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## Putting the Human Element Back into Customer Care

By Andre Angel

The round-the-clock job of supporting employees, customers, suppliers, and business partners is one of the biggest challenges facing information technology (IT) support staffs in enterprise organizations today. With more businesses running global operations, IT staffs need support tools that help the organization collaborate effectively across time zones and keep critical systems available.

On-demand remote support solutions have emerged to address the inadequacies of Web self-service tools, email response systems, and phone-based approaches to providing quality customer support. This new type of support service improves the customer experience with cost-effective human interaction, which is especially valuable when it comes to resolving the more frustrating IT problems that self-service options can't easily address.

As you may already know, remote support software products allow support professionals to create an immediate and secure connection between the support agent's computer and a user's PC or Mac, so the support staff can actually see what's on the user's screen in real time. This approach to providing IT support saves time and travel, and improves the customer service experience by delivering instant, personalized help.

**Self-Service Solutions: A Mixed Blessing:** We've all experienced varying levels of satisfaction when it comes to getting technical support. Self-service solutions are often not adaptable to every problem, and they also bring to mind memories of long wait times trying to get help from a human voice. Unfortunately, some businesses don't view customer support as a way to proactively build relationships with high-value customers while keeping competitors off their radar. Customers can't afford to have the process of getting help be difficult or time-consuming. They want immediate, direct contact with experts. This is where remote support solutions excel in comparison to "low-touch" self-service tools.

Generally speaking, customers have test driven varying levels of customer care and “low-human-element” tools, without receiving much satisfaction from them. As the Internet becomes more user-friendly in its development, it doesn’t necessarily translate into an improved method of solving customer problems.

It is interesting to note that in 2004, a Jupiter Research study found that only 51 percent of consumers reported being satisfied with a searchable self-service Internet-based solution. The dissatisfaction was two-fold: misunderstanding the audience most likely to use self-service and failing to provide the service customers actually needed to solve their problems, leading to “Web self-service user burden.”

Although the Internet solutions-based approach does have benefits, such as cost-effectiveness and cutting across time zone differences and geography, empowering customers to find their own solutions often leads to inconsistent or unresolved service experiences. This increases frustration with all self-service channels. These issues consistently result in lost sales and customer loyalty as well as customer dissatisfaction.

Research findings on the option of email-based support aren’t that much better. Common complaints were slow response times or even no response at all, and often multiple email exchanges were needed to address an issue.

In addition to the general option of Internet self-searchable support, the phone-based option also has limitations. Customers using phone-based support for technical help were not satisfied with the level of assistance, according to industry research. In a survey by DHL conducted by Roper Public Affairs and Media, more than 80 percent of consumers reported switching to another business or service provider just based on a previous negative customer experience. This proves that if a company relies solely on phone-based support as its only customer service option, it will continue to fall short of reducing the cost of service resolution. This is due to phone-related limitations, such as the short number of hours staff are on-call to help, ineffective communication or difficulty describing the problem without the staff being able to see it themselves, poor service quality, and cost of service delivery and first call resolution.

When self-service is coupled with interactive remote support tools – such as desktop sharing, remote control co-browsing, or guided online demonstrations – customer care, trust, and brand loyalty result. According to DestinationCRM.com, “A complete self-service vision [including real-time remote control support] translates into dramatic overall cost savings.”

**The Benefits of On-demand Remote Support Technology:** Increased productivity and reduced on-site travel time, in addition to reduced costs of delivering support, are the key benefits of using on-demand remote support. Reports from users prove that remote support reduces those areas within the support process that correspond to the highest costs: on-site technician visits, support escalations, and callbacks.

Physically traveling to a customer site is a cost drain in terms of time, productivity, and expense. Remote support is the next best way to provide immediate technical assistance. Remote support has the luxury of enabling helpdesks to see what the user sees and remotely control users' computers in real-time. No other technology can meet the unpredictability of end-user needs as effectively as remote support.

Remote support provides organizations with a proven return on investment within a short time after it's installed. Other benefits include:

- Improved problem diagnosis, leading to faster first contact resolution rates
- Shortened call time lengths, reducing the total number of calls and increasing productivity for support teams and those they serve
- Immediate problem resolution, improving customer/employee service experience and increased satisfaction levels and loyalty
- Higher perceived value for the help desk within an organization, resulting in transparency between user and support staff
- Increased revenue opportunities by offering training, which is a by-product of remote support
- Competitive advantages created by augmenting the reach of remote support with multiple self-help services
- Better analysis of the root cause of technical problems and successfully employed solutions, helping to facilitate information exchange across lines of business and support teams

Simply, remote support saves companies more time, money, and internal resources. The key to keeping support costs down is to determine which stage of customer resolution lifecycle takes the longest to solve and then to apply remote support to speed up that part of the process.

The intangible value of remote support helps organizations and service providers outperform their competition and exceed their customers' expectations while securing brand loyalty. It empowers help desk and customer support teams to achieve the performance goals by which they are constantly measured.

**If You're Considering a Remote Support Solution:** Remote support is a "value add" that businesses concerned with product implementation requirements, firewall and security impacts, service quality operations, and ongoing maintenance needs should consider. Remote support provides service professionals an enhanced ability to diagnose and resolve customer problems quickly and upon first contact.

There are a variety of remote support products on the market, but when shopping for yours, you should consider which features are most important to your business needs. A list of considerations is provided below:

- Built specifically for on-demand remote support
- Desktop sharing
- Remote control
- Unattended remote control
- Number of simultaneous chats or sessions per operator
- Reboot reconnect
- File transfer
- 256-bit AES encryption
- Smart ACD management routing of operator groups
- Chat without download
- Proactive Web chat
- Preset chat responses
- Call escalation transfer calls
- Inter-operator chat call routing
- Security access permission notification
- Application selection
- Direct support for applications
- Keyboard chat
- Voice over IP (VoIP)
- Fast connection
- Video
- Co-surfing
- Multiple language support
- Administrator center

The remote support product your company chooses should yield benefits that will positively affect your bottom line, including a significant decrease in the time and money spent solving IT issues. The product of your choice should give your company a leg up in assisting your internal and external customers, which will result in your company being a step ahead of competitors. Remote support access is the most effective method to revive the human element in customer care through the numerous features mentioned above. We all know how vital customers are to us: without them, we wouldn't be in business.



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