

WORLDWIDE WEB SELF-SERVICE

A NATURAL EVOLUTION OF A TRADITIONAL PROCESS.

By Pamela S Follett

Ask someone what a helpdesk or customer service means to them and they will most likely think of the traditional call centre. The helpdesk is the place to call if your computer does not work or customer service the place to call to discuss orders and pricing. Conversely, ask someone what 'self-service' means, and you will get a mix of responses, often limited to the presentation of FAQs on a website.

Regardless of perception, web-based self-service is rapidly becoming established as the preferred channel for the delivery of assistance and information, both for internal and external service. Whereas industry continues to wrestle with the concepts of customer relationship management (CRM), the benefits of self-service are readily identifiable and easy to achieve. Innovative and elegant solutions provide for economies of growth, ultimately affecting the bottom line through collaboration and customer satisfaction.

BUSINESS AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT

As technology evolves, so do the costs and methods of doing business. The internet, as an enabler of global commerce, has dramatically altered perceptions and expectations of employees, business partners and customers. The world expects service 24/7, and well-informed organisations are reaping the benefits of empowerment through self-service.

Although traditional service methods remain prevalent, the gains from implementing a self-service strategy are substantial. More than

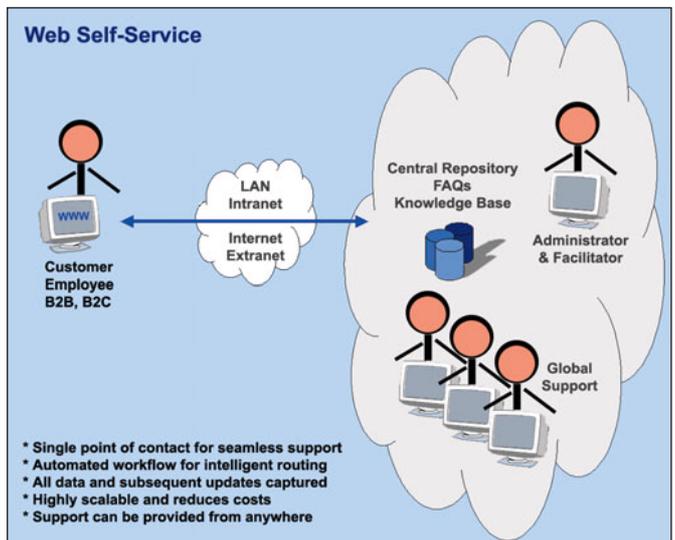
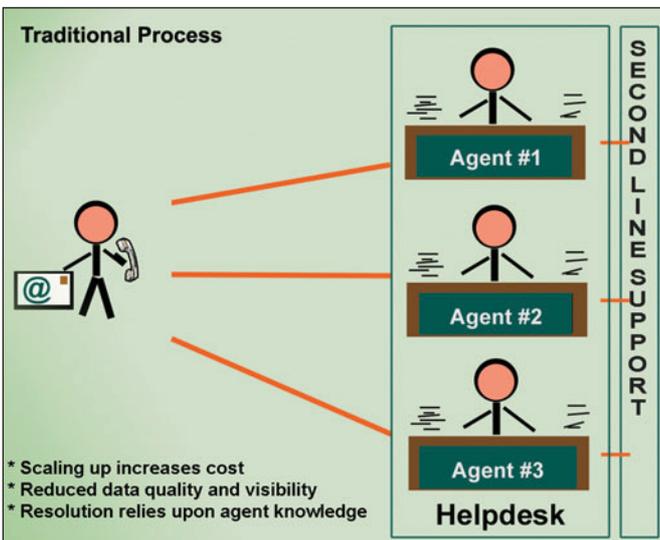
ever, executives are being asked to reduce costs yet increase productivity, and the pivotal role of the helpdesk and service centre must adapt and extend to meet these demands. If your organisation has not implemented self-service as a key component of your business and information technology infrastructure, rest assured that your competitors are already well on their way.

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TRADITIONAL PROCESS RAISES TRADITIONAL ISSUES

Until recently, the helpdesk had often become the last resort for resolving issues or obtaining information. Negative experiences using complex telephony systems, a lack of visibility or status tracking, combined with inexperienced helpdesk agents, leads to customer frustration, process inefficiency and ultimately loss of revenue.

During the last decade, e-mail advanced as the channel of choice for support. However, this also became expensive as



problems mounted through viruses and spam, creating bottlenecks and corrupting data.

From a management perspective, traditional process remains costly, with business expansion typically requiring increased support headcount. Furthermore, it limits the capabilities of small and mid-sized businesses to compete on an equal footing, while severely restricting support and trend analysis – critical elements for increasing productivity.

PIONEERING SELF-SERVICE

You probably use self-service all the time without even realising it. One only needs to look at the travel industry as an excellent example for the adoption of self-service. Traditional processes required frequent communication with travel agents in order to put together a business trip or vacation. Now one can simply use the internet to research travel options, build a schedule and make payments. This, however, has not made travel agents completely redundant. Frequently, a combination of self-service with experienced advice results in the best possible, personalised experience.

APPLYING PRACTICAL TECHNOLOGY FOR SUPERIOR PROCESS

With the accessibility offered by web technology, organisations are increasingly turning to augment customer and helpdesk support with web-based solutions. Such solutions offer superior economies of scale, whether deployed on a localised intranet for a small solution need or expanded to the internet for global support of customers.

Vendors such as CobbleSoft, pioneers of innovative self-service features, recognised that by blending the reach of the internet with the power of an enterprise class database, organisations could easily meet change and reduce costs yet significantly increase productivity and customer satisfaction.

Today, solutions are interactive, enabling mechanisms for connecting people to people, providing service through personalisation and convenience that extends well beyond simple automation.

Organisations sometimes overlook the fact that customers are individuals and, as individuals, they simply do not care about your other customers. Your customers expect premium levels of service – and on their own terms. It is a natural human tendency to seek control of your destiny, and self-service provides a perception of control through empowerment. Consequently, a single point of contact, complete with visibility of the wealth of knowledge that establishes you as experts in your field, provides enormous value to your customers.

From a management perspective, the self-service model enables headcount reductions, with helpdesk agents becoming

facilitators and administrators rather than your front-line support. Using features such as automated workflow, flexible business rules channel support to the areas of your business that can provide the quickest and/or most accurate response to your customer. This enables scalability, both up and down, allowing you to achieve a reduction in costs yet increase productivity.

For organisations located in multiple cities or countries, web-based self-service offers even greater economies. A single, centralised repository negates the need for front-line support at remote locations, thus realising further significant cost reductions. The elegance of an extended architecture with capabilities such as service on demand, real-time integration, a searchable knowledge base and process management enables successful communication and collaboration.

PROACTIVE SUPPORT

Comprehensive, next-generation solutions offer enormous advantages for organisations prepared to invest in their employees

and customers as a basis for growth. In addition to regularly soliciting and acting upon feedback, the use of broadcast and alert mechanisms provides for proactive support. Promoting communication channels such as these, alongside a solutions centre can pre-empt the majority of ticket requests, significantly reducing the workload on your helpdesk.

When it is necessary to raise a ticket, features such as real-time integration to other systems can be used to auto-populate data fields. In addition to enhancing customer interaction, potential costly data issues are eliminated, ensuring higher percentages of accuracy and resolution.

EXECUTIVES: THE BOTTOM LINE

What does web self-service mean to the company’s bottom line? Ultimately, it will result in substantial cost savings both in terms of quantitative costs for infrastructure

and personnel savings, as well as improved productivity of your front-line and back-office staff. Gartner, for example, estimates that support provided via the web can cost pennies per transaction versus over 50 times that for phone-based service.

As customers and employees come to expect more for their service needs, organisations that empower through self-service stand to gain the greatest competitive edge. Implementing an industrial-strength solution will put you at the forefront of technology, increasing customer loyalty and satisfaction rates, resulting in greater success for your business. ■

SERVICE ESSENTIALS

- 100 percent web, zero client footprint
- Intuitive, customisable interface
- Secure, global access
- Customisable fields and tickets
- Tracking and update capability
- Attachment upload/download
- Real-time integration and population
- Integrated knowledge base
- Searchable solutions centre
- Automated e-mail notification
- Context-sensitive online user help
- Customer feedback and surveys
- Fast, responsive and scalable
- Management analysis and trending
- APIs and web services

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