

AVSIM Commercial FSX Utility Review

Electronic Flight Bag



Product Information		
Publishers: Aivlasoft		
Description: Flight deck paperwork organizer and flight planner .		
Download Size: 46 MB	Format: Download	Simulation Type: FSX
Reviewed by: Eduardo Ocampo AVSIM Staff Reviewer - February 9, 2010		

Introduction

The flight bag is the aviation equivalent of a constructor's tool box. Every responsible and dedicated pilot, from student pilots on their first flight to seasoned commercial heavy metal pilots; they all have their own flight bag and cherish within it the most sensible papers and tools for a safe flight. Think of it as a magic box; you can pull anything out of it and it will surely be a useful element. Maps, airway manuals, plotters, flight computers, aircraft and company manuals and even an oxygen mask (I got a story about that, by the way!) are some of the treats found in a real pilot's flight bag.

Turns out the smart people at Aivlasoft noticed that there was not an add-on for MSFS that fulfilled the needs of the dedicated simmers that enjoy flying the virtual skies with all sorts of resources: detailed flight planners, airport and route charts, NOTAM's, checklists, flight following tables, etc. The result? Aivlasoft's Electronic Flight Bag (EFB), a software that provides everything you could possibly need to make your flights better planned and executed.

Being a pilot and a former flight dispatcher, I'll give thumbs up to the add-on's that have some sort of planning tools in it. For aircraft, for example, I grin when I see a weight and balance (now called weight and mass) and a fuel planner tool; real aircraft don't roll out of the production line with "control+E" keyboard combinations...no, not even Airbuses.

This is why I absolutely loved this product and fell in love with it the second I saw it. It is 100% a planning tool, from way before getting on the airplane until the very end "Shutdown and securing checklist". If you are a real pilot who also likes to sim, or if you're a seasoned virtual pilot and enjoy planning everything properly, or if you want to take the venture to add a whole lot of realism into your virtual flying, this is one piece of software you will like. Trust me.

Enough talking! Let us introduce ourselves into this fine piece of add-on.

Installation and Documentation

Despite of what appears to be quite a complex program in its internal functioning (not on its use, though), installation is very simple and quick once you have the required software (specified both in the "EFB Installation and Configuration"

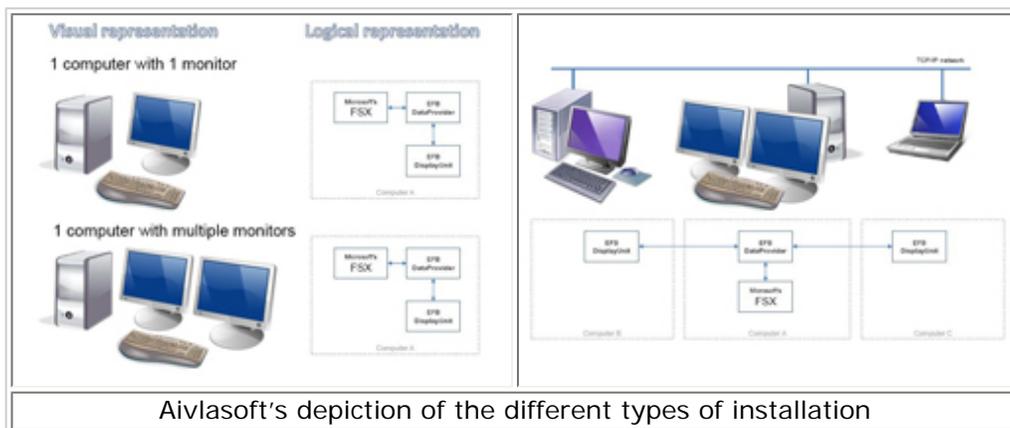
handbook and at Aivlasoft's website) and if you strictly follow the instructions with no flaw!

Your initial download comes with the zip package that contains the executable file that will install the EFB and the "EFB Installation and Configuration" manual to help you through the whole process. The product key will be delivered to you via e-mail. The "EFB Operations Manual", which explains thoroughly the use of the software, is available at the Downloads section at Aivlasoft's website. Thumbs up to Aivlasoft for preparing a superb documentation of their product.

There are two types of installation: "Single" installation and "Distributed" installation. The single installation will be your choice if you want to install the two components, the Data Provider and the Display Unit (whose functions will be explained later), in a single computer with single or multiple screens. The distributed installation will be performed if you have several computers interconnected through a local network.

Once you decide your installation type, the manual will guide you baby-step by baby-step to fully complete your installation. From now on, your only job here, as a good virtual (or perhaps a future real?) pilot is to comply with the instructions, given by both the wizard and the handbook, to the letter. If you do that, nothing unexpected (hopefully!) should happen.

Actually, both installation types are pretty much the same and it only changes a bit in the part when you decide which components, based on your installation type, you are going to install in the current computer. In any case, the handbook is explicit on this subject and will give complete instructions. So no need to worry.



By the way, since the EFB has airport and route charts, it needs a Navigraph cycle to run. One cycle, the 0911, is included with the package. So even if you don't have a Navigraph subscription, you will be ready to fly with a relatively updated cycle. The cycle installation instructions are also given in the handbook.

The EFB's first run needs to be done in a specific way. Pay attention to the steps given by the installation manual to make an optimum setup of the product. Start the Data Provider, put your license in (which, by the way, can be a 30-day fully operational demo license or your permanent product license), check or change your settings as you like and you are good to go.

The Data Provider and the Display Unit settings are extensive, but in all cases, easy and quick to make. Every option and message available is detailed on the manual so you know which option is the best for your individual needs and what every message you can get means.

Reading the handbook (I think you just guessed what I'm about to say here) it's not only recommended, but highly encouraged (I'd say an obligation!), so you can prepare and use your EFB to get the most out of it. It has incredible features and it would be too bad if you're not aware of them. Read the manual!

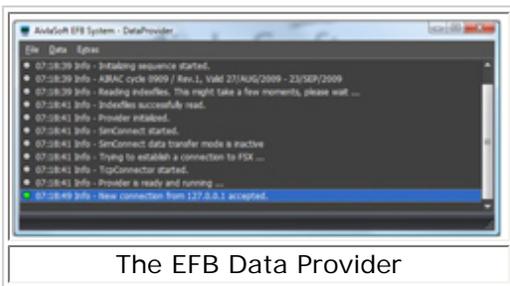
The EFB system

To provide the information, this software is composed of two major pieces: The Data Provider and the Display Unit.

Test System

AMD Athlon 7750 Dual-core processor @ 2.71 GHz
4GB RAM
Nvidia GeForce 9500GT
Genius joystick

Flying Time:
11 hours



The EFB Data Provider

The Data Provider is the core of the EFB since it acts as a CPU. It is linked to FSX and makes the connection between it and the Display Unit. Every command you make in the Display Unit is sent to the Data Provider which will "look" through FSX to respond to your initial command.

The Display Unit is the user interface. From here you will work with the different functions the EFB has to offer and it's both the starting and the ending point for every request you make to the EFB system.

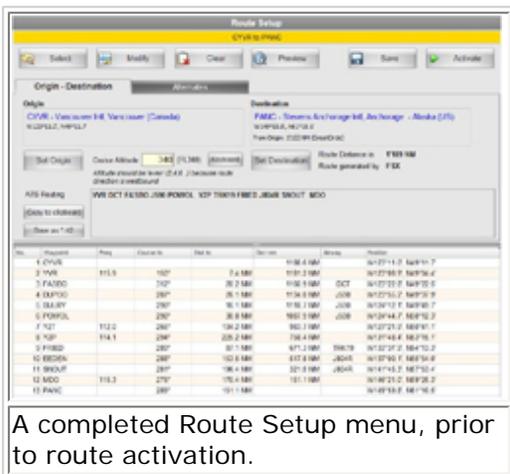
Now, on to serious things. Let's discuss the functions of this software.

The Display Unit basically, has 4 "main", functions. They are the "Route Setup", "Airports", "Modules" and "System" buttons; these are the default options available when you start the Display Unit. Let's take a look at them. By the way, if all of the EFB components are on the same machine, you have the possibility to select the most important functions of the EFB directly from FSX via an On-screen menu.



FSX On-screen menu

Route Setup



A completed Route Setup menu, prior to route activation.

From this option you can manage everything related to your flight planning: Origin, destination and alternate (enroute and destination, as in real life) airports, cruise altitude, complete departure and arrival routes, planned airways and waypoints.

There are several ways to get your route on the EFB; you can load it up from a previously saved EFB route as well as an FSX route, you can also download a route from VATroute or Route Finder and, of course, you can make your own route either a "complex" one with SID's and STAR's (departure and arrival routes, for those unfamiliar with the terms), airways and alternates, or a "simple" one: origin airport direct to destination airport.

From the route setup you can also modify saved, downloaded or created routes at your will, save new routes for a next use, preview your routes both in text and in a map and most importantly, activate your route.

Once the route is activated, the "Progress" and "Flightlog" submenus become available for you.

Progress

This is a "Route dependant module" accessible when a route is active. From this module you can choose both your charts for the entire flight: Ground (origin), Departure, Enroute, Arrival, Approach and Ground (arrival). You can also select your checklist for a given phase of flight: Departure, Enroute and Arrival (more on this subject later on).

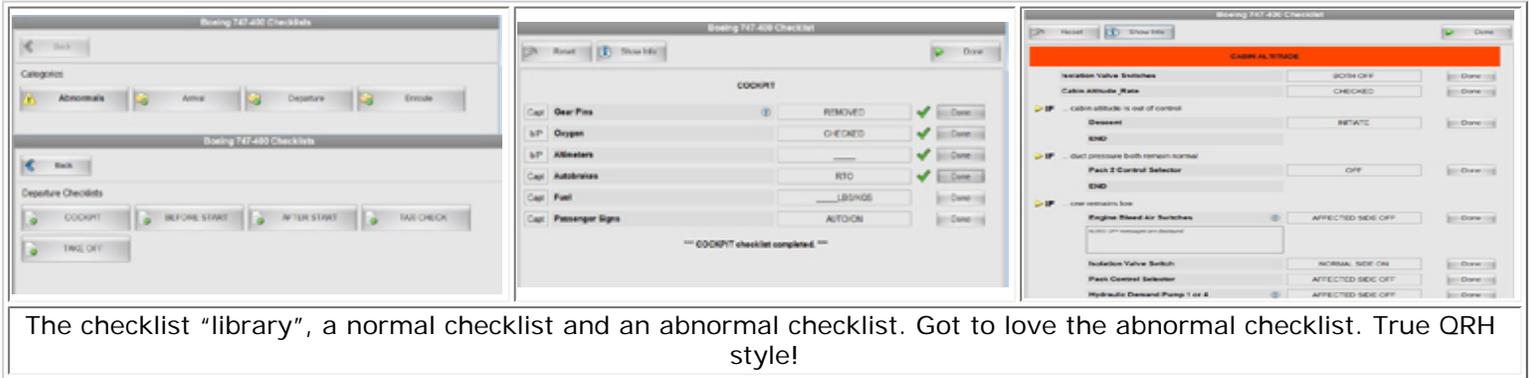
Wisely, Aivlasoft made the selection of charts and checklists as simple as it can be. Both of them are arranged chronologically, meaning that you can browse, for example, from the departure chart to the enroute chart with a simple click (or even with no click at all!). Same thing with the checklist, couple of clicks and you are on the new checklist; no more looking through lots of papers on your bed or desk with a jet aircraft descending at 3000FPM and 300 knots! Potential disasters, mon frère, lots of things tend to unfold while you look for the right paper...

By the way, if you can't locate yourself in an airport ground chart that easily, there's a function called "Moving map", which will locate and show your aircraft in the chart and it will move to your heading changes, sort of like a GPS does. Maybe that could be used as an easier way of learning chart interpretation and airport navigation?

If the "moving map" feature is activated, the charts will change automatically when an event programmed by default occurs. The sequence goes like this: Ground chart to departure to enroute to arrival to ground (destination) chart. The arrival to approach chart change-over is not automatic for several

Checklists for each type you fly can be created and classified by phase of flight, like departure, enroute and arrival; each phase of flight can contain several checklists like "Before Start", "Before Takeoff", etc. Abnormal checklists can also be created; these are available to you anytime you want.

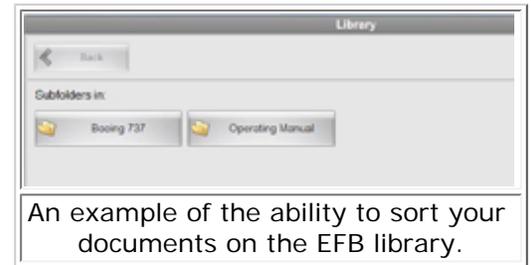
Each checklist item has the option to assign it to a specific flight crew member to take care of that item; it also contains a "Done" button, that upon clicking it will put a green tick next to the item, signaling it has been checked. Doing the Abnormal checklists feels like reading a real QRH (Quick Response Handbook)! All checklists are fully customizable, you can type them straight from the flight manual or you can make your own.



Library

Yes. You read it right. A files library. You can use the EFB to read some of your files, like flight manuals, websites, etc. Files supported by the EFB are .pdf, .rtf, .txt, .htm and .html. The EFB has a special folder created on installation dedicated to the storage of these files so they can be read in the EFB.

A good thing about the library is that you can sort your files in different folders. Think of this library as the My Documents folder in a Windows OS. So you can organize the files you have for, let's say, the B737 in a folder, and the ones you have for the A320 in another one; you will have this same organization in EFB display itself. If I recall correctly, this is a feature similar to the one on the B787, its manuals will be accessible from the cockpit, with no need to go to the paper ones.



Updates

Aivlasoft has already released an update (version 1.0.2/SP2) and it's available for download from their website, which fixes some minor issues. Service pack 3 is on final approach and it contains many little improvements that will make the EFB more enjoyable; it also contains a new feature: Checklists import and export capability in .xml files. This will enable users to share their checklists with others.

Aivlasoft plans to make a checklist database on its site, so users can download checklists for specific aircraft created by others.

Summary / Closing Remarks

From head to toe, a flight planning tool! Definitely something every dedicated simmer should have in his/her arsenal of software. Despite all of its functions, the EFB is easy to use and has a simplistic approach; very user-friendly.

The charts are definitely the strongest point of this software, although its other functions are equally powerful and useful. Adding to the fine piece of software they have produced, I found Aivlasoft support to be very effective and willing to help the customer; plus, their website seems to help to conclude what a dedicated company they are.

I would have loved to see this product for FS9, but given the different operating modes between FSX and FS9, I agree with Urs at Aivlasoft when he says that in his mind, it's better to continue to improve the FSX version, instead of making the extensive tweaking needed to make the EFB run on FS9.

If you enjoy a planned flight in your sim with all the proper tools at hand, you will find this software tailor made for

you.

What I Like About The Electronic Flight Bag

- A flight planning tool!
- Worldwide charts through Navigraph cycles
- Detailed documentation
- Easy to install and to use
- All of your FS-related documents are accessible from the EFB library
- Aivlasoft seems to be a dedicated FS software company

What I Don't Like About The Electronic Flight Bag

- I don't see anything I don't like, do you?

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