



# FLYING CONNECTED AT MEREDITH:

How corporate aircraft Wi-Fi changed the game for the media company

## Quick Facts

**Featured pilot:** Gary Stone

**Position:** Assistant Chief Pilot at Meredith Corporation

**Aircraft:** Two Embraer Legacy 450s

**Systems on board:** Air-to-ground (ATG) connectivity on both 450s

**Aircraft location:** Des Moines, Iowa

**Average flight time:** 2 hours

**Annual usage:** 600 hours per year

**Gogo customer since 2017**

**M**eredith Corporation, a global media and marketing services company, has owned corporate aircraft for almost 50 years. Only two years ago, however, Assistant Chief Pilot Gary Stone and his team helped make the decision to add inflight Wi-Fi to their two airplanes for the first time. We sat down with Gary to get his take on flying before and after inflight connectivity, why Wi-Fi is so critical to passengers and crew, and his favorite apps, features, and capabilities.

**Tell us about your day-to-day as a pilot for Meredith Corporation.**

I'm the Assistant Chief Pilot at Meredith. Our organization has been in aviation for many years, so operating corporate aircraft isn't new to us. We have two airplanes and seven pilots, and one aircraft is usually in the air. Most of my day-to-day is spent flying, but I also schedule the crews for flying and training, standardize our crew's procedures, and assist with the policy making.

**Why did Meredith decide to add inflight connectivity to the aircraft?**

I've flown with Meredith for a long time, but we didn't have Wi-Fi until we switched from Learjet to Legacies two years ago. When we switched, there was really no debate whether or not we'd put connectivity on the airplane. We were already behind the curve. Our passengers were just used to Wi-Fi by then because they'd flown on plenty of airplanes with it. And their first question to us was whether we had it on our jets. It was a no-brainer.

**Why did Meredith choose Gogo? Did you play a role in that decision?**

I did. Our corporate management team and the Chief Pilot and I helped choose the airplanes and everything in the airplane. We knew the corporate passengers wanted Wi-Fi. It was not even a debate. So we looked at a few alternatives. Gogo made the most sense because 99% of the time we fly in the U.S., so we weren't interested in satellite.

We wanted a reliable domestic ATG [air-to-ground] network. We thought ground-based made the most sense and Gogo was the market leader. The decision to go with Gogo was made fairly early on.

**What are the primary ways that people use your inflight Wi-Fi?**

We use Wi-Fi constantly in flight, both in the cabin and in the cockpit. As pilots, we're always looking down the road, checking weather, live radar, communicating with the office as we fly, our scheduler, maintenance, you name it. We used to have to do all that by sending messages out of the airplane, which took a while and wasn't nearly as convenient. The instant ability to communicate is just a game-changer.

I would say weather apps are the ones we use most often with Wi-Fi. We like ARINC Direct for radar and weather checking. The onboard radar is our primary radar and we have XM weather on the airplane, but we use the apps when one of those systems fails. I like the Weather Channel app for cloud tops and movement too.

We also use Flightdocs a lot to communicate with maintenance. We can keep them totally up to date with any maintenance issues and any questions that we have. While they're on the ground, they're seeing our Flightdocs messages and they're updating us with what they're working on, so we can check things as we fly. It makes it much more efficient.





There's also a fair amount of texting to the folks ahead. Wi-Fi gives us instant communication with our people on the ground. We'll let them know what time we're going to arrive at our destination and make sure we have all the arrangements set up for ground transportation. It helps us more quickly and effectively stay in touch with people and keep things coordinated. Those are huge and positive changes.

Oh, and we use a little Twitter once in a while, so we don't miss out on what's happening in the world.

**As a pilot, how would you compare life before Wi-Fi vs. after?**

Weather is really a big one. With Wi-Fi, now we're able to stay totally on top of current weather, covering the whole United States. In the early days, onboard radar would reach about 100 miles. That was the only weather you had unless you used the radio and called down and someone would describe what they were seeing. We now instantly have all this live weather for flying. We go from Des Moines to New York all the time and we can plan way ahead and make route adjustments on the fly.

**What are the biggest benefits of Wi-Fi from your passengers' perspective?**

It's funny - you can always tell when we hit 10,000 feet. Before then, the passengers are all talking to each other and then it just goes quiet because they're all online. They check email,

*“Onboard Wi-Fi is absolutely something you don't want to be without. The productivity and ability to accomplish so much in the air makes a huge difference. I would highly recommend it to anyone.”*

market reports, that kind of thing. It's important that when we land in New York, for instance, they're ready to go. I was just talking to a guy yesterday who told me that with Wi-Fi, when they land in New York after a two-hour flight from Des Moines, it's like they're two hours ahead of the game when they get on the ground. A lot can happen in two hours, especially during something like an acquisition; that ability to communicate and stay abreast of whatever project they're working on is a really big deal.

It makes a difference when we're flying customers, too. We'll often bring them into Des Moines or take them to New York so they can be wined and dined, and they almost always ask if we have Wi-Fi on the plane. When we used to say “no” they lived with it, but now it makes a very positive impression. They're able to continue what they're doing and we're able to make sure that transportation and all the logistics for them are all squared away. With the Wi-Fi, when we land and taxi in, our representatives are standing at the hangar waiting for them and everything is off to the right start.

**Has Gogo's service and performance lived up to your expectations?**

Customer service has been excellent. When we have issues, they've been there to help resolve them, giving us legitimate suggestions for how to improve whatever's going on.

Our airplane holds 9 passengers and 2 pilots and we fly full quite a bit. With 9 people on board and everyone has their iPhone and iPad and laptop, we test the limits and bandwidth of the system. We get very few complaints and the service



is great. We're on ATG 5000 for now but AVANCE may be in our future to get even faster service and more bandwidth. It comes down to productivity: for what people are really trying to do, it works. People can accomplish what they want to accomplish as they fly along.

**Operationally speaking, are there any specific Gogo offerings that you find particularly useful?**

I like Gogo DASH for troubleshooting. It shows us how many devices are on, service outages, we can track usage and pass info on to maintenance.

**Any good anecdotes about times when Wi-Fi made a difference on your flight?**

At the last minute when you have to change destination, you can pass that word on so much faster. We used to have to pick the flight phone up and hope someone answers. Now, if we know we're changing destinations because of weather, the car will beat us to the destination. As soon as we know, we get the word to the scheduler so she can get busy arranging things. From dropping off passengers to picking up passengers, it's much more convenient for them. So when you taxi in, the cars are there and no one misses anything. Every time that happens, the Wi-Fi is worth its weight in gold.

As far as specific stories, there was a situation that made us chuckle the other day. We were flying one of our execs and I had emailed him something earlier in the day that I needed him to respond to. So as he was getting on the plane, he said, "Hey, I'm going to get those answers to you tonight." Then we're flying and I check my email from my phone and he had replied from the back of the plane. So, I reply back from the front of the plane and we go back and forth a few times, sitting 10 feet away from each other. We were joking that it's kind of like being at home and your whole family's together and

sometimes you text each other instead of walking into the next room. When we got off the plane that day, I told him, "Hey, just so you know, there is a difference between emailing and flying and texting and driving" and he laughed. He knows we've got a pretty sophisticated autopilot system.

**If a fellow pilot asked if inflight Wi-Fi is worth it, how would you respond?**

It's absolutely worth it. It's something you don't want to be without. The productivity, the ability to accomplish so much in the air, it makes a huge difference. I would highly recommend it to anyone. I'm certain that it would be easy to prove the ROI on productivity alone if you had the numbers. And it's not just work stuff. A guy mentioned to me that he likes it as he's flying home at the end of the day so he can be in touch with his family, hear what they're doing, what's going on. Onboard Wi-Fi adds tremendous value to quality of life on top of productivity. Can't beat that.

**The passenger's perspective: Thoughts from a Meredith executive**

"Inflight Wi-Fi has been a game changer for me. I'm generally in the air for 2-3 hours at a time and the ability to check and respond to email and texts allows me to be caught up and focused on why I traveled to that destination. The ability to text my spouse and children has been a nice work/life benefit too. I also appreciate being able to use apps to check the latest news, weather and sports.

From a business perspective, having Wi-Fi on the plane is a feature that we believe pays for itself in increased productivity. In addition, the planes that have Wi-Fi capabilities seem to increase in value enough to cover its original cost."

- *Doug Olson, President, Meredith Magazines and GM, National Media Group*

**Looking forward**

Meredith Corporation is considering installing AVANCE L5 on both aircraft in the future. Upgrading will give them better performance for their passengers with the ability to stream audio and video content. AVANCE L5 also offers integrated inflight entertainment, remote diagnostics, and additional pilot data. Plus, their aircraft will be future-ready for Gogo 5G in 2021.