

Snakes on a plane – or just meetings on a plane

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Introduction

Prior to COVID-19, work consisted of working in an office. In a brave new world - that has followed COVID-19 - much has been written about the benefits of remote work. A number of companies are even offering employees the opportunity to work from anywhere all of the time. Spotify and Atlassian are two large operations demonstrating the point. PWC Australia now offer employees remote working for up to 8 weeks as noted recently in the Australian Financial Review.

A number of articles, blogs and books have been published about the advantages for both the employer and employees. A Google search on 'benefits of remote work' reveals some 630,000,000 results in 0.45 seconds. What is missing in the publications are actual tips and tricks to work effectively from anywhere. The 'anywhere' being a plane, airport, shared office or hotel lobby.

As we are now two years into COVID-19 disrupted workforce members, employees, stakeholders and customers are becoming less forgiving with internet connection issues, noisy backgrounds and microphone mishaps. Working from anywhere or remote work requires some planning and equipment for it to be seamless.

This article is inspired by the author's experience on a recent flight - For transparency the flight was Sydney to Melbourne flying with *Virgin Airlines*. The conclusion is that working on a plane can be done but there needs to be some preparation prior to flying.

First and foremost your equipment needs to be taken on board with you. For the purposes of this article the author travelled with a laptop Lenovo Think Book 15 Gen 4, Logitech wireless mouse and an iPhone.

Time of Flight

If you know you have to work on a flight look carefully at the time of your flight. Are you planning a red eye flight? Then working on the plane is not going to be popular with your fellow passengers. You will need to factor in a dimly lit cabin for the video calls.

Carry-on Luggage

Before getting on a flight look at your carry-on luggage. Does your bag allow you to fit your equipment neatly and in an orderly fashion? Take a quick inventory of chargers and cords. Do you have them and are they able to be accessed quickly? One suggestion is to carry small cosmetics purses and place your chargers in it. This allows you to remember where you put the chargers and more importantly it will not be tangled.

Noise cancelling headphones

Planes are noisy so noise cancelling headphones are a must. While the traditional over the ear phones are good they may not be practical for a plane. Instead, a set of wireless ear buds are invaluable. They do not weigh much and are small enough to carry in your pocket or handbag. As a tip make sure that, your headphones are connected to your device via the

blue tooth **before** you board the plane. Blue tooth is often disabled during a flight. The author recommends Jabra Active 75T noise cancelling earbuds. The battery life is 5.5 hours in contrast Air Pods Pro have a battery life of 3.5 hours (talk time). The volume on the earbuds will also need to be adjusted to take into account the noisier surroundings on a plane. A helpful suggestion would be to test all the equipment such as laptop, microphone and ear buds **before** you get on the flight.

Masks

The wearing of masks, on all domestic flights in Australia, remains compulsory for the time being. However, what does this mean if you are on a call? How do you look? The mask will cover a large proportion of your face (if worn correctly). This means that your meeting participants will not be able to read your facial expressions during the meeting. All in all this will require you as the participant to verbally articulate your thoughts during the meeting.

In addition, your video photo may look unusual. One suggestion would be to wear a funny mask. Again, it depends on the subject matter of the meeting. If the meeting were serious in nature, sticking to a dark coloured or neutral coloured mask would be the best option. It may be prudent to warn your meeting colleagues prior to the meeting that you are on a plane and cannot remove a mask.

Internet

Most domestic flights in Australia do offer free WIFI. These can be 'sketchy' at the best of times. To minimise disruption for the meeting and save bandwidth, if possible turn the video off. In addition, Virgin airlines (for example) does offer the 'high speed' (paid) option for internet. This may be the best option for anyone wishing to conduct a meeting without disruption.

Laptops and devices

The number one rule before you get on the plane is to make sure that your device is charged. This means laptop, tablet, ear buds and mobile phone. Better still charge them at the terminal before you board.

Mouse

Some people love them some people hate them. However, for remote work a charged wireless mouse is invaluable. A wireless mouse is compact and portable. Just remember to charge it before the flight and also ensure that the USB connector is in your laptop.

Passengers

Working on a plane may not be ideal when you are sharing close quarters with seat mates. If you can try and get the window seat. The window seat offers the least amount of interference in the guise of drink trolleys going past and or passengers asking you to move during the flight. It may be wise to even tell your seat mates that you are working. Generally, if you wear your wireless headphones most people will know it is a sign you are not in a talkative mood.

Software

If you use other software such as Otter Ai to take notes there are a few things to remember. Such software relies on an audio recording to transcribe. If you are on mute wearing headphones such software cannot be used. As a tip if you find it difficult to take notes in a meeting use TEAMS. TEAMS - when it records a meeting – serves as a transcript function.

The downside is that TEAMS recording will not highlight important parts of the meeting (unlike Otter Ai).

Natural Lighting

Natural lighting is important for video calls. On a plane, this can be difficult (if not impossible). The use of artificial lighting with lamps also is not practical. For the optimum lighting effect, keep your blinds open if possible. Another suggestion is to use the torch facility on the iPhone. To avoid looking too dark. This author kept the torch on and mounted the iPhone on top of the laptop. It was a crude but effective measure. As a note the author did tell her seat mates about the meeting and the use of a torch (who as expected were disinterested).

Conclusion

Remote working can be done successfully. This includes from aeroplanes. What it does require is some planning prior to the flight and mostly importantly - a sense of humour.

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