

Last year's top finishers held their positions this year, with Garmin leading the cockpit avionics pack and Aircell taking the top spot among cabin electronics makers.

Garmin retained its spot at the top of the 2012 AIN Avionics Product Support Survey cockpit avionics rankings, with readers giving the avionics manufacturer an overall average rating of 8.3 this year, down 1 percent from last year but again the only company rated in the eights. Rockwell Collins, which jumped to second place with a rating of 7.8, saw its score climb 1 percent compared with last year's fourth-place rating. Universal Avionics came in third this year, scoring an overall average of 7.7, down 3 percent from last year and its 2011 second-place finish.

Honeywell's cockpit avionics rating climbed 1 percent this year, and Honeywell moved up from sixth place last year to fourth this year. Avidyne scored the same 7.5 rating as last year, putting it in a tie for fourth place with Honeywell. Also with the same rating as last year was Honeywell's Bendix/King division, which moved from seventh place to change Honeywell to fifth, because of the tie. While more companies were listed in the overall average chart last year, some companies didn't receive enough ratings this year to be included.

What have you done for me?

by Matt Thurber

AIN asked avionics manufacturers—for both cockpit and cabin equipment—to summarize their efforts during the past year to improve product support. While some of these companies didn't receive enough ratings to be included in the survey results, all clearly work hard to keep customers' equipment and aircraft flying.

Aircell

Aircell's customer base for its air-to-ground voice and data communications network is growing rapidly, and during the past year the company has boosted its technical support representative staff by 25 percent. Aircell says its new telephone system and call-routing procedures have shortened the waiting time to reach an Aircell representative and made contacting the company for support much easier.

A new capability is Aircell's virtual technician system, which allows technicians to troubleshoot Aircell systems remotely.



Aircell topped the list of cabin electronics manufacturers, garnering an overall average of 8.0.

Aspen Avionics

Aspen supports its products with a "no hassle" warranty, which helps customers stay in the air. If a dealer can't fix an Aspen glass-panel unit that is under warranty, Aspen will ship a replacement unit to that dealer so the aircraft owner can keep flying. This helps Aspen identify and fix any problems more quickly and determine if it is a factory or installation issue, all while keeping the customer flying.

Avidyne

To improve product support during the past year, Avidyne has added to its technical support staff and boosted the hours for contacting product support personnel by 25 percent, to 12 hours per day from 9.5. Avidyne says the improvements have helped it reach a high level of efficiency, with 99 percent of calls handled live and 92 percent answered with no waiting time. Avidyne has also expanded its Platinum extended warranty program to cover sensor products such as traffic advisory, lightning detection and datalink weather receiver systems, and it has created an exchange pool for those products.

Flight Display Systems

Flight Display Systems has hired Josh Woodall to fill a new position, customer

Seven cabin avionics manufacturers received enough ratings for inclusion in this year's results, and topping the list again is Aircell, climbing 1 percent to reach 8.0, the sole cabin electronics company with an overall average rating in the eights. Flight Display Systems is catching up, however, and made a strong jump this year to 7.9, up 4 percent over last year and climbing from fourth to second place. Rockwell Collins also saw an improvement in the cabin electronics category, with a third-place 7.6, up 3 percent over last year's fifth-place ranking.

Rosen dropped slightly, moving down 1 percent with an overall average rating of 7.6, sharing the third-place spot with Rockwell Collins. Honeywell's score moved up 1 percent to 7.5, putting the company into fourth place, up one from sixth last year. Magnastar, which continues to be supported by Teledyne Controls, saw the largest leap in the overall average rating this year, up 13 percent to 7.1, a fifth-place finish compared to last year's last-place ranking. Thrane & Thrane dropped 1 percent to 7.0 this year.

support lead. Woodall's job is to manage a "total quality program to cover products from initial concept to post-sale customer satisfaction, striving for continuous improvement," according to the company. Technicians are available for live chat sessions during office hours.

Flight Display Systems launched a new website in January, providing access to product information for dealers and customers. Website visitors can view product research and manuals, answers to frequently asked questions, specification sheets, downloadable FAA documentation and 3-D models. Customers can also research questions that address common issues and are organized by product category. Information available also includes photos of product installations in various aircraft cabins and more than 70 videos that demonstrate Flight Display's products.

Garmin

As Garmin builds its international aviation presence, the company has expanded its spares warehouses and field support ranks outside the U.S. The newest office is in Munich, Germany. At the



Garmin received high marks from AIN readers for its product support, and is the only avionics OEM to have received an overall rating higher than 8.0.

same time, Garmin is offering more training classes at its Olathe, Kan. headquarters, according to the company, "to help ensure that the needs of the market are met for high-quality, detailed training." The classes serve operators flying with Garmin avionics and technicians who install and service Garmin products, to help pilots "fly with confidence using Garmin avionics and ensure that maintenance technicians have the skills to quickly and accurately address any issues, thereby ensuring the highest degree of operational reliability."

Honeywell

Honeywell says it has targeted AOG response time and on-time-to-request performance by improving parts stocking levels—especially avionics inventories in global distribution centers—and order processes and enhancing communication. The global efforts include improving spare exchange pool performance with more stock and better on-time response for avionics rotables, a move that has been aided by improved demand forecasting and increased investment in inventories, according to Honeywell.

To continue reliability improvements, Honeywell is offering software- and hardware-based avionics retrofits, modifications and upgrades. Customers are providing input for all of these efforts, via the Global Customer Committee advisory board.

International Communications Group (ICG)

ICG has been able to keep staffing levels steady during the economic downturn and recently began hiring new customer support staff. Sales have been growing outside the U.S., in Australia, China and India, which "creates challenges for those of us who provide support," according to ICG. "When an issue or AOG situation arises, time zones become irrelevant to those dealing with an inoperative cabin or flight-deck telephone system, especially with an impatient principal who is anxious to return home from halfway around the world. We know that a quick, effective response is vital to all of our clients, no matter where they are in the world." Customers have access to 24/7 telephone support and also ICG's myICG Web portal, which provides access to free documents and utilities.

ICG's training courses for its flagship ICS-120A/220A Iridium satcoms during the past year were attended by more than 60 airline, OEM, flight department and service provider personnel. A new feature on the myICG portal will be

self-guided online training courses for those who can't travel to ICG's Newport News, Va. headquarters.

Mid-Continent Instruments and Avionics

Mid-Continent added the word "Avionics" to its name in April, reflecting the company's growing avionics repair capabilities. The company manufactures True Blue Power backup battery emergency power supplies, inverters, Life-saver backup attitude indicators and other instruments, avionics and electrical accessories. Mid-Continent says it has expanded its overhaul/exchange pool and offers same-day shipping with no additional fees for AOG shipments; added customer service, technical service and sales support personnel; and now offers online access to manufactured and service inventory on the company website.

Rockwell Collins

Rockwell Collins says it has restructured its support group and developed a new customer support response team, which has helped improve response time to customers by about 25 percent. To meet the growing need for 24/7 access to spares around the world, Rockwell Collins has moved spares to more than a dozen locations from U.S. depots, and this has accelerated receipt of parts by 20 percent.

More customers want training available at their locations, and Rockwell Collins has responded to this need with double the number of online training courses and quadruple the number of desktop simulator programs. "Rockwell Collins has focused on improving access to training through expanded use of web-based technology under a changing philosophy of taking training to the customer rather than having customers come to [us]," according to the company.

Rosen Aviation

Cabin entertainment system and display manufacturer Rosen Aviation has reorganized its entire enterprise around process instead of functional departments, and this now includes a separate process for service and support. Other changes include "improved individual capabilities through innovative training methods," according to the company, "continued emphasis on our philosophy of being easy to do business with" and "continuing to improve the quality of our performance metrics, the visibility of those metrics and the efficiency of corrective action, when necessary."

Thrane & Thrane

Like other avionics manufacturers, Danish satcom maker Thrane & Thrane has expanded spares stocks worldwide, adding material in the U.S. and Europe to speed field repair capabilities and meet customer needs. Technical staff

are reachable via one telephone number, and customers can also tap into Thrane & Thrane's eSupport technical support Web portal. The eSupport portal provides access to software, manuals and service bulletin downloads, the ability to submit technical questions, a knowledge base and warranty tracking.

TrueNorth Avionics

TrueNorth moved into larger facilities, added a new person to the technical support team and achieved AS9100 revision C quality system certification during the past year. A new enterprise resource management system allows customers to track their progress on support issues and helps TrueNorth improve tracking and management of customer tickets. "Based on a customer satisfaction survey that we did early this year," a company spokeswoman told AIN, "we identified an issue that led to process improvements based directly on customer feedback."

Universal Avionics

Two key changes were made during the past year by Universal Avionics: a redesigned UniNet website and promotion of Robert Nierenhausen to the position of warranty manager. Nierenhausen's job was newly created, and he reports directly to Andy Seaton, director of product support, helping customers and dealers with warranty inquiries.

The UniNet website provides customers with access to navigation database downloads, technical publications and other information in a secure environment, including online bill payment, product registration and account information. Plans for UniNet are to "increase integration to support customer needs for responsive and comprehensive information about Universal Avionics," according to the company.

Above and beyond

This year, we asked AIN Product Support Survey participants to list their favorite support personnel and what they like about the service provided. Following are highlights from comments submitted about avionics support personnel.

Ken Klein Aircell-Denver

Knowledgeable and great troubleshooter; does not get caught up in any drama. Ken gets straight to the point.

Joao De Toni Honeywell-Brazil

Extremely well prepared, very good relationship with customers and excellent tech support.

John Braidich Honeywell-Cleveland, Ohio

John has been the best resource for us for years on our Honeywell equipment. He has always been here to help us and help direct us through any issues we have had.

Tim Kelly Honeywell-Kansas City, Mo.

When we have upgraded he has always tried to stay on top of the situation and he will give you the truth whether it is good or bad news. He is a straight shooter.

Jack Wolf Honeywell-Minneapolis

Jack has the difficult job of getting it done when the company has made some poor choices. Jack is honest with me and is willing to give me the bad news even if it hurts. He is a great rep.

John Petersen Honeywell-Seattle

When I call with a question or problem, he will get back to me quickly, and will either find a solution or someone who has a

solution, and then he explains it so I understand. I'm not an avionics person, and it really helps to have someone who does not act like I'm an imbecile.

Rick Stanley Honeywell-Southeast U.S.

This guy goes out of his way to keep his team available to the customer and has a can-do attitude. He always follows up (and so does his team) and always keeps the customer informed on the status of the project or concern.

**Jim Keeth
L-3 Avionics-Grand Rapids, Mich.**
Quick with helpful email support. Some of the best customer service I have experienced.

**Leroy Dunn
Natrona Avionics-Casper, Wyo.**
Leroy Dunn of Natrona Avionics always delivers what he promises when it comes to avionics. He is customer-service oriented and his technical expertise is outstanding.

**John Spellmeyer
Rockwell Collins-Wichita**
Extremely helpful and understands Pro Line and all Collins equipment. Goes out of his way to be helpful. All info from John is given in a way pilots understand. He is the best of the best!

**Max Goh
Rockwell Collins-Singapore**
Always available, ready, willing and able to go the extra mile. You can depend on him to do everything possible to help you out.

2012 RATINGS (Companies are listed in order of their 2012 overall averages)											
	Overall Avg 2012	Overall Avg 2011	Ratings Change from 2011-2012	Percent Change from 2011-2012	Parts Availability	Cost of Parts	AOG Response	Warranty Fulfillment	Technical Manuals	Technical Reps	Overall Product Reliability
Cockpit Avionics Manufacturers											
Garmin	8.3	8.4	-0.1	-1%	8.5	7.3	8.1	8.5	8.1	8.2	8.9
Rockwell Collins	7.8	7.7	0.1	1%	8.0	6.5	7.9	8.2	7.6	7.8	8.5
Universal Avionics	7.7	7.9	-0.2	-3%	8.0	6.2	8.0	8.1	7.3	7.8	8.3
Honeywell	7.5	7.4	0.1	1%	7.8	6.0	7.7	8.1	7.4	7.8	7.9
Avidyne	7.5	7.5	0.0	0%	7.7	6.6	6.7	7.8	7.3	8.1	8.0
Honeywell Bendix/King	7.1	7.1	0.0	0%	7.6	6.2	7.0	6.8	6.8	7.1	8.0
Cabin Electronics Manufacturers											
Aircell	8.0	7.9	0.1	1%	8.2	7.3	8.1	8.4	7.3	8.0	8.4
Flight Display Systems	7.9	7.6	0.3	4%	7.8	7.2	7.6	8.3	8.2	8.0	8.2
Rockwell Collins	7.6	7.4	0.2	3%	7.8	6.3	7.6	8.0	7.3	7.9	8.1
Rosen Aviation	7.6	7.7	-0.1	-1%	7.8	6.7	7.9	7.8	6.8	7.5	8.1
Honeywell	7.5	7.4	0.1	1%	7.6	6.1	7.6	7.9	7.4	7.7	7.8
Magnastar	7.1	6.3	0.8	13%	7.2	6.1	7.4	7.5	6.8	7.2	7.7
Thrane & Thrane	7.0	7.1	-0.1	-1%	7.4	6.1	6.6	8.5	6.3	6.1	7.5

Bold indicates highest number in each category
Source: AIN 2012 Product Support Survey

Rating Scale: 1 Inadequate, 2 Poor, 3 Average, 4 Good, 5 Excellent