



Getting to the Top of the Enterprise Services Value Chain

Sun Achieves Industry Recognition from SSPA and J.D. Power and Associates

Mary Kay Kosten, Vice President, Customer Services - Americas, Sun Microsystems,
Interviewed by Shawn Santos, Director of Member Programs, SSPA

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In October, Sun achieved J.D. Power and Associates Certified Technology Services & Support certification by scoring in the top 20 percent for high customer satisfaction among technology support organizations. The SSPA / J.D. Power and Associates program measured Sun's service excellence by surveying satisfaction among over 1,400 customers who recently experienced technical support.



Sun also earned the SSPA Excellence in Service Operations award which required a comprehensive evaluation of Sun's support operations - phone, web and field service. Expert auditors from the SSPA and J.D. Power and

Associates conducted a rigorous audit and review of Sun's policies and procedures for managing the support organizations in North America. Sun met these comprehensive and rigorous best practices established by the SSPA and 50 top industry leading companies.

This article explores the certification process, impacts and significance from the perspective of Sun's Mary Kay Kosten, who was responsible for spearheading the rigorous certification process and enabling Sun's positive outcomes—Excellence in Service Operations and J.D. Power

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and Associates certifications.

Shawn: Tell me about your organization.

Mary Cay: Customer Services – Americas is responsible for services delivery in the Americas, which includes Latin America, the U.S. and Canada. We are responsible for Support Services, which was the scope for this particular certification, professional services delivery and managed services.

Shawn: Your certification achievements must feel great—I am aware of the rigors of the audit process, the customer satisfaction phases and everything that comes along with it. How has this been received inside Sun, and what about externally?

Mary Cay: The news has been received positively both internally to Sun and externally.

We were fortunate in timing in that the news officially broke at the SSPA Conference [Services Leadership 2007]. It was great to have your industry peers congratulate and recognize you.

At the time of the SSPA press release I was at an internal conference, attended by over 3,000 Sun engineers from around the world. It definitely generated a lot of buzz and we got a spontaneous round of applause when it was announced by our Chief Executive Officer, Jonathan Schwartz.

I also had the opportunity to announce the certification to over 2,000 employees within GCS-Americas at my quarterly employee conference call. It was a great way to recognize the team for their contributions to our success and to validate the great work that they do.

From an external perspective, we've got some great ideas on how we can capitalize on the good news. We are currently working with our marketing team to finalize these plans.

Shawn: How do you perceive the difference between the two types of certifications you've been awarded, and how should your customers perceive the difference?

Mary Cay: The Excellence in Service Operations Certification is a comprehensive internal audit. It provides you with a robust process for assessing every part of your customer service organization. It makes you look objectively at your processes and measures, and identifies areas for improvement and opportunities for differentiation.

The J.D. Power and Associates Certification confirms these results by objectively measuring customer satisfaction. It also provides a recognizable, credible brand to hang the results on.

Shawn: I'm interested in what initially motivated you to pursue certification with J.D. Power and Associates and Excellence in Service Operations; and specifically, how these certifications factor into your response to some of the key challenges that face your support organization.

Mary Cay: It was actually an interesting coincidence. I just began a new role which put me in the position to pay SSPA's membership dues. I remember thinking that I didn't even know we belonged to the Association. Of course, I scrutinized the value you [SSPA] were providing and whether I should continue to support you. I saw some things on the website, started talking to SSPA staff, started getting more involved and became aware of the program.

And about that time, I was in a meeting with marketing and we were talking to your point of challenges. The biggest challenge we face today is our ability to differentiate ourselves in an extremely competitive environment. There is limited opportunity to differentiate our products on price or performance; however, there is an opportunity to differentiate on service. Our motivation to pursue certification came about as a result of our belief that industry recognition, such as these Certifications, is an excellent point of differentiation that is not easily repeatable.

Shawn: I'd like to discuss the certification process. I'm aware that preparing for certification is certainly no easy task—it's a very rigorous process involving audits, customer surveys and customer satisfaction measures. What was it like for you and your company to prepare for certification? How much time did it take? How many people were involved and what kind of things were you involved in?

Mary Cay: The way we approached the certification process at Sun involved establishing a board which consisted of key members from my staff and an executive program manager, who was assigned to guide us through the process. The board included people from across the organization and individuals from marketing and human resources.

Board members were assigned responsibility for processes and policies by function. Given the breadth of the subject, we asked them to collate these into one web portal and map them to the relevant criteria and measures within the certification process. This helped us organize for the audit and as the data was in one location, people weren't scrambling to gather presentations and data during the certification process.

Interestingly, because much of the audit criteria is actually mapped into the SSPA Benchmarking tool, it makes sense to us to just keep the portal open as an evolving resource—we're going to continue to use it and evolve it to map to the SSPA structure.

In terms of the number of people involved, this varied throughout the

period of the certification process.

Shawn: What do you think makes the Excellence in Service Operations and J.D. Power and Associates certification programs different from other industry certifications that are out there?

Mary Cay: Unlike other programs, it is not heavily focused on administrative controls. I believe that the Excellence in Service Operations and J.D. Power and Associates certification programs provide the right balance between process management and results. That's where the combination of the two really shines.

Shawn: I'd like to talk to you about how SSPA certifications are perceived in the marketplace, what kinds of factors are at play and some of the competitive components that may be involved.

The first question I'd like to ask is whether you have any methodologies, processes or programs set up to measure the effectiveness of this certification in the marketplace over time?

Mary Cay: It's an important question and we are currently working with our marketing team to address this.

Shawn: Do you have any advice for some of your SSPA member peers that are considering certification and how they might sell their program internally and go through the certification process?

Mary Cay: I think that establishing "the board" was key to getting us started and staying organized and on track. I also believe that a good program manager, with the right level of visibility and reputation in the company, is critical to the success of the process. Our internally-developed online portal was also a great resource and aided to the certification program's efficiency across the organization.

Shawn: You've been through the program and you know every single component by heart. How can the SSPA improve the program, and how do you see the program evolving over time?

Mary Cay: A number of improvements have recently been made to the program that I want to recognize.

The SSPA Rated Outstanding certification process allows companies to alternatively select a module and/or location specific certification approach. This addition to the program further opens the gates to many different types of organizations and maturity levels. In addition to this, the addition of new services in the Improvement phase can be utilized by companies to help them improve specific attributes of their operations - I see this as a huge value add.

About Mary Cay Kosten.....

Mary Cay Kosten is vice president of Customer Services - Americas, where she is responsible for all aspects of service delivery including Support Services, Managed Services, Professional Services Delivery and Sun Learning Services for the U.S., Latin America and Canada. Prior to assuming her current role, Mary Cay served as vice president of the Americas Customer Care Center, where she oversaw delivery of phone-based technical and escalation support across the US and Canada.

Mary Cay holds a Master of Science in systems management from the University of Southern California and a Bachelor of Science in marketing.

About Shawn Santos.....

As Director of Member Programs with the SSPA, Shawn focuses on developing and managing SSPA member programs, researching industry trends, and producing insightful content for the technology service and support industry. Prior to SSPA, Shawn managed the inception, development and roll-out of service marketing programs for the test and measurement service and support division of Agilent Technologies. In addition, Shawn pioneered the development of new products and businesses at Enologix and Global Vintage—wine industry leaders in information systems, software, research and consulting. Shawn holds a B. S. in Molecular Biology from the University of California at Santa Cruz.

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