Boeing to Digitize all Airplane Maintenance Manuals

In a major step to move aviation maintenance into the digital age, a top Boeing official today told an industry audience that the company is digitizing all of its principal maintenance manuals so customers can access the documents on compact disks.

Airplane maintenance documents traditionally have been published in conventional paper and microfilm formats.

"There's no longer any reason to rely on the old storage and retrieval systems," said Tom Schick, Boeing Commercial Airplanes Group executive vice president - Customer Services, speaking at the aviation industry's annual Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul Conference in Atlanta.

"Our new offering is part of our strategy of delivering digital solutions to our customers," Schick said. "It will help maintenance organizations save time and money, improve the quality of their work and do something positive for the environment as well. We'll offer this new digital tool for all Boeing and Douglas-built airplane models to help our customers streamline their maintenance processes."

The new support product is a series of compact disks called Boeing Digital Technical Documents. Each CD contains a complete manual and quick-search index. In conventional paper form, a single manual is actually a multi-volume set of loose-leaf binders. As an example, the primary Aircraft Maintenance Manual for the 777 takes up 24 binders and requires 10 feet of shelf space.

The new CD product incorporates the widely available Adobe Acrobat® Reader® software. The CDs can be loaded into any basic computer workstation. Documents viewed on the computer screen have the same look of the printed pages familiar to airplane technicians, without the inconvenience of searching through paper or operating a microfilm enlarger.

Temporary revisions to the manuals will be distributed on floppy disks that work in conjunction with the CDs. This will end the cumbersome and error-prone process of filing and retrieving paper revisions.

Extensive airline tests of the CDs showed a reduction in search time of nearly 60 percent. There also were significant reductions in distribution and filing times.

Schick noted that by digitizing the maintenance manuals, Boeing soon will shrink what he termed a "mountain" of paper and microfilm. Last year alone, Boeing distributed enough maintenance documents to create a stack of paper more than 24 miles (38 km) high and a stack of microfilm cartridges more than 14 miles (22 km) high.

He expressed confidence that as the new product offering is introduced and airlines experience its speed and convenience, virtually no customer would want to be receiving paper or microfilm documents by the end of 2001.

In addition to the basic Aircraft Maintenance Manual, documents available on CDs will include the manuals for fault reporting, fault isolation, structural repair, wiring and systems schematics, plus the illustrated parts catalog and other documents.

Next month the Aircraft Maintenance Manual for 737-100 and -200 models will be the first digitized manual in the new format. That will be followed by additional documents for 737s and by similar documents for all other in-production and most out-of-production Boeing and Douglas-built airplane models during the next two years.

Boeing Digital Technical Documents is the latest in a series of innovative digital support products designed by Boeing to add value for its customers. Boeing was the first in the industry to offer spare parts ordering on the World Wide Web through the Boeing PART Page, and the first to offer direct access to technical databases through Boeing On-Line Delivery. The company also offers the Portable Maintenance Aid, a laptop-based digital troubleshooting tool for airplane mechanics.

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