

# Employee Self-Service: Benefits for the Help Desk

A ServiceWare White Paper - February 2003

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# Introduction

IT organizations continue to face tight budgets and headcount restrictions that threaten to reduce the quality of service. This is taking place while IT's role is being expanded to be the single point of contact for both IT and non-IT issues. Plus, the credibility of the IT help desk is based on key metrics that are often affected by the lack of adequate resources. Metrics include first call resolution, call handle time, escalation rates and average time in the queue. These metrics are used as gauges to determine the end-user's level of satisfaction and the support agent's success.

Too often, help desks are plagued by the lack of a centralized, accessible knowledge base, requiring support agents to escalate calls, consult colleagues or struggle through complex key word searches to find answers - ultimately producing negative support metrics. Today's companies have discovered knowledge management as a solution to improve the productivity and efficiency of their help desk agents. But using the help desk solution alone can be considered reactionary - your agents must wait for the phone to ring or an e-mail to arrive before the end-user can receive a resolution to his or her problem. The next step in improving employee support - both quality and cost - is to provide access to this support knowledge directly to employees - enabling them to proactively answer their own IT issues and easily escalate to an agent if necessary.

# Today's companies have discovered knowledge management as a solution to improve the productivity and efficiency of their help desk agents.

## Web self-service: A Necessity for Today's Help Desks

Self-service is important in many industries - from your local ATM machine to online banking - people often prefer to find a solution or complete a task without assistance. Companies are providing self-service options on their corporate Web sites so customers can solve their own product and service issues. For many of the same reasons, IT help desks are discovering Web self-service. Escalating employee expectations have resulted in increasing demands on the help desk. Plus, companies have more complex IT infrastructures than ever before - complex networks, multiple integrations, a plethora of applications running in global environments - creating more opportunities for employees to contact support. These new levels of support drive hiring increases in the help desk, and come with escalating expense. Even if these higher costs were acceptable, they are not a long-term solution. You can't buy your way out of your IT support burden by increasing your support staff.

As support management knows, most queries are similar in nature and often inefficiently satisfied. Does someone really need a live agent - the most expensive method of support - to explain how to reset a network password? Of course not. Nor does an employee want to wait in a queue for 15 minutes to get an answer. Gartner estimates password reset costs range from \$51 (best case) to \$147 (worst case) for the labor alone (source: Gartner, Inc. April 2002). So, the inflection point is providing this type of support via a channel that is most convenient for the end-user - 24x7 Web self-service.

## How is "knowledge-enabled" self-service different?

It's not enough to put the information on your Intranet and ask your employees to go find it. You need to make the information timely, accurate, easy to find, and in the format that most employees want. To do this, you need to knowledge-enable your Web-based support via your corporate intranet or Internet site. You may or may not have already provided knowledge to your agents in the help desk. In either case, your end-users want access to that knowledge. Knowledge should be accessible through dynamic FAQs that update with the most requested information, and a knowledge-base search. The search technology should also be self-learning to ensure that the most relevant information is easily accessible. Just imagine if there was a problem with your department's network printer and everyone on your team called the IT help desk with the same issue. The agent would have to research and find the solution once and then convey it to every caller that experienced the problem throughout the day. Is that an efficient process? With an adaptable learning search technology, once the first person solved the problem using the knowledge base, the next person would be more likely to find the answer quickly... and so on. The win-win here is that employees are more productive and satisfied, you've reduced your support expenses (more on that later), and the knowledge-enabled self-service solution conveys economies of scale that even your best agents could never match. The more a self-service tool is used the lower the transaction cost to you.

# Can Web self-service reduce support costs?

Let's look at a hypothetical help desk to get a feel for the magnitude of the types of savings, which can be obtained via self-service call deflection to the Web. We will need to make a few assumptions for example purposes:

- First, let's assume that due to the nature of our business we can only offset 10% of our monthly call and e-mail volumes to self-service.
- Second, we need to assume that 10% of our employees are willing and able to use our knowledge-enabled self-service.

**Figure A** shows how our example help desk can recognize \$74,000 in savings per month by diverting just 10% of its monthly call and e-mail volume to online self-service.

Cost/call			\$15	
Cost/e-mail			\$ 5	
Cost/online query			\$ 1	
<b>Current Scenario:</b>				
Monthly contacts:				
Calls	50,000	\$15	\$750,000	
E-mails	10,000	\$ 5	<u>\$ 50,000</u>	
<b>Monthly contact support cost</b>			<b>\$800,000</b>	
<b>Self-Service Scenario: 10% call avoidance</b>				
Monthly Contacts:				
Calls	45,000	\$15	\$675,000	
E-mails	9,000	\$ 5	\$ 45,000	
Online self-service	6,000	\$ 1	<u>\$ 6,000</u>	
<b>Monthly contact support cost</b>			<b>\$726,000</b>	
<b>Monthly Savings from self-service</b>			<b>\$ 74,000</b>	

figure A

Cost/call			\$15	
Cost/e-mail			\$ 5	
Cost/online query			\$ 1	
<b>Current Scenario:</b>				
Monthly contacts:				
Calls	50,000	\$15	\$750,000	
E-mails	10,000	\$ 5	<u>\$ 50,000</u>	
<b>Monthly contact support cost</b>			<b>\$800,000</b>	
<b>Self-Service Scenario: 15% call avoidance</b>				
Monthly Contacts:				
Calls	42,500	\$15	\$637,500	
E-mails	7,500	\$ 5	\$ 37,500	
Online self-service	10,000	\$ 1	<u>\$ 10,000</u>	
<b>Monthly contact support cost</b>			<b>\$681,000</b>	
<b>Monthly Savings from self-service</b>			<b>\$ 119,000</b>	

figure B

In **figure B** we take a look at how incremental increases in our employee base using self-service affects our support costs. In this scenario a 15% call deflection rate delivers even greater savings - nearly \$120,000 per month.

## Scenario:

As you can see from these examples, the return on investment (ROI) from knowledge-enabled self-service can be significant. As we all know, every support situation is different, and the amount of savings and percentage of calls that can be avoided will vary. Often we find that the cost of providing support per call is much higher than we estimate here. In fact, industry experts have reported the cost of a single technical support call to be as much as \$45, making the potential for savings even higher.

Of course there is no free lunch... there are many other factors to consider such as the initial investment in self-service functionality and knowledge-enabling your organization. It's important that vendors provide services to assess these costs for maximum ROI.

## Will self-service drive more complex calls to the Help Desk?

In many cases, effective knowledge-enabled self-service does change the mix of inbound calls. This is a desirable economic phenomenon. You want to support your employees in the most efficient and economical way possible. This dictates that you use the appropriate resources for the given issue. Basic questions can be quickly and easily solved through self-service, which is the optimal media to handle these "Tier 0" questions. If we re-use our assumptions from above (cost per call = \$15, cost per online query = \$1), then it is easy to see what the most efficient channel is for this type of question. You still have to pay your support agents - don't you want them working on the more demanding problems and issues? Agents that are utilized for complex demanding issues are often more satisfied in their careers and are less likely to experience high rates of job turnover.

## How does self-service apply to the enterprise?

Most people agree that online self-service is an obvious fit for the help desk and call center. The leap to the enterprise may not be as intuitive. It is crucial to ensure that information is consistent across the enterprise, particularly considering today's hyper-competitive business environment.

Take a moment right now and see if you can think of a time when a wrong answer or misinformation (whatever the source) had a profound impact on your business. All too often, organizations suffer from communications problems that hamper day-to-day activities. In your organization do you, or your customers ever get one answer from Sales and another from Technical Support, Customer Service, or Marketing? Are the answers consistent across all partners, outsourcers and suppliers? This does happen - even in great companies and unfortunately it can yield very bad results. Likewise, your company's different departments - as well as vendors, partners and customers - probably need access to different sets of knowledge.

Knowledge-enabled self-service is a consistent, cost-effective, and timely way to convey data, information, and knowledge to all of the parties within your enterprise. Properly configured, an enterprise solution will provide separate access to the specific knowledge that each party needs.

To illustrate the value of providing different levels of knowledge across the enterprise; let's say that a retail sales company has provided both its customer service center and its retailers access to the self-service application. You may want your customer service agents to have access to specifications, troubleshooting procedures, and your wholesale costs. You could also provide access to some of that information for the retail stores, but you don't want them to have access to your wholesale pricing and other sensitive data. A good knowledge-enabled self-service implementation allows you to disseminate only the appropriate information to the different audiences within your enterprise.

## ServiceWare's approach to knowledge-enabled self-service

ServiceWare Enterprise™ and ServiceWare Express™ hosted solution, powered by the Cognitive Processor® (US Patent # 5,787,234), a patented self-learning search technology, enable large organizations and mid-sized companies to capture intellectual capital, develop and manage a repository of knowledge and effectively answer inquiries over the Web, in the help desk and through the contact center. The knowledge base is built with guidance and training from our expert consultants and services team. Our Web-based tools make it easy to add new knowledge to the system. Plus, your system administrators control access to the knowledge so that each audience (customers, support agents, sales force, etc.) sees only the items that are relevant to it.

## What cost savings are ServiceWare customers realizing?

The costs of implementing a robust knowledge-enabled self-service application on the Web are real, but so are the returns that organizations are realizing from making the investment. ServiceWare's Decision Integrity Team works with our clients to help determine total cost of ownership for self-service - and ROI. ServiceWare is helping help desks, call centers and enterprises implement and maintain self-service for their customers. Through our Reality Base, which is an exclusive source of benchmarking and performance metrics from dozens of customers, we are able to accurately track our customers call avoidance levels. Depending on their industry our clients are averaging between 15 and 40 percent call deflection to the Web.

Most ServiceWare customers are reaching a break-even in just 10-14 months. Of course some clients may take longer to achieve ROI, but with increasing frequency many are realizing break-even points in just a few months. The companies experiencing rapid ROI are doing so as a result of being able to roll their knowledge base out to their employees. These organizations are moving significant portions of their incoming queries to self-service and it is paying off substantially. Realizing benefits from self-service doesn't stop at the break-even point. You can expect self-service to continue to yield positive returns on your investment in future years. In addition to the cost savings companies are recognizing there is another benefit to implementing self-service. The economies of scale associated with a knowledge-enabled self-service tool allow you to handle growth, while minimizing the need to grow the size of your support staff. In the help desk, ServiceWare's solutions can help save additional money by assisting agents during service calls by reducing training time, preserving corporate knowledge as turnover occurs, and shrinking the time it takes to answer both simple and complex questions.

## What's the bottom line?

Today's support environment is demanding, talent is hard to find and retain, and employees continue to demand answers - faster, better, and cheaper. Online knowledge-enabled self-service is a proven way to help manage these demands. ServiceWare's applications are helping companies deal with the challenging tasks of service and support. You can increase your service levels, improve satisfaction, and quickly begin recognizing a compelling return on investment. To find out exactly how ServiceWare's products and services can benefit your help desk, or to request a Decision Integrity Team consulting engagement, contact ServiceWare - On the Web at: <http://www.serviceware.com/about/contact.asp> - Via e-mail at: [info@serviceware.com](mailto:info@serviceware.com) - Toll free: 1-800-572-5748 - Internationally: +(44) 01344.74.2828.

## About the author

Tom Tobin is the Senior Business Analyst with ServiceWare's Decision Integrity Team. He has authored technical training videos and computer-based training for General Physics. Also he's served as the business applications manager at Canon ITS, where he managed a variety of technical application projects including: knowledge management, IVR, and intranet/Internet strategy consulting. Tom has an MBA from the College of William & Mary, and a BS from the State University of New York. He is currently working on an advanced degree in Knowledge Management at George Washington University. More ServiceWare White Papers can be found online at: <http://www.serviceware.com/whitepapers>.

### **About ServiceWare Technologies**

ServiceWare is a leading provider of knowledge-powered customer service and support solutions that are designed to improve agent productivity and customer satisfaction, while reducing operating costs.

ServiceWare's enterprise and departmental solutions enable all businesses to easily manage, share and access corporate knowledge to effectively answer inquiries through contact center, help desk or Web self-service interactions. ServiceWare has helped customers achieve proven results, including AT&T Wireless, EDS, Cingular Wireless, Green Mountain Energy, H&R Block, QUALCOMM, Reuters and Texas Instruments.

#### **For More Information**

To learn more about ServiceWare's award-winning solutions, please visit us at [www.serviceware.com](http://www.serviceware.com) or call 800.572.5748. Outside North America, call our international office at +(44) 01344.74.2828.