

Advertising in the Friendly Skies

It is not a new phenomenon that the airlines sell advertising. Their main selling points always involve the terms "captive audience," since at 25,000 feet no one is going anywhere. On my USAir flight on Friday, I noticed that the airline has certainly been working this captive audience angle. All ticket jackets had an ad for Geico and its ubiquitous gecko. And one flight segment, the tray tables were covered over with a ad on a sticker. The interesting thing is that although I did use the tray table, I cannot recall what the advertiser was. I do recall the product—it was virtual voicemail. I think that this is the challenge for advertising on board—you can't take action and you may not have pen and paper readily available to make a note to check when you get back on the ground. Or you may be wrapped up in your book or traveling companion's conversation to even notice.

On the other hand, Skymall must be somewhat successful. They have had their catalog onboard for many years. Skymall offers the most unusual selection of goods (whether you NEED any of these is another discussion). People who board a flight without any reading material or other forms of entertainment nearly always end up perusing the catalog. I wonder if any buy or if it's just a source of amusement.

In any case, the airlines are desperate for additional sources of income. As discussed a few days ago, USAir is set to start charging for "premium" seats in economy class, and all airlines will start charging fees for the second piece of checked baggage come May. It will not surprise me if soon we start seeing ads being played on the TV monitors at full volume for at least the first few minutes of the flight. It will also not surprise me if the flight attendants start pushing a product other than the airlines' own credit

card/frequent flyer program.