



Airstream transforms  
its business and delights  
customers by adding AT&T

# IoT connectivity

to its classic travel trailers  
and touring coaches

- **Business needs** - By enabling connectivity and smart-home functionality, Airstream is making camping easier and more accessible.
- **Networking solution** - An AT&T Internet of Things (IoT) solution enables mobile Wi-Fi® hotspots on Airstream travel trailers and touring coaches. They can connect as many as 10 devices, while a separate connection gives owners easy-to-use control and monitoring, so they can stay connected, comfortable, and in control whenever they roam.
- **Business value** - Adding smart technology and highly reliable 4G LTE-A connectivity further helps to improve Airstream's customer experience and generates growth opportunities for the company.
- **Industry focus** - Recreational vehicle manufacturing; outdoor recreation
- **Size** - More than 1,000 hard-working associates

## About Airstream

Airstream, manufacturer of the iconic “silver bullet” aluminum travel trailer, is the longest-tenured recreational vehicle manufacturer in the world. The company’s mission, as set forth by founder Wally Byam, is to create well-designed, high-quality products that allow people to follow their dreams and explore the world in home-like comfort. A division of Thor Industries, the company is based in Jackson Center, Ohio. There, a team of skilled craftspeople hand-builds each travel trailer and upfits every Mercedes-Benz touring coach, adding daily to the brand’s reputation for quality and innovation.

## The situation

Since the 1930s Airstream’s distinctive vehicles have enabled people to travel the world with the comforts of home. They connect people with each other and to the outdoors. Recently, Airstream noticed a trend among people who spend time in the great outdoors. While many people who camp report the desire to “unplug,” research shows something different. People extend their camping trips and go more often when they have reliable connectivity solutions. Airstream, and its obsession with

creating a world-class customer experience, invested in solving the unique technical challenge of creating a mobile smart home to meet consumer expectations.

## Solution

With the AT&T IoT connection, Airstream created an intuitive, virtually seamless smart-home experience inside their iconic vehicles. This helps make camping less unpredictable, more manageable, and more enjoyable. Onboard systems now communicate with the vehicle and the owner via the Airstream Smart Control Technology mobile app and by internal touchscreens. Vehicle owners can control and monitor systems that have been integrated to the vehicle's network, including water and propane levels, battery power, climate controls, fans, shades, awnings, and more. An integrated GPS locator enables Smart Classic Airstream owners to keep tabs on their vehicle from virtually anywhere.



## The promise of adventure and good fellowship

When founder Wally Byam unveiled the world's first Airstream in 1929, he began a journey that would take Airstreamers across oceans, cultures, and continents. He summarized his mission in a Creed, which was, in part, "to provide a more satisfying, meaningful way of travel that offers complete travel independence, wherever and whenever you choose to go or stay."

In 1931, Byam opened the first Airstream factory and began creating high-quality travel trailers that allowed people to explore the world in home-like comfort. That tradition continues today.

McKay Featherstone, Airstream Vice President of Product Development and Engineering, called Byam a visionary entrepreneur. "He made promises that set a very high bar for us," Featherstone said. "Our mission is to create a world of new experiences, a new dimension in enjoyment where travel, adventure, and good fellowship are your constant companions. You can't really make a bolder, bigger promise to customers than that—then or now."

## Crafting a lifestyle

Airstreams are unlike any other recreational vehicles. The riveted aluminum trailers with the rounded edges promise the best in performance, safety, and comfort. The company's commitment to craftsmanship is evident in each trailer. To build one takes an average of 4,000 metal rivets and 350 hours of labor. As a result, about 70% of all Airstreams ever built are still in use today.



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**Bob Wheeler**

President and CEO, Airstream, Inc.

“Everyone here understands that we’re building a lifestyle, a way to make memories,” Featherstone said. “People talk about Airstreaming as an activity. It’s not a product; it’s an experience.”

Ingenuity is part of the Airstream experience. “Taking aircraft aluminum from the 1930s and turning it into travel trailers was really inventive stuff,” Featherstone said. From there the innovation continued. Airstream offered the first pressurized water system in a travel trailer, the first flush toilet, the first refrigerator, and the first furnace. In partnership with AT&T, Airstream can now add the world’s first smart and connected travel trailer to the long list of innovation achievements.

While an unwavering focus on innovation keeps the company at the forefront of technology and customer experience, Airstream never rests on its laurels. “We’re not stuck in our history. We see it as a challenge or obligation to live up to,” Featherstone shared. “We’re standing on the shoulders of giants here at Airstream, so it’s our responsibility to uphold the brand and promise to our customers.”

## Creating a world of new experiences

While Baby Boomers have long been a key demographic for Airstream, customers are becoming younger, more diverse, and more digitally connected. “Around 50% of our customers are totally new to traveling by recreational vehicle,” Featherstone explained. “They’re coming into this with their own set of needs and expectations. We’ve got to make it as intuitive and easy as possible for them and figure out ways to delight them.”

As customers are becoming younger, Airstream continues to explore new ways to deliver on its promise of creating a world of new experiences. According to Airstream President and CEO Bob Wheeler, consumer research placed smart technology at the top of their list of priorities. “Our customers are more connected in their home, and they expect that same level of connectivity in their home on wheels,” he said. “They want smarter, more intuitive features enabled by connectivity.”

Featherstone said Airstream viewed the situation as an opportunity to further improve the experience and make inroads with the growing market of millennials, who view connectivity as a way to enhance their outdoor experience.

## Passion and drive to create something new

As the company searched for ways to introduce smart technology into its vehicles, associates were guided by founder Byam's philosophy: "Let's not make changes; let's only make improvements."

To design an intuitive IoT smart technology system, Airstream first had to grapple with the challenge of the unreliable coverage that sometimes comes with traveling in remote destinations. "We knew this was different, so we needed a provider that would understand this mobile lifestyle and have the passion and drive to create something new," Featherstone shared.

Airstream began looking for the right providers. AT&T quickly emerged as a front runner. The rich history of AT&T was important to Airstream, which has its own legacy of innovation. "There's a real sense of continuity in the history of the companies," Featherstone explained.

Subject matter experts from AT&T and Airstream collaborated to develop a solution that fit the needs of Airstream's diverse customers to enable a virtually seamless user experience, regardless of the vehicle's ability to connect to Airstream's cloud.

An AT&T IoT connection allows younger owners to participate in the gig economy and work from the

great outdoors. And older owners can extend their time outside with the ability to stay connected with healthcare via telemedicine. These capabilities and others are powered by a high gain, roof-mounted antenna and mobile LTE-A router that brings reliable data into the recreational vehicle. As part of the partnership, AT&T developed the first-ever data plans targeted for recreational vehicle owners.

"We got to know each other and pretty quickly saw that together we could solve a real problem and create a market for it," Featherstone said. "Our teams worked hand-in-hand to solve a challenge everyone had been avoiding for years."



## A new range of business opportunities for Airstream

Wheeler explained the company had to decide between making smart features controllable locally via Bluetooth or by connecting to the cloud to enable a world-class customer experience. They chose the latter and decided to join forces with AT&T for connectivity and IoT technology. This has helped Airstream transform its business.

**“We’re an innovative company that’s known for our timeless products. For a while, we’ve had our eyes on digitally connected services around travel and trip planning, navigation, supply, and connecting with the Airstream community in new ways. Working with AT&T has allowed us to bring some of those ideas to life, and we’re more excited than ever about the future.”**

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President and CEO, Airstream, Inc.

“The interesting part for us is that smart home IoT technology has opened up a whole new range of business opportunities for Airstream,” Wheeler said.

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The public immediately took notice. Two months after its debut in September 2018, Airstream showcased the vehicle at AutoMobility LA where it attracted national media attention for its beautiful design and cutting-edge functionality. In March 2019, the Airstream Smart Classic travel trailer received the New Horizon Award at RVX (The RV Experience Show). The prestigious award is recognition by industry leaders that Airstream’s first smart vehicle is leading

the customer experience. The connected travel trailer, which can be activated on AT&T 4G LTE data plans, has 3 patents pending in the U.S. and was rated one of the most innovative products in the Recreational Vehicle Industry.

## Enhancing the outdoor lifestyle

Dealers and customers alike are excited about the connected Airstream vehicles. “It’s a totally new benefit for our customers, and the reaction has been positive,” Featherstone said.

AT&T worked with Airstream to refine the customer experience so it matches the Airstream brand. The companies collaborated to create websites to build awareness of the connected services, including a tailored landing page that lets new and existing Airstream owners activate AT&T connectivity through an Airstream app. Additionally, customers who need help can engage through a newly designed customer support process that helps them efficiently connect with the person who can best help them.

Plus, AT&T created flexible data plans to meet Airstreamers’ unique needs. “There are Airstream owners that spend 6 months a year traveling in their vehicles and those that go out only a few times a year,” he said. “The plans have the flexibility to meet those needs.”

Featherstone pointed to the study demonstrating the importance of connectivity: People with good Wi-Fi while camping tend to spend more days camping. “For some, they need to be on email or check in at work or check grandkids or healthcare providers while they’re traveling,” Featherstone said. “The good news is that

our people can turn on the system when they need it and turn it off whenever they want. Connectivity doesn't get in the way of their outdoor lifestyle. It enhances it."

## Unlimited opportunities for growth

Wheeler noted how introducing connected recreational vehicles into the marketplace continues to transform the company. "We're starting to get insights into how our different customer segments use their products. This enables us to accelerate our product roadmaps and ideate with more agility."

Airstream is also working to improve the customer experience in other areas. "We're thinking about all the other things we can do to improve our customer's experience," Wheeler continued. "How can we make travel safer? How can we make it more enjoyable with less hassle? How can we connect Airstreamers with other Airstreamers? The solutions we can develop by asking these questions will empower more people to get outside and search for adventure on their terms."

"The opportunities here are only limited by our own imagination."

