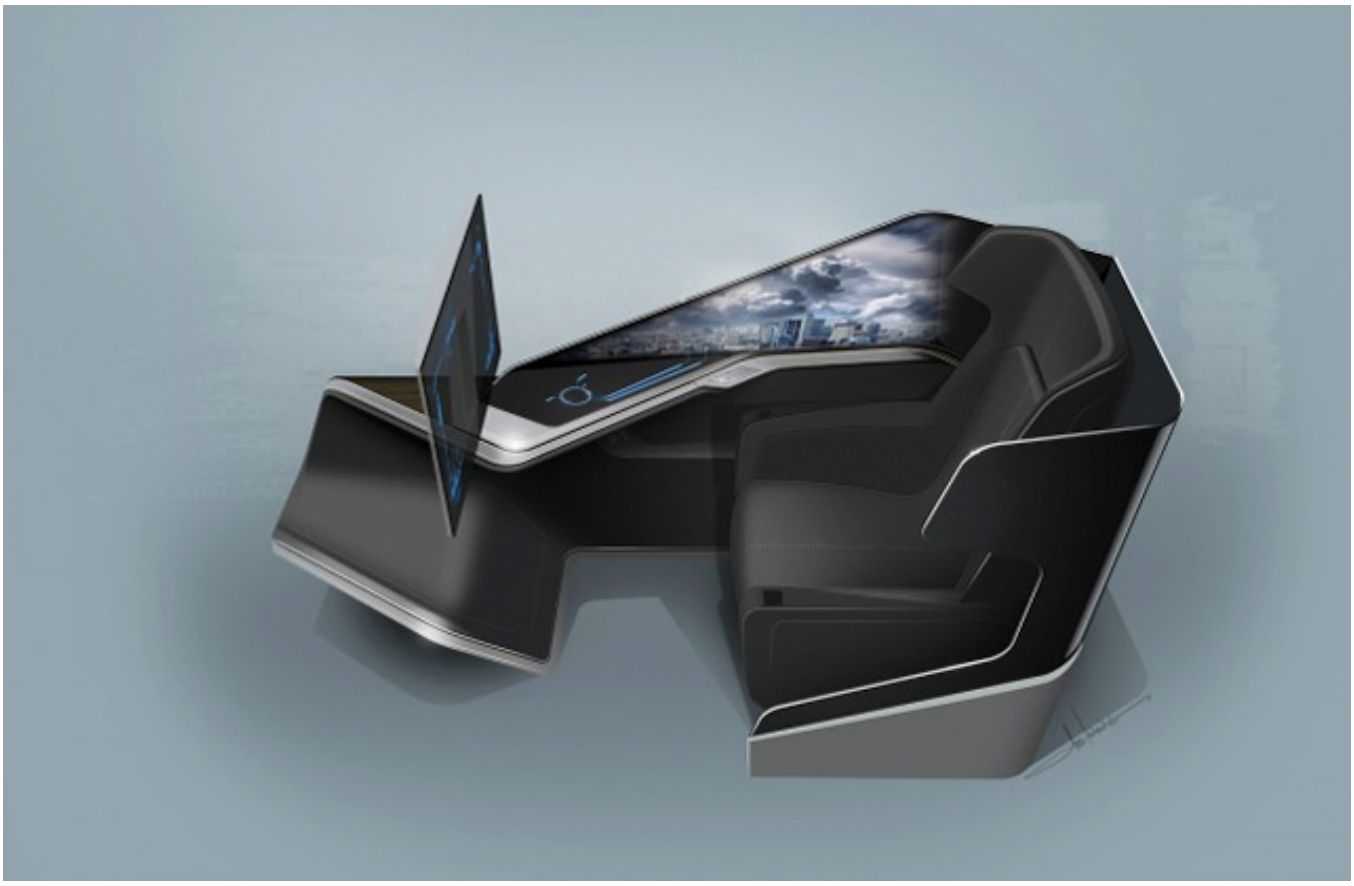
App-controlled airplane seat lets passengers customize their experience before they board

A key aspect of a holiday is comfort, and consumers come in all shapes and sizes when it comes to what helps them feel at ease. While we've already seen the UK's Whitbread hotel chain let guests customize their room before they arrive through its hub project, now Thales Group has unveiled its Immersive Business Class Seat, an airplane seat that can be controlled by an app and detect entertainment preferences using social data.

Created in collaboration with B/E Aerospace and BMW DesignworksUSA, the system consists of a luxury semi-private space which features an ultra HD display, surround sound and touchpad controls. Those booking the seats can download a companion app through which they can manually select the configuration of the space, entertainment and on-board services before they board the plane. Optionally, they can load their social media profiles to let the app detect the preferences they might like.



When they arrive, the seat connects to passengers' smartphones via NFC and automatically loads their settings. All preferences are stored in the app so customers can enjoy their personal configuration on any Immersive Business Class Seat ticket.

Finally, the seat also uses eye-tracking technology to detect when fliers have fallen asleep, enabling automatic pausing of their in-flight film. If they leave a plane halfway through a film, for example, the app will remember and ask them if they want to pick it up again on their next flight.

The seat was recently demonstrated at the Aircraft Interiors Expo 2014 in Hamburg, although Thales doesn't expect it to be commercially available for another five years — unless significant interest demands its production to be completed more quickly. In the meantime, are there other ways airlines could provide personalization options prior to boarding?

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