

Tue 19 Feb 2008 – Moroccan low-cost airline Atlas-blue has become the first African carrier to offer carbon offsets as an integrated part of its booking platform. The offset program has been developed by Airsavings, a Paris-based global supplier of back-end technology to low-cost carriers, and contributions from the scheme will go towards carbon offsetting projects funded by Action Carbone.

The Atlas-blue carbon offsetting scheme makes it one of the few airlines able to offer passengers the option as part of an integrated booking engine. “The difference with other airline carbon offset schemes is huge, because very few passengers use this option if it is not clearly displayed to them,” says Airsavings CEO, Raphael Bejar. “They do not have time to go to another micro site to offset their flight. Our solution is displayed in front of the passenger’s eyes, in the booking path, while he or she is booking, so the uptake ratios are much higher. Passengers are willing to offset CO2, but they want to do it easily.”

The program calculates the emissions of a flight based on the distance travelled, based on GPS coordinates, and fuel consumed, along with load factor, capacity and radiation effect. It automatically computes a monetary contribution, calculated in euros, based on these factors sufficient to neutralize the tonnage of carbon emitted. The passenger has nothing to do but validate the amount of the offset, says Bejar.

Action Carbone is a European-sponsored non-profit organization that funds carbon-offsetting projects like tree planting and alternative energy implementation across the world. It is backed by ADEME, France’s government agency for environment and energy issues, and is operated by GoodPlanet, an NGO that promotes sustainability and ecological preservation.

“Travellers are very concerned about their carbon footprint, and offering them a way to minimize the impact of their flight on the environment allows us to both meet their wishes and add value to the Atlas-blue offer,” says Kamal Bennis, the airline’s Marketing Manager.

While Airsavings currently only provides airlines with a carbon offset program, Bejar says airlines need to do a lot more than simply offset their pollution. “We think it is vital for airlines to alert consumers as to the carbon emissions created by their air travel. To think that people will stop flying as a result is absurd. I think this information provided by the airlines will urge passengers to become more responsible about their actions, resulting in more contributions and the overall improvement of better, sustainable air travel practices.

“In addition to emissions trading, airlines, and especially those with older fleets, should have goals in place to reduce their fuel burn and to cut down their taxiing times. They will find that these green initiatives will also save them money.”

Bejar also sees many smaller, but equally important initiatives springing up like the LSG SkyChefs’ partnership with Perfect Day, the coffee and sandwich specialist, to open a coffee bar at Frankfurt Airport that offers only sustainable, eco-friendly coffee and snacks.

