

Cutting Operational Expenses with Innovative Technology: Web Self-Service Knowledge Management

Across all the areas of customer service and support technology, the area that can have the biggest and fastest impact to operational costs is knowledge management. Web self-service knowledge management, or KM, captures issue resolution information for reuse, creating cost savings by deflecting assisted interactions. With self-service options, customers are able to solve problems on their own, avoiding any interaction with your support employees—a huge cost savings.

Unfortunately, according to the AFSMI/SSPA Benchmark database, the average percent of visitors to support websites who find the answer they need has been steadily declining, from 48% in 2003 to 40% in 2007. There are three primary reasons for this alarming trend:

- **Out of date technology.** Though KM technology has been a hot bed of innovation over the last decade, according to the 2008 SSPA Member Technology Survey, 30% of members are using the knowledgebase they received for free with their CRM system—hardly a ‘best of breed’ solution. With limited search options and few tools to automate content maintenance, these systems have not been able to keep up with the oceans of new content being developed.
- **Issue complexity.** Both enterprise and consumer technology is rapidly increasing in technical complexity, and as problems grow harder to solve, older KM systems are not flexible or feature rich enough to support more intricate problem diagnostics.
- **Lack of IT resources.** With Software as a Service (SaaS) or OnDemand software adoption growing, business users now routinely acquire technology with no involvement from IT. The end result is that the enterprise software vendor ends up doing more end-user support, as there is no ‘IT cushion’ available to handle basic usability and functionality questions.

With an economic recession upon us, support organizations must objectively evaluate their current KM tools and practices and identify steps to increase effectiveness of self-service. With the average fully burdened cost of a Level 1 technical support incident hovering near \$50, the ROI for assisted incident deflection is fast and easily tracked. Companies wanting to lower operational expenses by moving more traffic to self-service should do the following:

- **Refresh technology.** Get the content out of your CRM knowledgebase and into a more flexible KM platform, optimized for effective enterprise search. Not only will customers more easily find the right information, but the maintenance tools will automatically identify stale and duplicate knowledge, as well as proactively identify content gaps in your existing library.
- **Identify FAQs and make them very visible.** The list of frequently asked questions changes over time, depending on the season, advertising campaigns, release schedules, etc. On a daily, or at least weekly, basis, identify the top five most commonly asked questions and push them to your customers. When they email you, include the top five (with a link to the online solution) in the email. When they call you, have a recording of the FAQs play during hold times, with instructions to go online to resolve. And definitely include the top five most common problems on the main Web self-service site, and anywhere else it makes sense (search screen, create a ticket screen, etc.).

- **Introduce rich content.** A common element among the finalists of the recent SSPA Star Award for Best Online Service was rich content: how-to movies, large full color diagrams, downloadable procedures, etc., embedded in knowledgebase articles. Going beyond just text to provide a multi-media experience makes certain customers are able to fully comprehend and execute the recovery procedures or 'how to' steps.
- **Offer tools for all skill levels.** Another common trait among Star Award finalists was an analysis of self-service use cases. Different age groups and skill levels require different types of self-service tools, and savvy companies include multiple ways to reach content to meet the needs of the widest audience possible. Chat bots can answer simple questions or direct customers to the right resource. Decision trees help novices hone in on the right product and problem. Boolean searching works for serious techs. If you only offer one path to content, you are alienating potential self-service users.
- **Implement forced search.** When a customer attempts to create a support incident online, take all the text they enter for the incident and pass it through your search engine. Display the search results to the customer, and ask them to verify that their problem is not addressed before creating the incident. This gives customers one final opportunity to self-solve before an assisted support incident is created, and forces customers who didn't attempt self-service to see what information about the problem or question may exist.
- **Create a marketing campaign.** One thing every successful self-service implementation has in common is an ongoing marketing campaign. The best self-service in the world can't help if the customers don't know it is there. Be sure to include descriptions about self-service and links to the site in all customer communications—bills, advertisements, IVR recordings, emails, etc.

For more information on the operational cost savings from KM and self-service, see [The ROI of Knowledge Management: Building a Business Case for KM Investments](#).