

# Want to sell premium sheet to aircraft interior specifiers at high profit?

PLASTICS IN  
AEROSPACE

by Adam Mellen

**T**he secret for distributors to penetrate the lucrative aircraft interiors market is to arm yourself with more than aircraft-rated sheet products. Simply complying with aircraft fire ratings and toxicity standards is a given; without allowable products you're not even in the game. To win big you must also motivate aircraft interior specifiers by maximizing aesthetic and functional attributes. You must also partner with suppliers who will help you close sales and, above all, remain faithful to you as a distribution partner.

Following are the five essentials every distributor should know if they want to sell premium sheet to aircraft interior specifiers at high profit.

## 1. The baseline: offer sheet that meets aircraft fire, smoke and toxicity standards

High performance thermoplastic alloy sheet products that qualify for aircraft interior applications must be certified as meeting stringent FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) standards for flammability, heat release and smoke generation including: FAR 25.853 A1 F, Part IV-6565; FAR 25.853 (d); FAR 25.853 A1(i); and FAR 25.853 A1.



The plastic components of this aircraft seat were thermoformed with Boltaron 4330 sold through one of its international distribution partners. Boltaron 4330 meets FAR 25.853 (a) flammability requirements.

In addition, many aircraft interior applications also require compliance with Airbus ABD-0031 and Boeing D6-51377 toxicity standards to limit toxic gas emissions when burned.

It is therefore fundamental that your sheet supplier offers products that carry the above certifications. It is important to note, however, that thermoplastic formulations developed to meet these standards typically incur significant reductions in physical property values, particularly impact resistance. Since the properties of competing fire-rated sheet properties can vary widely, it is incumbent on you, the reseller, to align yourself with a supplier whose sheet products offer the most desirable properties for any given fire rating and/or category of product.

## 2. Offer a diversity of solid colors, metallics, clear, wood grains and patterns that add value

Getting into the door of aircraft interior specifiers, and influencing his/her specifications, often depends on how many different types of aircraft rated sheet grades, colors and patterns you have to offer. The greater the diversity, the more likely you are to differentiate yourself from competing resellers, and to satisfy your customer's aesthetic preferences.

You should therefore determine whether the suppliers you are considering offer the following:

- Solid colors in a standard or unlimited range
- Translucent colors
- Clear sheet
- Wood grain prints
- Custom patterns
- Thicknesses from .003 to 3.0 inches (.076 to 76.2 mm)
- Standard or unlimited surface textures
- Scratch resistant surfaces
- Scratch resistant, integral metallic colors
- Low, medium and high gloss surface textures



Aircraft armrest thermoformed using Boltaron 9815M, a proprietary, FAR 25.853 (a) and (d) rated, PVC/acrylic alloy that meets FAA requirements for flame, heat release and smoke generation.

Most aircraft interior projects start small and then grow, so your supplier should also offer very low minimums on all variants of its sheet products to remove an important obstacle in closing a sale.

## 3. Offer cost and performance advantages that motivate specifiers

Contrary to the assumptions that most resellers are new to this market, aircraft specifiers are highly sensitive to cost. But unlike their general industrial counterparts, aircraft specifiers are less inclined to sacrifice properties, and tend to focus more on performance per dollar.

You should therefore partner with a supplier that offers sheet products having, on average, greater physical properties than competitive sheet of the same cost, lower cost than competitive sheet products having equivalent physical properties, or better, the highest physical properties as well as the lowest cost.

You can easily evaluate aircraft rated sheet products of major manufacturers in terms of Izod impact resistance, specific gravity, tensile strength, flexural modulus, Rockwell hardness, heat deflection, heat release, NBS smoke and thermal expansion, by comparing specifications of individual grades online.

Critically important is sheet quality, which should not be assumed just because of brand. For those new to aircraft interior or sheet sales, you are likely unaware of problems such as pits and inclusions associated with certain sheet products after forming. News travels fast among aerospace specifiers, so be certain the sheet you chose to sell has an excellent reputation.

**4. Partner with a sheet supplier that offers a well-known aerospace brand, and a staff of aircraft interior specialists available for joint sales calls**

As plastics distributors service many industries you should utilize the knowledge of your aircraft sheet suppliers. The specifiers you will call on are exceptionally knowledgeable, the sheet products you'll be selling are highly engineered, which can be overwhelming. Your sheet supplier can assist with joint calls focusing on the technical aspect while you focus on the value you add as a distributor.

While you do need to evaluate major manufacturers of aircraft sheet in terms of the number of available grades, differences in properties, diversity of decorative options, and their reputations, your primary purpose in doing so should be to



The plastic components of this aircraft seat were made using Boltaron 9815E, a proprietary, thin gauge film that meets stringent FAR 25.853 (a)(d) requirements for flammability, smoke density and heat release.

determine which suppliers are true aerospace specialists, which will offer you the required training, and which are most able and willing to accompany you on sales calls.

Your supplier's sales staff should show you how to approach airline manufacturers, seat manufacturers, aftermarket seat suppliers, aircraft repair contractors and other aerospace specifiers. They should also accompany you on sales calls.

In aerospace, success depends on a team sell. Your responsibility as a distributor is distinctly different from that of your suppliers. The more overlap of knowledge the better, but in the case of aerospace sales, co-dependence is a good thing.

**5. Partner with a supplier with a track record of protecting the distributor**

As a distributor, an aircraft sheet supplier's behavior can be as pivotal to your success as the quality, selection and price of its products.

At the onset, your primary goal should be to determine which supplier is the most distributor oriented and has the reputation of quality, teamwork and loyalty to distribution partners.

In the end, your success depends on combining the value of plastics distribution with the knowledge and extensive product offering of your supplier. ■

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