

Ryanair turns Musk spat into publicity with “Great Idiot Sale”

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 24 January, 2026



Dhaka: Irish low-cost carrier Ryanair has launched a tongue-in-cheek promotional campaign dubbed the “Great Idiot Sale,” capitalizing on a highly public spat between its chief executive officer, Michael O’Leary, and SpaceX founder Elon Musk over Starlink in-flight connectivity.

The campaign followed a heated exchange on social media after O’Leary publicly questioned the cost and fuel-burn implications of installing Starlink satellite antennae across Ryanair’s all-Boeing 737 fleet. Musk rejected those claims and labeled the Ryanair boss an “idiot,” triggering days of insults and viral commentary.

Ryanair leaned into the controversy by unveiling a limited-time seat sale explicitly dedicated to Musk and “any other idiots on X,” the social media platform formerly known as Twitter. The airline offered 100,000 seats priced at just EUR 16.99, equivalent to USD 20, turning the feud

into a marketing windfall.

O'Leary said the airline recorded between 3 and 4 million online hits within a day of launching the sale, describing it as one of Ryanair's most successful promotional stunts in recent memory. He credited Musk for the surge in attention and free global publicity.

At the core of the disagreement is Ryanair's ultra-low-cost business model. O'Leary argued that installing Starlink equipment would increase fuel consumption and operating costs, forcing the airline to charge for Wi-Fi that most of its passengers are unwilling to buy.

According to O'Leary, Starlink estimates suggest up to 90% of passengers would pay for onboard connectivity. Ryanair's internal data, however, indicates that fewer than 10% of its customers opt for paid Wi-Fi, making it commercially unviable under the airline's pricing structure.

Despite the public sparring, O'Leary acknowledged that Ryanair has been in discussions with Starlink for more than a year and praised the system as technologically strong. He added that the airline would reconsider if Starlink absorbed the added costs or invested directly in Ryanair.

The dispute escalated when Musk jokingly threatened to buy the airline, prompting O'Leary to remind him that non-European citizens cannot hold a controlling stake in a European carrier. O'Leary later struck a lighter tone, suggesting the two "old farts" could settle matters with an arm wrestle.

Ryanair said the "Great Idiot Sale" underscores its commitment to ultra-cheap fares and sharp-edged branding, reinforcing its claim that no other region matches Europe in low-cost air travel value.

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