

WiFi on motorcoaches is beginning to hit the road

PORTLAND, Ore — Introducing a new product to the motorcoach industry can be particularly challenging.

First, motorcoach operators must be made aware of the product, then sold on the idea it would be smart business to put in on their buses, and ultimately convinced the product is near bulletproof, meaning it will be reliable in all kinds of adverse situations, require little maintenance and be relatively easy and inexpensive to repair when it inevitably fails.

Often, those are nearly impossible hurdles to clear, especially those related to initial price and long-run costs.

That is what companies pushing a relatively new internet technology known as WiFi are currently finding. WiFi is a synonym for wireless internet. It essentially allows computer — and an increasing number of cell phone — users to connect to the internet at locations away from office and home.

Today, the industry is becoming educated about the availability and capability of WiFi on motorcoaches. “The stuff exists (but many operators) don’t realize it’s out there,” says Rob Taylo, CEO of WiFi in Motion, a Portland-based company that specializes in WiFi products for buses, recreational vehicles and boats.

WiFi in Motion is a new exhibitor at UMA Motorcoach Expo 2009 in Orlando. “We create the highway to allow the (internet) traffic,” says Taylo.

Upfront capital is one of the main issues in getting the equipment on the road, acknowledges Taylo, because companies can’t budget for something when they don’t know it exists. “The upfront equipment cost can be a challenge for operators.”

WiFi In Motion partners with a decade-old Swedish company, Icomera, for its technology. Icomera units can be found on coaches across Europe, including double-decker buses in London.

“Europe is a little bit ahead of the curve in this,” says Taylo.

WiFi In Motion’s premium unit, called the Moovbox, costs about \$1,600 a bus, and uses cellular access. It can handle extreme temperatures and allows for GPS use and multiple WiFi users. Its other capabilities include e-ticketing, integration with onboard security systems and automated overhead paging. Multi-unit discounts are available.

Service for the cellular air cards that connect the motorcoach to WiFi run \$60 a month per card. The Moovbox system uses two cards, one of which can simultaneously support 16 laptops online. The other card is dedicated to the other features.

A more basic product, the WiFi Lite System, is only for WiFi and is not equipped to handle extreme temperatures. It runs about \$900 per bus. It also can handle 16 users.

Installation, typically done by the client’s maintenance shop, takes about an hour and a half.

Taylo says there are options for helping cover costs. One is having a “splash page,” which comes up when the user connects his laptop to the system. The splash page can have advertising on it. Also, an ad-

ditional charge can be placed on the rental of buses equipped with WiFi.

The ability to offer WiFi on buses can be a powerful marketing tool, says Taylo.

“The idea of connecting fleets to the Internet requires a leap into the market,” he says. “It requires forward-thinking, early-adoption, safety methodology, or a demanding client to drive the idea.”



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