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New airline tray table designs that could rock your in-flight world

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CAPTIONS

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By Mary Forgione
Daily Deal and Travel Blogger
January 30, 2014 | 8:30 a.m.

Airlines love to push cushier seats, more legroom and seat-to-seat chatting to woo fliers to their brand, but what about tray tables? They're not the sexiest selling point, but new designs with electronic tablets could change that.

A company called [SmartTray International](#) is partnering with Northridge-based Satterfield Aerospace to develop tray tables for economy-class travelers that go beyond the so-last-century blocks of plastic on most planes today. "The only thing more abused on airplanes than travelers is the airline tray," SmartTray President Brian Queenin said Wednesday.

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The phrase has become his selling point for rethinking what has become many fliers' platform for entertainment or work. Most people in coach (me included) find it awkward to use a tablet or laptop while trying to juggle a soda and bag of peanuts in the same space.



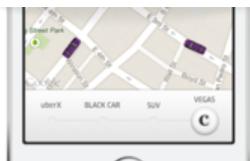
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SmartTray hopes to design away that problem. One design called X1 features a groove that acts as a tablet stand, which leaves the rest of the space free for work or eating. A second, X2, clips the tablet into the tray in the tray's upright position, making it easier and safer to use the tablet during landings and takeoffs.

The X3 option would change how airlines present their in-flight entertainment programs. It replaces the seat-back system with a tablet that can be programmed with safety instructions, SkyMall and airline magazines, ads and other information. It's cheaper and lighter too, something Queenin says could help airlines cut fuel costs.

"With the advances in technology and sophistication of the everyday user getting much more technically proficient, [tray tables] become a more sexy platform," Queenin said.

But will these trays accommodate all gadgets? Right now the designs run toward the size of an iPad Mini but they're still being worked on. Queenin says the company is in negotiations with national and international carriers (though he wouldn't identify which ones), and may debut as soon as the end of the year.

Take a look at other features of [SmartTray's new designs](#).

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