

# wideofthemark

Daniel Baron of Lift Strategic Design sees no need for two aisles on future short-haul aircraft

So what's going to replace the Boeing 737 and Airbus A320? I keep hearing tantalizing talk of a twin-aisle solution featuring a 2-2-2 economy cabin. True, 2-2-2 would indeed mean less anxiety prior to the trip. Even if unable to pre-book an aisle or window seat, none of the last-minute options would be as nightmarish as they are now. Stress levels would decrease over a wide spectrum of humanity. Global peace might break out.

But assuming that the economics allowed for a slightly wider cabin, would 2-2-2 actually save the world? Using the standard seat and armrest widths, it would not address a critical issue: nobody actually wants to sit closely to anyone, unless the seatmate in question is a family member, partner or target of a sexual conquest. 2-2-2 with conventional spacing would not reverse the reality that we humans are getting larger (in every direction), and that our elbows often commit involuntary violation of borders during intensive typing and passionate game-playing. Ditto for long legs straying into aisles. Our shapes and behaviours have rendered the current dimensions utterly redundant.

Twin aisles would not be the holy grail of service delivery either. Cabin crew numbers aren't going up anytime soon, and ruthless seat packing might necessitate long marches back to the galley. Human overflow would mean collisions between passengers and carts in two aisles, not just one.

All carriers have access to sophisticated yield management software. Now what they really need is a super-flexible, convertible, narrow-body cabin that enables them to sell different products depending on market, sector length and/or time of day, with no extra labour for configuration changes. The future narrow-body cabin should therefore give lateral space between passengers precedence over number of aisles. How to achieve this? Simple. A slightly wider fuselage in a 3-3 configuration, with current seatback widths – but with wider centre armrests. The primary benefit: even with a 100% load factor, all customers get more 'breathing space' and the middle seat is no longer akin to medieval torture. The extra inches in each triple would mean additional space under and above seats for stowage, slightly deeper closets and lavatories, and a pinch of new vertical space in the galleys.

A wider triple would deliver the quick product change flexibility that airlines need. The aircraft could perform single-class, short-haul sectors during the day and then overnight flights with the



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spacious triples sold to a single customer at a premium, with sleep pad, comforter and pillow included. No additional dividers or labour time would be necessary. The à la carte enhanced offering would be popular with business travellers forced to fly economy. Many of these road warriors would pay out of their own pocket for the guaranteed ability to get horizontal (conquests aside).

These fabulous additional inches would also create new possibilities for business-class seat designs, and for long-haul niche players who want to offer a high-density, low-fare affair in the back but 'owner class' luxury up front.

Conventional categories continue to blur as airlines tweak their models to cut costs and increase revenue. Creative tweaking is the new norm, and product differentiation remains critical for brand loyalty. At the heart of my wild 'wide 3-3' concept is a cabin designed for today's needs, with built-in flexibility for tomorrow. ☒



A WIDER TRIPLE WOULD  
DELIVER THE QUICK PRODUCT  
CHANGE FLEXIBILITY THAT  
AIRLINES NEED

01. Wider centre armrests – the way forward?

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