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Why Fly When You Can Web Conference?

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His association's members tend to talk to one another at least three times a day by conference call, he said, but the group prefers personal meetings. His members often fly free on each other's airlines, but they still encounter the same travel difficulties, he said.

In fact, there is a countertheory that air travel, Web communications and phone calls drive one another.

"As technology has advanced, it increases the need for face-to-face travel," said Kevin Mitchell, chairman of the Business Travel Coalition, a group that advocates lower fares and better conditions for passengers. "In 1990, you and I might have managed 100 relationships, and that was a lot," he said. "Now with e-mail and instant messaging, you and I may manage 1,000."

Still, not every meeting has to be face to face, even though the demands of a global economy require more meetings, the experts say. People who collaborate often, and people within the same company, may consult over the Web in between face-to-face gatherings, sometimes holding Web conferences far more often that they would ever have traveled to each others' locations.

"We all know each other, we've all met each other, we don't have to do it face to face," said Mr. Tiller, describing corporate strategy. "Save that money for much more important, lucrative trips; have that sales guy make two more trips."

This reliance on face-to-face meetings continues even though the Internet is the thing you can't leave home without. Why else do all those hotels advertise free high-speed connections?

So despite shocks like the London arrests, demand for business air travel is still strong. Globally, according to the International Air Transport Association, an airline trade group, passenger traffic for the first half of this year — until the British government said it had uncovered a plot to bomb planes — was up 6.7 percent from the year before. About 40 percent of global aviation is in the United States.

Not that getting there is still half the fun; that fraction is overstated.

"Most business travelers would say, it's not a fun thing anymore," said Mr. Mitchell of the Business Travel Coalition. For him, the fun period was before Sept. 11, 2001, when terrorists turned four airplanes into kamikaze bombs, resulting in the creation of the Transportation Security Administration. But reaction to 9/11 was not the end, Mr. Mitchell said. "It's worse and it's probably getting worse, in view of most business travelers," he said.

It's worse for personal travel, too. Ms. Smith, of Tower Travel Management, a company that manages travel for corporations, flies without hesitation for business. But when she must go from her base in Chicago to visit relatives near Kansas City, she said that lately she chose the seven-hour drive over the 90-minute flight. On holiday weekends, when she likes to go, the airports in Chicago are "crazy," she said, partly because of security requirements. And the economics have changed. "It's harder to get a really cheap fare," she added.

And Web conferencing with Mom is unlikely to do the trick.

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Coping strategies exist. Michael Brein, a travel-book writer who bills himself as the world's first travel psychologist, recommends living in a personal cocoon.

"Create your own comfortable, cozy inward personal space," he wrote in an essay on his Web site. "Attain the mental state that you in your own cocoon are traveling through the airport space and simply dealing with all that goes on around you, all that needs to be done. Withdraw into the self."

But there are those pesky recorded announcements warning that unattended luggage will be destroyed, hardly an inducement to avoid looking around. "Put on your noise-canceling headphones," Dr. Brein advised.

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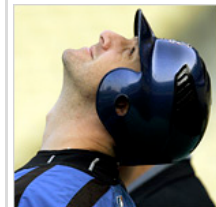
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