ease of use, integration with JetBlue's existing IT backend, protection from viruses and device familiarity, among others. Interestingly, while some pundits were disappointed by Apple's latest iPad mini update, which comes down to Touch ID and a new gold color option, JetBlue's technicians said the inclusion of biometrics was a key factor in their final decision.

The airline's maintenance team officially switched over to iPad in August and currently has more than 500 technicians using iPad mini 3 toolboxes across the company's 11 line maintenance stations. The program picked up steam earlier this summer with some 300 mechanics receiving units in June and July. As a side note, Lowery said those who are issued iPads can take them home to "increase familiarity and instill a sense of ownership."

JetBlue first brought iPad into the cockpit in 2013 as a replacement for paper-based flight bags. As part of the program, pilots are trained to use three core apps providing real-time weather, pre-flight planning and airport and aircraft charts, all running on JetBlue's in-flight Wi-Fi backbone.

Earlier this year, the New York-based airline issued specialized iPad mini 3 hardware to cabin crewmembers for conducting point of sale transactions — with Apple Pay support — as well as viewing documents, manuals and forms, and accessing management software.

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