

The Last non-App Cockpit

By Chris Hope, Master CFI

To everything, there is a season – A time to reap, a time to sow, a time to add an app, a time to put the electronics aside. OK, neither Ecclesiastics nor the Byrds ever stated it quite that way. But to read any aviation magazine within the last twelve months, a person would think that it is impossible to fly without an iPad or glass panel in the cockpit. At the risk of sounding “so last century” I would like to offer some thoughts to the contrary.

First of all, I admit that I am of an age where I take a strong interest in the conversations regarding Medicare. However, I spent a number of years writing computer programs, so it is not that I am totally computer illiterate. And while I can still nail an NDB approach.(assuming that the needle ever stabilizes), I also love the situational awareness and the three-dimensional accuracy afforded with a moving map and a GPS signal. But when we start putting a Garmin G-1000 display into a sport aircraft, I think we have misplaced our capabilities.

I find myself regularly flying with pilots in aircraft with 1970s technology, as well as in new aircraft with all of the glass that money can buy. And I have found that the pilots with the most problems with maintaining aircraft control and with situational awareness are those pilots using iPads or similar devices. And this is mostly the case with non-instrument pilots.

So, why is this? Why, with an extra \$\$\$\$ spent on keeping the airplane upright and computing our position, do we have such a problem keeping the airplane upright and computing our position? I think it all has to do with deciding (by default) that we would rather be computer operators than pilots.

It is becoming true that as we decide we can carry more information with us in our electronic carry-alls, we actually carry less information in our minds. Let’s remember that there is an advantage to becoming totally familiar with our VFR route as well as memorizing the three or four radio frequencies that we are most likely to use. The advantage is that we get to spend more time looking outside, and less time looking inside, trying to find the correct app for the info we seek. I find many of my flying mates, whether on a flight review, an aircraft checkout, or a student flight, spending so much time trying to manipulate the iPad or other electronic device that when they find the info they want they seek they look up to see that they are in a right descending bank, four hundred feet off altitude and thirty degrees off heading. And then, when they just about have the screen they want, the airplane bounces a touch and their finger hits the screen in such a place that they have moved to a totally different screen, with totally different information.

My own technique – I do not use an iPad, but all of the aircraft I seem to

fly have some type of a GPS system. Some have a Garmin 1000 or 430, some have a handheld unit. But I generally have a source of electronic airport data as well as a source of map-following capability. However, for every flight, whether I file for VFR or IFR operations, I carry a VFR sectional and / or a terminal area chart and a piece of paper with airport information for my departure and destination. Why the redundancy? The paper map with its long straight line and the piece of paper with departure and destination airport info are so easy to refer to. They just don't get lost. And tucked away in all of its electronic space is all of the information that I will need if my Plan "A" is abandoned and I move to my Plan "B".

I am not suggesting a total return to paper and a ban on electronics in the airplane. However, I am suggesting that before you bring the iPad or other device in, you take two steps. First, decide what information will be critical, that you know for sure you will need to see. Then, either write it down on paper or note exactly where that primary information can be found in your device. Bookmark it, so that you can pull it up with one finger-stroke (keystrokes are so "last

year") so that you are not digging for it. Secondly, position your device in the airplane in such a way that you do not have to turn your body and look down onto the passenger seat to manipulate it. Smart instrument pilots know that all of their information must be visible in such a way that they never have to move their head to see it, only their eyes. Plan your cockpit information system so the same is true in the VFR cockpit.

Wolfgang Langewiesche in "Stick and Rudder" and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry in "Wind, Sand, and Stars" both capture the feeling of actually flying. Langewiesche leans more toward "one with the plane", and "feeling the aircraft." Saint-Exupéry, on the other hand, leans more toward the sense that as we fly we are part of a larger world. But each of them, and many of the best aviation writers afterward, invite us to take the opportunity to look around and appreciate this three-dimensional world that we have chosen to explore. Let's get our heads out of the airplane and enjoy this opportunity we have given ourselves.

Fly safe.

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