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Taking your airline to new heights

SkyTeam:



Caring More About You

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Let's Talk ... Anytime

Sabre Airline Solutions communicates with customers

Finding every means possible to communicate with customers to ensure their needs are being met is critical. It's an effective way to create goodwill with customers as well as boost productivity and build confidence in the relationship.

■ By Anita Allen | *Ascend* Contributor

When it comes to running a successful business, it pays to know your customers. It seems simple enough in theory, but truly knowing who they are, what they want or need, where they want to go, and how you can help them get there is more complex. Running a successful business takes ongoing communication, commitment and collaboration. For *Sabre Airline Solutions*®, this takes a community — the *Sabre* community.

We recognize the value of communicating with our customers, not just “to” them. Over the years, we have invested time and resources to create an airline community that is unparalleled in the industry. At every level of engagement — from airline executives to end users — we provide a way for our customers to engage with and among the largest airline community in the world 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Today, more than 380 airline industry companies partake in some facet of our community.

The Community: Then And Now

In our early days, customer communication primarily consisted of teletype, queue messaging and printed newsletters. Except for conferences and phone calls, communications were more one-sided, not collaborative.

Today, we use technological advances to enhance customer communication at every level. Customers participate in various on- and off-line community forums to give opinions, preferences and suggestions about the solutions they use. Because these discussions occur in a password-protected environment or by invitation only, the conversations tend to be candid and the level of detail explicit.

Frank Community Discussions

One of the more common ways we connect with customers is through our customer council calls, which occur on a regular basis to provide insight for solution enhancements, upgrades, releases, development and any range of other solution development activity.

“It was always my personal goal to be very transparent with our customers, especially during customer council calls,” said Alicia Probasco, former Customer Care manager and now client delivery executive for *Sabre Airline Solutions*. “Despite times of harsh criticism, we stuck to our objectives and adjusted our support processes to get the best for everyone. A tough job — and often a thankless one — but we play to win for our customers.”

The *Sabre Airline Solutions* Executive Advisory Board is another forum where

World’s Largest Airline Network Nearly 400 airline industry companies share, learn and engage with each other through the *Sabre* community.

frank discussions occur between airline executives and our company. The first executive advisory board was held in 2007 to candidly discuss business strategy and direction, obtain feedback, and provide networking opportunities. These forums are held twice a year, with memberships rotating every few years to ensure we have new voices in the discussions.

For airline end users and managers, community conferences and events are held throughout the year. These ongoing events provide in-person opportunities to:

- Collaborate in small or large groups,
- Engage with frontline development and product managers,
- Exchange ideas,
- Learn from and network with airlines around the world.

The “voice of the customer” is a specific forum held during conferences with a group of airline customers, one or two *Sabre* executives, and a correspondent to capture topics of discussion. These discussions are extremely direct and often result in action items to do, research or enhance.

For nearly 10 years, our customers have also been able to submit, prioritize and vote on ideas for future solution enhancements. Each year, customers outline their list of enhancement ideas that are later voted on and prioritized by the entire airline community. Since many enhancement ideas require development work, customers are regularly asked for their input on functional requirements. Enhancement rollout schedules are

then posted for customers to view on the *Sabre*® *Community Portal*.

The *Community Portal* is a central online resource that enables customers to have single-sign-on access to their solutions and profile-driven information. More than 20,000 users access the *Community Portal* for their:

- Applications,
- Customer care,
- Delivery,
- Training,
- Solution management expertise,
- Business networking.

This figure has more than doubled during the last year.

“When you consider the number and different types of airlines we have in our community — all the various solutions and offerings these customers have as well as their different needs — it makes our community experience very unique,” said Susan Via, manager of community marketing and engagement for *Sabre Airline Solutions*. “The fact that these airlines regularly come together to help each other based on their knowledge and experience is not only impressive, it’s also quite innovative. We’re building solutions that evolve airlines and honor their uniqueness in channels that would historically be closed lines of communications.”

Our community also helps “put a face with a name” through the *Sabre*® *Community Portal Hub*, our online business networking tool that helps customers



stay connected with industry colleagues. At customers' request, we created the Hub in 2009 so customers could:

- Ask or answer questions,
- Discuss ideas for future enhancements,
- Share perspectives and knowledge,
- Obtain information about their solution,
- Network with other members of the community.

Last year, we realized a year-to-date increase of 141 percent in membership profiles.

"Not every customer is always going to engage in an online forum or community discussion due to the competitive nature of the business," Via said. "Many times, customers prefer to contact us directly,

better solutions that benefit our customers and the industry overall.

Customer Comments

It's one thing to hear it from us, but it's another to hear direct feedback from our customers through a variety of communications such as surveys, conferences, advisory boards and on the *Community Portal*. A few remarks we have received from our airline community members include:

- "Thank you for providing us the opportunity to share ideas and gain knowledge through each others' experiences," said Kashif Karim, assistant manager of revenue management for Pakistan International Airlines.

Service Trends For 2011," the customer-service market has continued to evolve, with an increasing number of companies focused on improving customer support. In fact, more than 80 percent of North American companies use customer experience as an area of differentiation. On the watch list for 2011, the report cites continued:

- Growth of self-service adoption by customers,
- Use of social media for customer service,
- Challenge in viewing a customer across all communications channels,
- Power to customers through their actions, voice and social media channels,
- Focus to make customer service an even bigger differentiator,
- Increase in customer-to-customer support.

"Social media is still a growing trend, but we are ahead of the trend, and we offer advanced tools to boot," said Gordon Locke, vice president of portfolio marketing and strategy for *Sabre Airline Solutions*. "We take great pride in our community and the differentiator it is for us. Whether it's having an automatic customer call-back feature for customers to use or the ability to report their contractual metrics online, our focus is to help airlines increase revenue, reduce costs and provide a better customer experience through our expertise and leading technology."

Collaboration doesn't have to be limited to the confines of a conference room or an online meeting. At *Sabre*, community conversations and knowledge sharing occur in person and in virtual environments all around the globe, with no cubes or conference rooms required. We're available to chat ... anytime. **F**



Anita Allen is a member of the Sabre Airline Solutions community marketing team, which is primarily focused on customer engagement. She can be contacted at anita.allen@sabre.com.

High Light

Today, we use technological advances to enhance customer communication at every level.

Customers participate in various on- and off-line community forums to give opinions, preferences and suggestions about the solutions they use.

but the thoughts and postings found in the community can promote more meaningful discussions, insight and direction."

Customers can also develop their skills through individual courses and self-paced learning via *Sabre® Airline University*, located on the *Community Portal*. Depending on the solutions purchased, customers may have on- and off-line resources available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A bookstore and certification programs are available.

Through the Alumni Group on the *Sabre Community Portal* Hub, individuals who are certified in at least one course are first to hear about new training courses that are available as well as have a voice in what is coming next. Last year, visitors to the site increased more than 50 percent with recent enhancements, such as adding a virtual campus and an increased number of self-paced (computer-based) learning opportunities.

These are just a few of our *Sabre* community components and how we leverage them to move the industry forward through aviation technology, services and programs. Through customer insight and suggestions, we are able to streamline, enhance or create

- "The networking was good, and understanding each other's businesses makes it easier to interact and know where someone is coming from," said Mike Croucher, head of IT architecture and delivery for British Airways. "I have seen *Sabre* take on some of the previous suggestions. It makes you want to contribute more. It's worthwhile."
- "I am relatively new to the airline industry," said Kris Kutchera, vice president of information technology for Alaska Airlines. "I wanted to meet others in the industry. I enjoyed the amount of networking, and the discussions have been better than I expected."

At Your Service

Social media has seen explosive growth during the last few years, signaling it is dynamic, demanding and here to stay. Having a plan and knowing how to engage customers to your mutual benefit is critical to harvesting loyalty, customer satisfaction and sustained growth.

According to the recently published Customer1 report, "Top 10 Customer