



FASTER CALL RESOLUTION WITH
BROWSER-BASED REMOTE CONTROL:

HANDS-ON CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Improve productivity and customer satisfaction
through the power and simplicity of show and tell

ASK AN EXECUTIVE to name the single most important asset at his or her organization—not including the personnel—and you’ll get a range of responses. Some will point to intellectual property, others to physical location or a robust distribution network. But for a savvy exec, especially one in a service-oriented business, there’s only one answer: customers.

No matter what the industry, businesses are realizing that one of the quickest and most effective ways to strengthen their business is to treat their customer base like the valuable asset it is. The competition for customers in every industry is fiercer than ever, as loyal customers are expensive to acquire and easy to lose. Ten years ago, only a few people might have recognized the expression “customer churn.” Today, almost everyone knows what it means, and a growing number of decision-makers can quote average churn figures for their industry, if not their own business.

As a direct result of these trends, customer service has become more important than ever before. The reason is simple: it’s one of the single greatest factors in increasing customer retention. According to a leading consultant firm specializing in strategic, measurable customer relationship management (CRM), “Repeat product purchases occur when customers are certain that they can count on consistent, reliable service.”

For corporate call centers and help desks, the attention now being paid to customer support is a mixed blessing. Companies are more willing to invest in

CRM tools and infrastructure, but with that increased focus comes increased accountability. The pressure on customer contact centers to improve service quality is higher than ever before. And while budgets may have grown a bit, the fact remains that customer support—especially technical support—is labor and capital intensive. Even outsourced solutions don’t come cheap: companies report charges of more than ten dollars per call or 85 cents per minute. Make no mistake, tech support is expensive, and for many customers, frustrating.

LOOKING FOR LEVERAGE

Recently, businesses searching for ways to stretch their resources have embraced Internet-enabled support. According to analyst firm Datamonitor, the contact center technology market is expected to grow 30 percent per year, reaching \$4.7 billion by 2009. The first step for many organizations is to offer support to customers via e-mail. In fact at many businesses, it’s the only way to contact a technical support agent.

From a cost perspective, the ideal support situation is to help customers solve their own problems. Most companies now stock their Web sites with extensive support resources, from lists of frequently asked questions (FAQs) up through searchable knowledgebases containing known issues and common solutions. Most software and hardware vendors also maintain areas on their Web sites that guide users through downloading and installing software and firmware updates.



A more recent trend in Internet-enabled support is to connect users with support agents through a Web-based instant messenger-style chat window. This application makes many customers more comfortable, as it returns some of the immediacy of the call center contact missing from e-mail support and self-service Web sites.

The attraction of these Internet- and Web-enabled support mechanisms is increased call center efficiency. Self-service sites help users find their own solutions, while e-mail support and chat applications permit staff to respond to multiple requests simultaneously. In all cases, the solutions are designed to boost the most common metric used to measure contact centers: the number of customer issues resolved in a given time period.

ACHIEVING QUALITY AND QUANTITY

All of these support mechanisms also share the same glaring weaknesses. First, they do nothing to improve the efficiency or quality of the support interaction. Self-service support systems eliminate the customer-agent interaction completely. E-mail and chat applications do nothing more than shift the conversation to another medium—one that is more efficient for the support agent, but may or may not be more convenient for the customer. And traditional over-the-phone conversations often turn into frustrating back-and-forth conversations as agents and customers try to describe a visual desktop experience that's increasingly rich and complex.

None of these applications increase the quality of the communication. In fact, the quality of the interaction may be degraded if either the customer or the agent has poor writing or typing skills. Even when successful, the support process places a tremendous amount of stress on the customer, as it requires them to perform complicated, unfamiliar, technical tasks with no visual cues or guidance.

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eCARE IN THE ENTERPRISE

Enterprise IT departments have been relying on Timbuktu Pro remote control software for years. So it's no surprise that while eCare is being widely adopted for customer support, it's also winning hearts and minds as an internal solution. The same features that make eCare a winner in the call center make it perfect for the enterprise helpdesk. It's lightweight, doesn't require a specialized client installation, secure, and its tight transmission protocols don't abuse network bandwidth. In addition, the software's reliance on user permission and explicit approval makes it especially well suited for support scenarios in businesses where employees work with sensitive or heavily regulated data, such as the healthcare or insurance industries. Netopia eCare offers an IT department the irresistible option of having a tech virtually present to solve problems instead of having to travel to the employee's desk. It's an offer that few businesses can—or want to—refuse.

Back at the contact center, phone, e-mail, chat, and self-service applications look like winners when performance measurement begins and ends with a stopwatch and a whiteboard. But as businesses look for ways to increase customer retention, they're looking for tools that will help them work past call volumes to boost per-incident efficiency. While they complement a telephone conversation, neither e-mail nor chat applications provide any direct information about the customer's desktop, nor do they add any diagnostic tools that the support agent might use to speed resolution. The agent must still rely entirely on the customer to independently and accurately report symptoms, perform diagnostics, apply any solutions that may be indicated, and evaluate success or failure. The picture is no better for managers and executives working to improve overall contact center performance by discovering and propagating best practices with chat or e-mail transcripts as their only points of reference.

Some companies, primarily PC vendors and ISPs, have attempted to improve the odds for their support staff with software agents that transmit information about a customer's system. Depending on the sophistication of the client, a support technician may be able to see anything from basic hardware configuration up through the software installed on a customer's system. Leaving aside the expense of developing and deploying a custom application, a system monitor installed with administrative privileges transmitting customer system data raises potential security and privacy issues. Despite careful safeguards, applications can be compromised or malfunction, possibly revealing sensitive data to unauthorized persons. And, of course, as time passes, the software agents become outdated and require support and maintenance.

And so, while Internet and Web software may have increased the volume of incidents that customer support centers can handle, the applications have yet to improve the quality of the interactions between the support agent and the customer. As the battle for customer loyalty intensifies, businesses working to deliver world-class customer service are evaluating solutions that build on the tools that they've already implemented.

THE NEXT GENERATION OF BROWSER-BASED REMOTE SUPPORT

Interestingly, the problem of providing remote technical support has been around for many years in enterprise scenarios. For thousands of businesses, the answer is remote control software that allows technical staff to connect to a computer to troubleshoot and repair problems. For 20 years, Timbuktu Pro remote control software from Netopia has been an indispensable tool for the enterprise

THE CUSTOMER IS NEVER ALONE

With the Netopia eCare remote support solution, agents can walk a customer through a Web site, software install, or other solution procedure as if they were physically present. It's a perceptible difference, and it helps companies reinforce the feeling that they're within easy reach, standing behind their products. The new version of eCare strengthens this connection by adding a simple way for customers to reconnect with the same support tech in case the connection is broken, whether by accident or on purpose (due to a necessary restart). When an eCare session begins, the software places a shortcut file on the customer's desktop. If the connection is broken for any reason, double-clicking on the shortcut re-establishes the support link, opening the same ticket at the care center, so that the support session can continue as if had never been interrupted.

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helpdesk. But the challenge becomes more complex outside the managed confines of the enterprise. How do you provide high-quality, cost-effective technical support to a geographically dispersed customer or partner base when you can't control the hardware, the configuration of the desktop, or even the operating system?

It's possible to extend that same enterprise-grade support to customers without pre-deploying software agents or standardizing customer environments. Netopia eCare is a Web-based, cross-platform remote support application. With eCare, call center technical support staff can remotely and securely connect to a customer's Macintosh or Microsoft Windows desktop through a Web browser to facilitate troubleshooting and repair. Netopia eCare eliminates the confusing back-and-forth as an agent tries to give directions and customers try to describe what they see.

The eCare remote support solution is the next generation of Web-enabled customer support. It augments current support technology, improving the quality and efficiency of the interaction between the support agent and the customer. To begin an eCare session, all the customer has to do is click on a link on the support site. The Web browser then securely contacts the eCare server and, with the customer's permission, establishes a secure, encrypted Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) link between the customer and the agent.

At this point, the agent has several options, all of which help create a richer support experience for the customer. Netopia eCare incorporates an IM-style chat client, or it can be used in parallel with a telephone call. Through eCare, the support agent can view the customer's screen and—again with the customer's permission—take control of their computer. The agent can show the customer a feature or function and see any error messages. Beyond sight and control, eCare offers a set of features spe-

cifically targeted at secure and efficient troubleshooting. Authorized support agents can request a hardware and software profile, and transfer files and URLs between the two systems. At all times, the customer remains in complete control of the transaction—authorizing each action as the support call progresses.

Netopia eCare also solves a significant customer care challenge: resolving incidents on the first call—the key to high productivity, expense control, and customer satisfaction. From the customer's perspective, perhaps the most frustrating part of a multi-call experience is that they are forced to re-explain the problem over and over. Some remote support solutions can exacerbate this situation, as many desktop operations require a reboot of the computer, after which the customer must reconnect to the call center. With most remote support products, the customer ends up working with a new agent, and must explain the problem in order to continue. With eCare, the customer can be re-connected to the original agent after a restart. Similarly, in the cases of accidental connection disruption, the customer can be easily re-connected back to the original agent. Additionally, Netopia eCare allows an agent in a Tier 1 environment to efficiently and smoothly escalate a support incident to a Tier II agent by simply sending an e-mail invitation to the user.

The net effect: eCare broadens the diagnostic and repair options available to the support representative, improving the quality and efficiency of the interaction. The results go straight to the bottom line—one company was able to reduce the total amount of time that its call center representatives spent on the phone by 25 percent.

At a single stroke, the agent is simultaneously released from depending on the user as the sole conduit for information and empowered to take a reassuring, hands-on role in leading the user through even the most intricate support procedures. The result is a more efficient—often shorter—support interaction that doesn't sacrifice the customer on the altar of speed. In fact, surveys from users who have worked with agents using eCare show that customers are more than simply satisfied with the support that they receive—they're actively enthusiastic about the process.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE CUSTOMER

For the customer, eCare immediately relieves much of the pressure and stress of a support interaction, allowing them to participate as much or as little in the process as they choose. Customers comfortable with technology can follow the support agent through the process, while the less adept can simply hand their system over to the support agent, while remaining confident that nothing will happen to their system without their explicit approval.

SUCCESS STORY

Netopia eCare helps support agents resolve issues across the Web, desktop-to-desktop, so it's particularly effective when the support representative must untangle a complex problem that's been escalated up from a Tier 1 call center. That's the case at Legacy Software, creator of the BakeSmart point-of-sale and bakery management application. At the company's advanced call center, Tier II technicians take on the knottiest support issues. President and CEO Ray Clements says that with eCare, Legacy has been able to cut its average call time from 45 minutes to 15 minutes, dramatically increasing call center efficiency and saving the company money.

managers to increase overall support staff competence. Recorded interactions can be played back for later analysis and coaching, while best practices can be discovered and shared with other team members.

Netopia eCare helps call center agents resolve customer support incidents more efficiently than ever before, while achieving previously unapproachable levels of customer

In fact, beyond the broad palette of tools that eCare brings to the support interaction, the solution is built from the ground up to protect the customer's security and privacy. At the customer's computer, the solution operates out of a Web browser instead of as a standalone client application installed at the root level. All transactions between the customer and the support agent take place over secure, encrypted SSL channels, ensuring that outsiders cannot see or break into the session and that the customer is actually connected to the authorized support center instead of an impostor.

Many remote control support clients incorporate an approval mechanism by which the user grants the support agent access to their system. But typically, this allows complete, unfettered access to the entire system. This arrangement can be appropriate for an internal helpdesk scenario, but eCare takes a different approach. The customer must explicitly approve of every action that the agent takes, from collecting system information to sending files or URLs. The customer is always in total control of their system and information, increasing their comfort level and confidence.

All support sessions are recorded and logged, creating a long-term record of everything that occurs during a session that limits the liability of the business while maintaining the privacy of the customer. Finally, once session is complete, eCare erases itself from the user's system, leaving nothing behind that could potentially compromise the customer's security.

In addition to providing a record for security purposes, eCare can be used internally, allowing call center

satisfaction. And, as businesses have seen, customer satisfaction directly contributes to customer retention. With eCare, every customer support contact becomes an opportunity to positively reinforce the customer's perception of an organization's brand.

HIGH VOLUME, HIGH TOUCH, LOW COST

Because eCare is Web-based, it helps businesses to provide world-class support without requiring a large commitment from the customer. Because it is a hosted solution, eCare similarly minimizes both the burden on an organization's IT department and the impact on the support budget. The solution is equally well suited for large and small support organizations, integrating smoothly with existing CRM applications and complementing other support tools. Perhaps most important is the fact that despite its sophistication, eCare is both easy to use and thoroughly road-tested, based on 20 years of remote control development experience at Netopia.

Support professionals across the world understand that remote control dramatically changes the quality of a support interaction, speeds issue resolution, and improves customer satisfaction. Netopia eCare delivers on-demand remote control support wherever the customer happens to be, whenever they need it, all the while providing real metrics that help call centers constantly improve. The next generation of customer support is available today. ■

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