

Using Web-based Support Tools to Improve Customer Service

a SupportIndustry.com & CRMindustry.com White Paper

April 2009

Sponsored By:



PARATURE.

Using Web-based Tools for Service and Support

The Web continues to put an indelible stamp on the way people live and work, impacting the way they communicate, do business, and conduct social interactions. It has empowered the population in countless ways, and continually layers on new mechanisms for connecting with anyone, anywhere.

It's given voice to every kind of business and end user, as they take to social networks, blogs, wikis, video-sharing, virtual reality worlds and tweets in growing numbers. This level of communication has dramatically changed the way business gets conducted, to the joy of many high-profile companies who have leveraged it to great fortune. But to the horror of some businesses, the voices directed at them are harshly revelatory: they're bringing to light broken business practices, service faux pas, product malfunctions, and corporate malfeasance.

Some of the loudest voices stem from service and support transactions, which, thanks to the Web's instant communication capabilities, can be broadcast loud and clear across a range of media. Epic stories of bad service bound around the Web in various incarnations, only replaced by the next fiasco. Businesses, particularly those who haven't kept pace with newer marketing and customer response strategies, find they have less and less control over their own brands.

"There's a real shift from CRM, which is very data-centric, to customer-managed relationships," says Michael Maoz, an analyst with Stamford, Ct.-based Gartner Inc. "You can spend as many billions of dollars as you want, but with their Web at their disposal, your customers are going to determine your brand for you – they're going to make it or break it."

Indeed, while more people are starting and concluding their support transactions in online channels, they're shifting their search away from their provider's own properties, says Tom Sweeny, an analyst at ServiceXRG. Instead, they're increasingly going to third-party forums or relying on Google searches to get the support information they need. The upshot: The provider loses the benefit of interacting with their customer or learning from the issue.

"We've taken for granted for so many years that support questions were an annoyance and came at a cost. But what happens when those interactions dry up and take place somewhere else?" says Sweeny. "Somebody else is creating and shaping the experience. They can shape the perception of your company, sometimes inaccurately, without you chiming in to correct misperceptions."

While a vendor's own site is still the leading source of information among online support options — 79% of users looking for technical support spend time on their provider's site, according to ServiceXRG — the growth rate in use of other resources is exploding. For example, the use of third-party product forums has grown 141% over the last five years, while use of special interest forums has climbed 120% and Web searches 88%.



source: ServiceXRG, 2008

Providers should strive to remain the leading service destination so they can hold the most influence over their own brand. To take advantage of every potential customer interaction, companies must be ready to deliver a stellar service experience when users arrive. Effective knowledgebase content, facile navigation and search mechanisms for self-service, the ready ability to move between or escalate to other channels — chat, remote connectivity and control solutions, telephony channels — all provide the opportunity to positively influence visitors.









Please, Help Yourself

Providing users with a quality self-service experience is an increasingly high-profile avenue for providers seeking to differentiate themselves and maintain brand loyalty. Support organizations that stage valuable content and surround it with applications that best leverage it can continue to be the destination point for their users. A growing number of people want to help themselves to information rather than composing an email or picking up the phone. They're increasingly adept at accessing knowledgebases, searching for content, downloading patches and fixes, managing their own product lifecycles, opening trouble tickets and checking status, and escalating their session if they can't find what they need.

To be fully exploited, a self-service channel must be backed by a continual improvement strategy and adequate resources, say experts. It shouldn't be viewed as merely a contact avoidance channel; it should be treated as an avenue to customer satisfaction, quality feedback, competitive differentiation, and relationship-building.

In a recent survey conducted by SupportIndustry.com, 30% of respondents cite increased efficiencies as the biggest benefit they're realizing from deploying self-service knowledgebases. Another 15% of respondents point to improved customer satisfaction and loyalty, while 14% cite cost reductions.

What has been the primary benefit from implementing Web-based or self-service technologies in your support organization?

Choice	[N]	Percent	Graph
Reduced Costs	11	14.1%	
Improved Profitability	3	3.8%	
Customer Demand	4	5.1%	
Competitive Pressures	1	1.3%	
Increased Efficiency	23	29.5%	
Reduction in number of support requests	10	12.8%	
Greater Customer Satisfaction/Loyalty	11	14.1%	
Other	15	19.2%	
Total Responses:	78	100%	

source: SupportIndustry.com, 2008

Self-service technology, like other support-related applications, is gaining traction as more vendors roll out offerings based on the software-as-a-service (SaaS) model. In fact, SaaS has had many of its best success stories to date in support- and CRM-related deployments. According to Gartner, support organizations are seeing project savings of between 25% and 40% when they deploy CRM-related technologies in a SaaS model, stemming from savings on applications and reduced integration spending.

According to Gartner's Maoz, SaaS-based support technologies will see a healthy growth rate in the coming years. Gartner expects the market for SaaS-based customer service and support applications to grow by 20% annually through 2012, at which time 30% of all new service and support applications investments will be through SaaS delivery.

SaaS makes sense in service and support initiatives, as service organizations often don't have the ear of IT to the extent that bigger corporate revenues producers do; they can get sign-off on a SaaS platform more easily than they can for an on-premise solution. Too, they can pilot new efforts with some quick deliverables and return on investment, whether it be in reduced headcount or improved customer satisfaction.

To effectively roll out self-service initiatives, companies need a content/knowledge management infrastructure with consistent, continually reviewed content to ensure accuracy and remove redundancies. It needs to be complemented by sophisticated and intuitive search capabilities, and well-mapped with tested escalation points to avoid causing frustration and abandonment.

When customers, partners and employees are able to use knowledge management solutions to solve problems and find their own information, service desks and contact centers can avoid a great number of low-value support contacts. In doing so, they can drive some of the costs out of support delivery while improving it.

Allocating Resources

According to recent research by ServiceXRG, the top two self-service resources used by customers are knowledgebases (used by 42%) and downloadable updates and patches (34.9%). The same resources were named as the two categories users find most effective, with knowledgebases and updates/patches both cited by 38.8% of respondents.



source: ServiceXRG, 2008

Sweeny contends that service organizations allocate a disproportionate level of resources to delivering content through one-to-one channels vs. creating content for self-services — despite the fact that such labors remain one of the “low-hanging fruits” of support. Even with self-service making such strides, he says, many support organizations still have the model where “one rep is fielding 30 phone calls daily on the same simple subject. It’s grossly inefficient when this doesn’t get captured and pulled into a knowledge repository.”

The support industry has laid the infrastructure for delivering information via self-service channels and has driven early behavior transformation among customers. Now, businesses need to develop the feedback loops that will let them continue to build on early successes.

Far and Away

Building good self-service content is a major piece of a service portfolio, but service organizations need tested escalation processes and technologies in place for assisted support should a user not find what they’re looking for. For some companies, telephony-based escalation options still make the most sense, but more and more

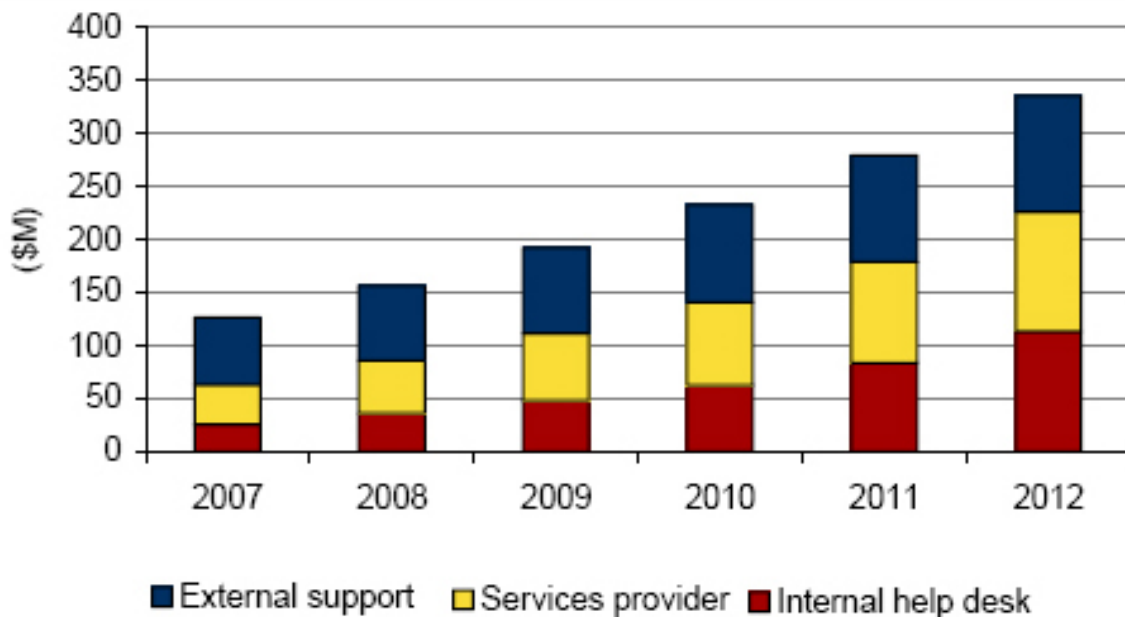
businesses rely on such options as email and chat. Increasingly, support organizations are adopting remote tools that allow technicians to view an end user device and applications over the Internet, diagnose problems, and take control to fix them.

Though companies have employed remote connectivity solutions for some time, says Matt Healey, an analyst with IDC, recent growth trends stem from the adoption of clientless solutions, which allow for Web-based support to be delivered without the need for the end user to download software.

“With no preinstalled software on [the client] machine, you just need an Internet connection. It opens up this tool that has been pretty well-received in enterprise scenarios for the internal help desk, where IT can control the image that goes on the PC and ensure everything’s installed and running correctly. It takes that functionality and opens it to the uncontrolled world,” says Healey.

A recent IDC study highlights the growing adoption rate. The research firm expects the worldwide market for clientless remote support services tools to increase from \$126.1 million in 2007 to \$335.7 million in 2012 — a CAGR of 21.6%.

Worldwide Clientless Remote Support Tools Spending, 2007–2012



source: IDC, 2008

According to Healey, the clientless remote support market breaks down into three primary use cases:

- Technology companies supporting their own customers: This group represents the largest user segment for clientless remote support software, representing \$63 million of current total revenues.
 - Service providers/outsourcers supporting customers.
 - Enterprise service desks supporting employees: This group represents the fastest-growing user segment for clientless remote support software, projected to have a CAGR of 35% over the next five years.
-

Consider Yourself at Home

A strong driver for the uptake of clientless tools in the enterprise is the increasingly distributed nature of the workforce, says Healey. These can be non-IT workers, or IT professionals themselves, who in turn may be using clientless remote support tools to support customers or employees.

“Most organizations have telecommuters, remote branches without dedicated IT support, or traveling road warriors,” he says. “Each of these may have trouble getting to the VPN, or may not have high-bandwidth connections. Any type of tool that helps those employees not on campus becomes powerful.”

Remote support applications such as cobrowsing, remote control, and file transfer are indeed on the cusp of a significant adoption cycle, according to Keith Dawson, an analyst with Frost & Sullivan.

“Remote support options are just at the beginning of the deployment cycle and will soon be adopted en masse. There’s a window of opportunity for companies to deploy these very quickly now and gain a certain competitive advantage,” says Dawson.

The security issues and user concerns that thwarted early adoption no longer exist, Dawson continues. “Sometimes it takes a larger institutional deployment, with a big security stamp on it that says ‘IT-endorsed,’ to make a product more accepted,” he says. “People have become accustomed to remote support as employees who’ve seen their IT guys take over their machines. Therefore, as customers, they’re much more at ease with a tech support person taking over their machines remotely.”

Self-Service Meets Assisted Support

If a company wants their customers or employees to go online to try to resolve problems, they should aim for full service channel integration from the point of contact so problems can be escalated. If they can’t find an answer, they’re likely to visit their vendor for assisted support, so it makes sense to have self-service seamlessly linked to an assisted component. With true multichannel integration, content from the self-service session gets identified and packaged, so it can be delivered during the escalation to the support technician.

Experts suggest that businesses position a remote connectivity solution as a key mechanism by which they integrate assisted support with the self-service channel. These tools can be complemented by a click-to-call or click-to-chat mechanism to escalate a session from self-service, at which point the technician can decide whether to employ remote support, or can be the primary escalation channel from a self-service session. In most cases, a tiered escalation model makes the most sense.

Integration among service channels is on the rise, according to a recent survey from Supportindustry.com. More than half of respondents (56.8%) say they’ve achieved some channel integration, whether it be in the form of a common knowledgebase, or a single view into customer interaction data. That compares to 40% of respondents who cited some integration in 2006, 30% in 2004, and 27% in 2003.

Not only does full multichannel integration benefit the customer, it helps businesses establish a feedback loop — something that’s often lacking in self-service transactions. Instead of wondering whether a customer found the right answer, went away empty-handed, or had to leave the session to escalate to an assisted channel, the support organization determines behavior and satisfaction at the point of contact.



LogMeIn to the Rescue

With President Obama's stimulus package promising billions of dollars for healthcare IT in the U.S., the discussion around electronic health records and other patient-related systems has been pushed to the forefront. While they promise increased efficiencies, improved safety due to consistency, and greater patient and healthcare worker satisfaction, they'll also challenge IT organizations. Not only are there significant questions unanswered as to how the entire national infrastructure will interoperate, but there's much to decide on how this integrated infrastructure will be supported.

A critical piece of this puzzle, of course, will be IT's ability to effectively support the arsenal of end-user devices that will arm medical professionals, whether onsite or offsite, so that workers can access and update key medical and administrative data sources.

The need to support a mobile workforce, as well as administrative personnel working in five satellite offices, drove Palm Valley Health Care, a provider of healthcare and services based in Edinburg, Texas, to search for a Web-based remote connectivity solution that their IT staff could use to fix problems occurring on wireless mobile devices. An early adopter of electronic medical records (EMRs), Palm Valley wanted to ensure their mobile nurses, who work with homebound patients, are readily able to use their handheld devices to access and update server-based patient data. The search led IT administrator Nathan Armstrong to LogMeIn Rescue+Mobile, a remote support solution from Woburn, Mass.-based LogMeIn Inc., that allows service desks to remotely support mobile devices, helping to reduce costs and speed resolution time.

Remote connectivity tools such as LogMeIn offers are greatly improving service delivery across a range of vertical industries. A support technician can diagnose and fix problems on a range of applications and platforms, wherever the worker happens to be — in satellite offices, at home, on the road. These tools mean technicians don't have to travel to remote locations, or request expensive equipment shipments due to improper diagnosis, or try to decipher lengthy user descriptions of IT problems over the phone. In conjunction with the phone or chat, or through a Web-initiated request, LogMeIn provides assisted support without the need for users to download client-based software.

Diagnosis: Streamlined Support

Like an increasing number of medical facilities, Palm Valley recognized the benefits of migrating from a paper-based approach to EMRs, but, unlike many who are paralyzed by implementation and support issues, they knew the improvements they would gain were worth the upfront costs and effort. By enabling access to individual patient EMRs, and equipping traveling nurses with wireless devices to access and update patient data at the point of contact, Palm Valley hope to see significant benefits: they would allow nurses to spend more quality time with patients, increase efficiencies in medical billing, reimbursement and other administrative processes, and improve the overall quality of care by creating a single paperless record for each patient.

“Our nurses love Rescue+Mobile. They think it's wild that we can take control of their devices, and it cuts down on their office visits, saving driving time and gas, and allowing them to spend more time with patients.”

**— Nathan Armstrong,
Palm Valley Health Care**

and improve the overall quality of care by creating a single paperless record for each patient.

The healthcare provider's 200 field nurses, who provide personal assistance, therapy and other nursing services to patients living throughout the Rio Grande Valley, can now remotely log-in to the centralized EMR server to retrieve schedules, input patient assessments and access other data. Patient data synchs with related administrative data to allow for more efficient billing and reimbursement.

With such benefits, however, come new remote support challenges, and Palm Valley meets those challenges with LogMeIn Rescue+Mobile, which allows Armstrong and his support team to troubleshoot and fix a range of platform and application issues, including EMR system failure, device-to-database connectivity issues, corrupt files, storage card issues, database rebuilds and numerous other problems. No longer do Armstrong and his team have to talk through problems over the phone, or travel to remote workers to fix problems or have them bring their devices in for diagnosis: Through LogMeIn's agentless solution, workers simply connect to the service desk through a pin code and technicians can remotely diagnose, control and fix the device's problems.

"LogMeIn has been a life-saver when it comes to supporting our nurses," says Armstrong. "Nurses don't have to drive to the office and back for a support call, which can wipe out a big chunk of their day. And that means they don't need to miss the remaining appointments scheduled for that day."

Armstrong reports that Palm Valley's end users have rapidly taken to the new technology — a key factor to making remote IT management strategies successful. Says Armstrong, "Our nurses love Rescue+Mobile. They think it's wild that we can take control of their devices, and it cuts down on their office visits, saving driving time and gas, and allowing them to spend more time with patients."

Supporting the Supporters

Arise Virtual Solutions Inc. is seeing similar benefits from their LogMeIn Rescue deployment. Arise, a technical support services provider, employs more than 5,000 Arise Certified Professionals (ACPs), self-employed home-based agents who serve clients through phone, email and Web-based channels. These agents operate, essentially, as their own virtual support centers, equipped with their own desktop machines and Web-based access to Arise's customer-related systems so they can serve clients throughout the U.S. and Europe.

Because the company's business depends on this virtual support center (VSC) model, Arise's service desk needs to be able to quickly solve problems agents have with their platforms and applications so they can continue, in turn, to support clients. The service desk fields from 400 to 500 support contacts per day for such issues as remote connection problems. Arise uses LogMeIn Rescue to expedite those requests and get homesourced agents back to helping clients as quickly as possible, according to Allen McClure, who manages

"When I found Rescue it was like a breath of fresh air. I'd gone through all of these different products, and they all had a 'gotcha' somewhere along the line."

**— Allen McClure,
Arise Virtual Solutions Inc.**

"Our ability to support our clients rests on ensuring that the VSC's home-based agents can stay connected to the systems they need," says McClure. "My team's job is to make sure that nothing stands in the way of those agents." His group also supports corporate employees and clients who want to access Arise's call management systems to track call volume and agent performance, but the majority of the support requests come from home-based agents.

Virtual support center models — increasingly deployed by managed service providers — are heavily reliant on effective remote support solutions. Service desks need remote connectivity solutions so they can quickly diagnose problems and, if needed, take control of machines and fix them. When operating in a virtual model,

technicians can't physically be onsite, or lose valuable time trying to solve problems over the phone.

"It's not as if we can walk down the hall when there's a problem," McClure says.

Prior to choosing LogMeIn Rescue, Arise had used another vendor's remote connectivity tool in conjunction with phone-based support, but found the solution unsatisfactory. McClure exhaustively tested a number of tools prior to purchasing LogMeIn, but found each lacking. Shortcomings included the inability to connect to home-based agents if the VPN connection was off, the inability to handle multiple sessions, latency problems resulting in dropped connections, and the inability to support Macintosh platforms, on which many home-based agents choose to work.

"When I found Rescue it was like a breath of fresh air," says McClure. "I'd gone through all of these different products, and they all had a 'gotcha' somewhere along the line."

Arise now uses Rescue to handle about 80 percent of their support requests. "With the certification and education that Arise requires, an ACP home-based agent consistently outperforms the internal, brick-and-mortar support groups that they're augmenting, by a factor of 10 to 30 percent," says McClure. "Those results rest on Arise's ability to keep the VSC's agents connected to the systems they need. That's where LogMeIn Rescue comes in."

Customer Sat Goes Up, Costs Drop

LogMeIn Rescue has given Arise the kind of bottom-line results that the service provider believes translate to improved customer satisfaction, which can ultimately impact top-line revenues as well. For instance, an internal study conducted by Arise found that first-call resolution rates have increased by approximately 23 percent since implementing LogMeIn Rescue, which lowered overall costs-per-incident. McClure believes that part of that increase is attributable to Rescue's diagnostic tools, which can quickly analyze a problem through a simple system check — an improvement over traditional phone-based support methods where agents blindly try to determine what problems exist based on customer descriptions.

Further, LogMeIn allows Arise technicians to handle multiple sessions simultaneously, increasing the volume of support contacts the service desk can process. And they're able to reduce call volume by educating home-based agents during a support session — taking control of the desktop, showing the ACP where the problem lies, and demonstrating the troubleshooting techniques undertaken using such Rescue features as whiteboarding. The service desk also leverages Rescue's recording feature to capture sessions so they can easily add new content to their knowledgebase

Says McClure, "With LogMeIn Rescue, we're able to provide a valuable educational function and decrease an individual's support requests" — a crucial objective considering that new agents come online weekly. Arise research shows that, during September and October 2008, the service desk saw a 33 percent decrease in repeat callers.

Not surprisingly, with Arise continually ramping up new home-based agents to meet their own growth requirements, their overall support volume shows a growth pattern. Nonetheless, with their support requests increasing 268 percent since 2006, when they first started using Rescue, they've only had to increase support staff by 80 percent.

"With Rescue's help in making our support staff more productive, we estimate that we're saving \$48,000 per month in support costs," says McClure. Meanwhile, Arise internal studies show that "customer satisfaction" rates among Arise's home-based agents have improved, McClure believes, due to the speedy problem resolution they see.

“Rescue is a breath of fresh air,” McClure adds, “and so is working with LogMeIn. All of the people we’ve worked with have been very responsive to our needs. LogMeIn provides excellent support – and at Arise we know all about excellence in support.”

About LogMeIn, Inc.

LogMeIn is a leading provider of on-demand, remote-connectivity solutions to small and medium businesses, IT service providers and consumers. LogMeIn's products are deployed on-demand and are accessible through a Web browser. The LogMeIn family includes LogMeIn Free®, LogMeIn Pro®, LogMeIn Ignition™, LogMeIn Rescue®, LogMeIn IT Reach®, LogMeIn Backup™, Remotely Anywhere®, LogMeIn Hamachi™ and LogMeIn Scout™. LogMeIn is based in Woburn, MA with European centers in Budapest, Hungary and Amsterdam, Netherlands.

More information can be found at <http://www.LogMeInRescue.com>.

PARATURE.

When Content is King

At Webs.com, the mantra might be: “Content is king.” That premise has taken the company from its inception as a basic Web site building tool and hosting provider to becoming the social publishing platform it is today — a platform that allows anyone to take their interests and make them the foundation of a social network. To bring about this transformation, Webs.com has moved beyond simply providing tools that allow their customers’ site visitors to comment via forums; with the company’s extensive portfolio of products, visitors can become true members of a particular social community, contributing images, videos, wiki material and more — content that greatly enhances the value of that community.

“The difference between Webs.com and Facebook, for example, is that they’re a social network built around people, while we provide the ability to build social networks based around a site owner’s particular interest. We’re highly focused on content,” says James Watson, director of customer relations for the Silver Spring, Md.-based Webs.com.

The strategy behind this business model characterizes the company’s approach to support as well. For Web-born companies, quality content — and ready access to it for customers and partners — can be a key differentiator in their support portfolio. As support organizations continue their quest for best practices in services delivery, their strategies increasingly include access to high-quality self-service content through knowledgebases, dynamic FAQs, downloads, and forums, complemented by whatever escalation channels make sense.

When Webs.com moved to bolster their support delivery so they could keep pace with rapid growth — as well as to make support a more strategic component of their overall value proposition — they searched for a solution that would complement their Web roots. In 2008, they chose a customer service software suite from Vienna, Va.-based Parature Inc. Webs.com is now leveraging Parature’s integrated suite of modules, including their portal, self-service knowledgebase, ticketing system, email, chat and forum capabilities.

“We want to differentiate our support team from the typical customer service team. We want our support reps to be ‘Web product specialists’ — not just resolving little how-to questions, but understanding how people are actually using our platform,” says Watson. “We want to understand how customers are building sites and how we can improve that experience.”

Getting Webby With It

When Webs.com first launched, the support team relied largely on a simple Pine-based email system and some static Web pages answering how-to questions, but as the company added more products to their offerings, that support model proved inadequate. They decided they would replace it with a more comprehensive online support system, but wanted to avoid building it in-house. They first piloted RoboHelp, which turned out to be easy to administer but not Web-enabled enough to provide the user experience they were looking for. They then turned to Drupal, an open source content management system that serves as a back-end for many Web sites. While Drupal provided the right look and feel, Watson found it difficult to update and manage.

“At this point, we were using the old email system based on Pine, a third-party application for chat, another

“If it weren’t for Parature, I think our team would be double the size. The products have allowed me to not only offload tasks, but actually empower the team to handle those tasks.”

— James Watson, Webs.com

application for forum capabilities, and nothing telephony-based,” says Watson. “Our offerings had grown to 40 products, so we needed a new support approach, but every support tool we considered was either too expensive or didn’t fit our needs.”

When they responded to a call from Parature and saw a demonstration of their suite, their cost/benefits analysis — including the fact that they didn’t have to dedicate in-house developers to deploy or maintain it — convinced them to invest in the SaaS-based applications.

Raising the Bar

Fueling Webs.com’s early satisfaction with Parature was the fact that they were able to rapidly deploy it and start resolving issues. “We quickly moved away from Pine and started using Parature’s ticket tracking system, chat, and forum products. We finally could bring everything into one product and do so with few internal resources,” says Watson.

Watson and his team continually explore ways to best interact with customers and improve their service delivery. They’ve developed a ticketing structure based on the way customers want to submit tickets, and use Parature’s autoresponse feature to handle high-volume, redundant issues. They’ve taken advantage of the suite’s pass-through authentication capabilities to identify existing customers, and “skinned” the product to give it the Webs.com look and feel.

Webs.com wants to maintain the flexibility they’ve engendered in their support processes as they continue to monitor the best ways to serve their customers. For a new partnership agreement with the American Chemical Society, for instance, in which ACS is committing to 100 premium user sites for their different organizations, Webs.com will add telephony-based support to their services portfolio. They’ll offer that channel at least through the ACS project development cycle, and then explore whether it makes sense to continue to do so. Adding a telephony-based option is just part of the evolution of discovering the best ways to serve their particular customer base, says Watson.

With nine people, the support team is now supporting 55 products; meanwhile, they’re serving millions of customers and seeing up to 20,000 new members joining daily.

“We’ve got a lot more to support on the product side, and we have to find a way to optimize that without becoming just a group of autoresponders,” says Watson.

Support, Meet Engineering

Webs.com now has two service-level agreement tiers depending on whether a customer is using their free or premium model, each with its own ticket routing process. The knowledgebase is open to all users, but if a customer is not paying to use a particular product, they can’t access the corresponding knowledgebase segment.

“That’s the problem with other products — you need to tie up other resources from the company to help the support organization. Parature has optimized our group.”

— James Watson, Webs.com

The entire service team contributes to the knowledgebase, and — as best practices in support dictate — works closely with the engineering team to ensure that the two groups can provide continuous feedback between product development and support. In fact, after moving into a larger building and giving each team their own sections of the building, Webs.com moved the two groups back into close proximity so they could enjoy the synergy they had enjoyed in smaller quarters. That model of information-sharing, both through communications tools and verbal communications, creates a level of awareness in each group of the other’s issues, says Watson, resulting in better products and better support of those products.

“By tying the groups closely together, we can fix products as issues occur — everyone’s aware when a problem arises. Many companies have people who develop products in glass towers, and though they may hear about a support issue, they don’t understand it to the same extent that they would if they worked closely with their support team,” says Watson. “Here we can channel support communications in a productive way through the engineering team.”

Watson says it’s not difficult to know when people are having problems with products or support “because they start blogging about us.” So Webs.com doesn’t closely track such metrics as how many tickets they’re getting. What Watson’s really interested in are the high-level details that differentiate good support from bad: where the knowledgebase is failing to provide information, what information is getting low ratings, and the support team’s response times, for example.

The fact that everyone involved can contribute to the knowledgebase has been a significant productivity boost for the service organization. Setting approval processes for submissions to the knowledgebase and promotion of articles to customers is a simple procedure, and easily managed.

“The great thing about Parature is that you can make processes as strict or as flexible as you want and we can change who has access or control at any time,” says Watson.

The reporting tools have likewise helped the support organization improve knowledgebase content.

“I want to wield the power of the [Parature] tool. When I see a mood change among users, I can dive in with reports to see what’s going on,” says Watson.

Reducing Costs, Optimizing Delivery

Watson says Parature has delivered a significant return on investment, both through softer benefits such as empowering Web specialists and customers, and through the hard-cost savings that have come from keeping headcount steady while experiencing high corporate growth.

“If it weren’t for Parature, I think our team would be double the size. The products have allowed me to not only offload tasks, but actually empower the team to handle those tasks,” says Watson. These tasks include managing the forum, assigning moderators, and setting up autoresponders and closing them when they’re no longer needed — without the aid of engineering.

“That’s the problem with other products — you need to tie up other resources from the company to help the support organization,” Watson adds. “Parature has optimized our group.”

About Parature, Inc.

Parature, the global leader in on-demand customer service software, makes it possible for any business to leverage the Internet to provide outstanding customer service. The company’s software-as-a-service (SaaS) delivery and integrated, intuitive design enables organizations to better and more efficiently serve, support, engage with and retain customers in today’s Web world. Founded in 2000, Parature received the 2007 & 2008 Product of the Year Award from *Customer Interaction Solutions* magazine and has been named to the *Inc. 5000* list of Fastest Growing Private Companies in America. For the past three consecutive years Parature has been on the *Washington Business Journal’s* list of Best Places to Work. Headquartered in Vienna, Virginia, Parature is at work in organizations of all types and sizes, and helps support more than 13 million end users worldwide.

For more information, visit <http://www.parature.com>.

White Paper Written by: Kym Gilhooly

Gilhooly is a contributing editor to CRMIndustry.com. She can be reached at kyimg@maine.rr.com.