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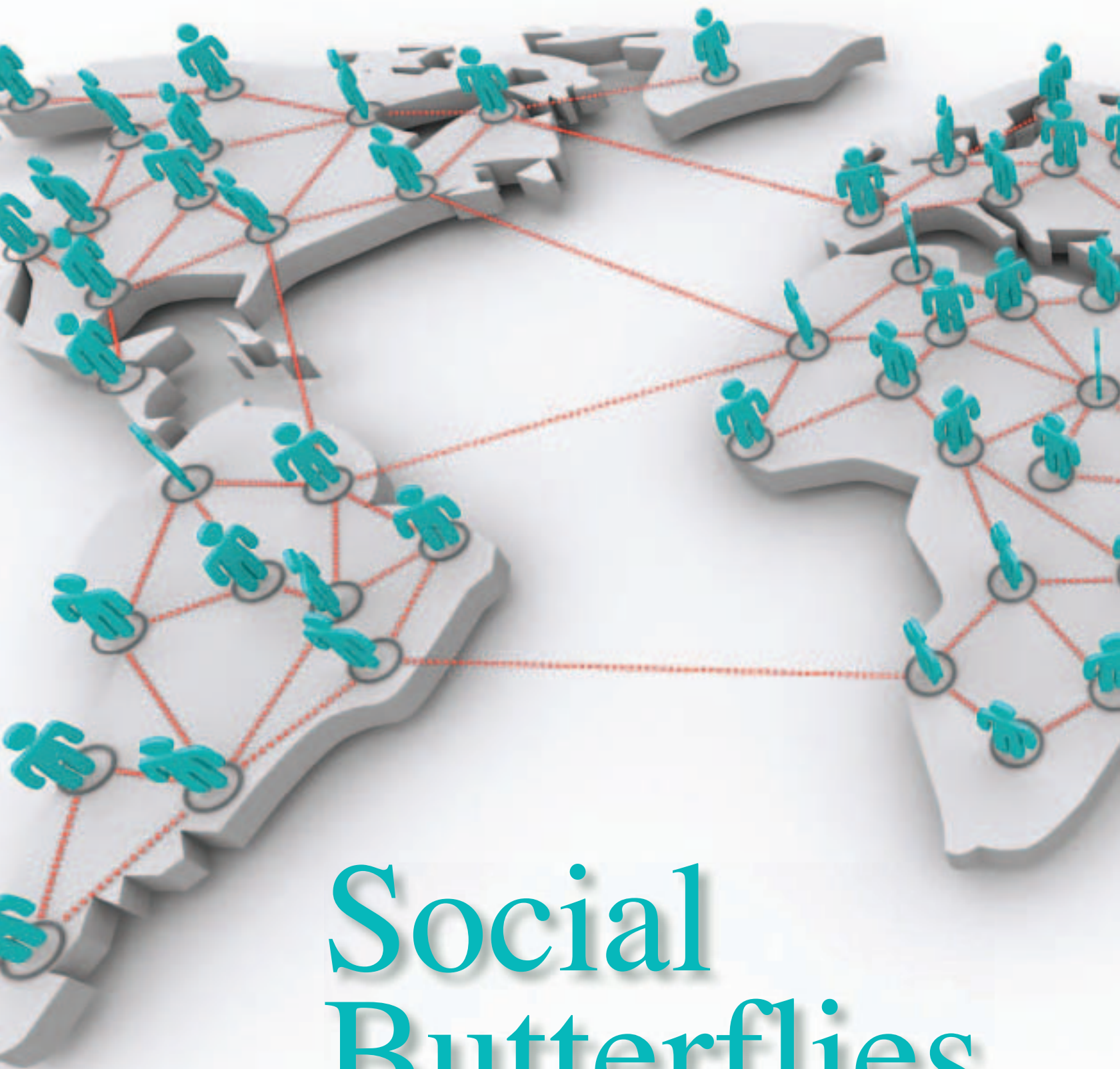
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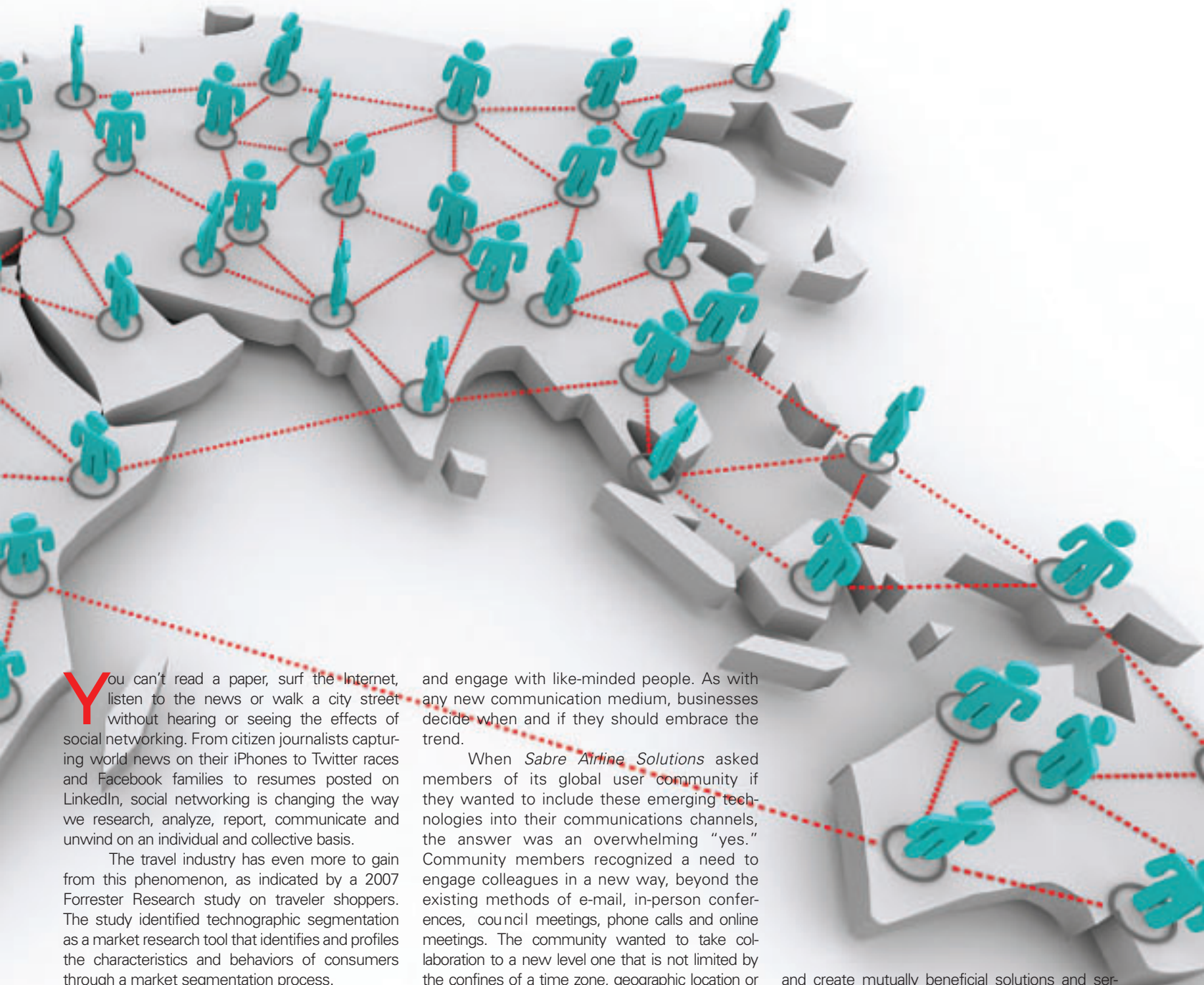
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Social Butterflies

Sabre Airline Solutions® offers members of its airline community a rich social networking opportunity to ensure easy access to real-time, valuable resources.

■ Anita Allen | *Ascend* Contributor



You can't read a paper, surf the Internet, listen to the news or walk a city street without hearing or seeing the effects of social networking. From citizen journalists capturing world news on their iPhones to Twitter races and Facebook families to resumes posted on LinkedIn, social networking is changing the way we research, analyze, report, communicate and unwind on an individual and collective basis.

The travel industry has even more to gain from this phenomenon, as indicated by a 2007 Forrester Research study on traveler shoppers. The study identified technographic segmentation as a market research tool that identifies and profiles the characteristics and behaviors of consumers through a market segmentation process.

The study also showed that business travelers are 50 percent more likely to be "creators" of blogs and video uploads or indulge in other social creation activities compared to the average general online population. Defined in categories, they're also more likely to be:

- Critics (people who react to others' content),
- Joiners (people in social networks),
- Collectors (people who use really simple syndication, or RSS, feeds or voting sites such as Digg).

As business professionals across the globe adopt social networking into their personal lives, it is a logical step for social networking to expand into the realm of business networking. Similar to social networking, business networking allows individuals to connect

and engage with like-minded people. As with any new communication medium, businesses decide when and if they should embrace the trend.

When *Sabre Airline Solutions* asked members of its global user community if they wanted to include these emerging technologies into their communications channels, the answer was an overwhelming "yes." Community members recognized a need to engage colleagues in a new way, beyond the existing methods of e-mail, in-person conferences, council meetings, phone calls and online meetings. The community wanted to take collaboration to a new level one that is not limited by the confines of a time zone, geographic location or budget. The solution: business networking through a unique online tool called the *Sabre® Community Portal* hub.

Working together for the common good makes sense, and providing members of the user community with the types of communications they need to build their strengths and better perform their jobs is a top goal for *Sabre Airline Solutions*.

"The airline business is no stranger to working together for the good of the industry," said Greg Gilchrist, senior vice president of global sales and client management for *Sabre Airline Solutions*. "Airlines have historically worked together to create and expedite solutions that benefit the industry, such as interline ticketing and codeshare agreements. Through our robust community model, we continue to help airlines have these conversations

and create mutually beneficial solutions and services. That's the heart of our business."

With features similar to Facebook and LinkedIn, the Hub enables community members to take this desire to work together to the next level. The tool enables users to share and collaborate in a virtual online community 24 hours a day, seven days a week, regardless of geographic location. Through the Hub, members can:

- Ask questions and provide answers,
- Share perspectives and knowledge,
- Provide input and guidance on the future direction of *Sabre Airline Solutions* software, services, training and other support.

Perhaps most important is the ability for users to interact with members of their own organization, other customers and *Sabre Airline Solutions* staff worldwide.



The Sabre Airline Solutions community enables airlines from around the world to help shape the technology they use. From the beginning of a customer engagement to implementation and throughout the ongoing relationship, airlines are encouraged to collaborate with other airlines as well as Sabre Airline Solutions as its systems improve and evolve.

“All members of the airline community are encouraged to participate in one or more community activities,” said Susan Via, manager of community marketing for Sabre Airline Solutions air segment customers. “The goal is to continue to engage customers in conversations that provide mutual value so they don’t have to wait for a survey or annual meeting to tell us what is on their minds. The value of using multiple channels of engagement

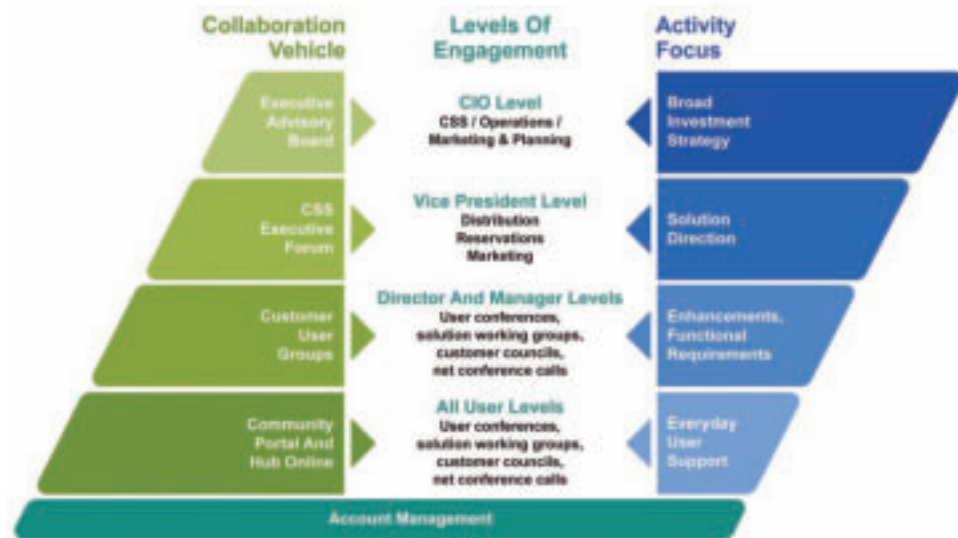
is that feedback and action items can be addressed immediately or noted for consideration.”

In the popular book Groundswell, the “groundswell” phenomenon is defined as a social trend in which people use technologies to get the things they need from each other instead of from traditional institutions such as corporations. Recent successes of community initiatives indicate that the phenomenon can also help businesses that listen

to and take action from these important customer touch points.

“At every level, Sabre [Airline Solutions] people listen and really care about solving our problems and making the best possible product line,” said Gary Plexman, director of schedules and product support for First Air. “We get to share our concerns and ideas with the full Sabre [Airline Solutions] community on a frequent basis through customer councils, conference calls, workshops and conferences, and now on a real-time basis through the Sabre Community Portal and the Hub. This allows the community to bring a number of different viewpoints to bear on an issue very quickly, leading to rapid development and change to existing products and to the development of new products.”

While it’s unclear what long-term value social media, business networking tools and community marketing will provide the airline industry, one truth is sure to stand: humans, by their very nature, are social and collaborative beings. Given the right tools, the commonalities of the majority can be magnified and tapped at a global level to develop next-generation software and services that benefit the entire industry.



Collaboration opportunities within the Sabre Airline Solutions community offer multiple gathering points that are aimed at specific employees from end users to top executives to help them engage and connect on a personal and professional level.

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.