

SSPA news

Special Conference Edition – October, 2005

A Publication of the Service & Support Professionals Association

SSPA Conference Las Vegas—Was it Worth it? *Key Insights from the Conference Floor*

By Shawn Santos, Senior Program Manager, SSPA

Las Vegas , NV – October 12, 2005 – I walked into the 2005 SSPA conference in Las Vegas as probably the single biggest critic of the value of trade events. Do I despise networking? Hardly. But after attending various conferences over the last decade, I've had the impression that they have a propensity to be more of a social event than a valuable use of company resources. You might find more benefit sending your staff on an extra paid vacation.

Yet, almost as soon as I heard the din of the South Seas Ballroom, my negative impression began to fade. On the surface, it looked like any other conference. In fact, I had to meander my way through several other large technology events taking place at Mandalay Bay's sprawling conference center to find SSPA's "Shaping Tomorrow's Service & Support Models" venue. But straight away this event seemed different. You could almost feel the one-of-a-kind buzz of service and support professionals demonstrating, presenting, and discussing their view of the future.

After settling into some java and the distinctive backdrop of the resort, I got to work. I dropped in on several exhibitors and was impressed to learn how focused and inventive these companies are at increasing operational efficiency and revenue. There is something to be said for live product presentations and one-on-one demos to drive this point home. Companies like **Right Now Technologies, Talisma, Apropos, Apparent Networks, Next Nine, ATG, InQuira, eVergence, Citrix, Knova,** and **Conversagent** (to name a few) clearly demonstrate a common commitment, as well as tactical plans and products, for increasing efficiency and ROI for their customers. Talking to members, I found a unique opportunity to discuss their core business issues and how the resources and programs at SSPA can help address them. Of course, the ground-breaking introduction of the J.D. Power and Associates Certified Technology Service & Support Program and the Wharton School / SSPA partnership generated an overwhelming response.

Keynotes: Cisco, IBM, Hewlett-Packard, & SSPA

These well-received keynote presentations fueled attendee exchanges and contemplations well into the evening hours.

- **Joe Pinto, SVP Worldwide Service and Support, Cisco Systems** , casually and effectively demonstrated the intricacies of Cisco's service and support programs including their employee-focused "customer culture", how they measure customer satisfaction, and the relevancy and value of their support programs.
- **SusanM. Puglia, VP of Technical Support and Quality, IBM**, was a powerful speaker that demonstrated the value and future of on-demand support within IBM.
- **MohanGarde, VP, IPG, Americas Consumer Operations, Hewlett-Packard**, had a tough job—expounding on consumer-support to a mostly enterprise-focused audience. Mohan described his organization's support model, and his presentation was extremely effective at illustrating a common landscape between consumer- and enterprise- support initiatives. My take home message for the future of support: when technology becomes commodity, services become king.
- **Trisha Bright, VP of Member Programs, SSPA** , delivered what turned out to be a very popular presentation—summing

In this issue

- **Formation of Technology Professional Services Association Announced**
- **Wharton School Partners with the SSPA**
- **Playing Offense: How to Protect Services Pricing and Margins**
- **SSPA Conference Las Vegas: Was it Worth it?**
- **The Return of the Next Big Thing**

up the results of the SSPA Committee on Support ROI—a look into the winning strategies and tactics that are successful at minimizing discount concessions (see this month's article "Playing Offense: How to Protect Services Pricing and Margins".)

Tech Sessions

The Tech Sessions were uniquely suited to target audiences and highly attended. Back by popular demand from last-year, they represented an opportunity for attendees to learn how technology can enable them to reach their business goals, while giving presenters the opportunity to effectively pitch their solutions to interested buyers.

- **John Cray of Apropos Technology** discussed the challenges of the support center and how a new approach is driving resolution, in particular, how new trends in communications and metrics improve customer satisfaction and revenue while controlling costs.
- **Knova Software's Mark Angel** demonstrated the technology required to optimize service resolution in detail. He made the point that service resolution drives over 80% of support costs--costs that aren't reduced by CRM investments--and legacy KM point tools fail to make much of an impact because they're disconnected from the service and support workflow. Mark explained why KM by itself is not enough to drive a measurable reduction in support costs and an increase in satisfaction and loyalty.
- **Mark Woollen and Bob Macdonald of InQuira** teamed up to deliver a smart presentation on customer-centric best practices for resolving support issues based on the one element companies cannot control—the customer's articulation of his or her unique need. This account delivered specific case studies on companies using Intelligent Search and how it's helped them resolve major customer problems.
- Account Executive **Julie Goldstein of TNS Prognostics**, a pioneering Silicon Valley company specializing in customer satisfaction research driven by leading-edge technology, discussed how they utilize innovative techniques for collecting customer satisfaction data from key groups of decision-makers.
- Finally, **Todd Smith of Citrix Online** introduced their "On-Demand Remote Assistance Value Chain" and discussed best practices in building a strong support infrastructure.

These groups of presenters have a handle on the technological problems facing support organizations and have solutions in place to address them. Even better, they seem to understand the future of this rapidly evolving industry.

Breakouts & Training Day Speakers

Of the many issues the SSPA Advisory Board convenes on, they define which topics are most important in shaping tomorrow's service and support models. The Advisory Board creates a compilation of vital, forward-looking issues, and when complete, they are verified with SSPA membership for development within the conference. In these in-depth workshops, every seat in every session was filled, and then some.

After a full seven-hour training day session, an attendee clearly described the value of attending the conference, "it's worth it for the training day alone. Nowhere can I spend \$300 to sit with a noted industry expert for an entire day asking questions to my heart's content."

If attendees deliver on even half of what was presented at this year's training day and breakout sessions they will do more to address key service issues than any other tools or techniques to date.

2005 STAR Awards

The SSPA announced the winners and finalists of the 2005 STAR Awards for Service Excellence. Not only was this ceremony important to honor the nominees, but it also helps service professionals understand the key benchmarks for becoming and retaining status as a truly great service organization.

The SSPA STAR Awards provide peer recognition of excellence in eight unique categories. The SSPA also announced its latest STAR Awards Hall of Fame inductee, Oracle Corporation. Hall of Fame induction is special recognition awarded to companies that have won five SSPA STAR Awards since the program inception in 1989. All winners and finalists were honored during a popular luncheon and awards ceremony on Tuesday.

"We had an incredibly strong and impressive pool of award applicants this year. Technology maintenance, service and support providers across categories continue to innovate and improve their capabilities to deliver world-class customer service," said Bill Rose, SSPA Founder and Executive Director. "This trend was reflected in the high caliber of applications we received and made judging a very formidable task."

The 2005 STAR Awards winners by category are:

MOST IMPROVED – ProQuest Business Solutions

This award recognizes ProQuest Business Solutions for demonstrating the greatest increase in the quality of their support over the past year. Key measurements included customer satisfaction improvements as well as support productivity.

HIGH CASE VOLUME – Sage Software – Timberline Office

This award recognizes Sage Software - Timberline Office for service excellence at a support center with hundreds of support representatives fielding thousands of technical assistance/customer support requests per day. The winner in this category typically supports a wide range of products.

SUSTAINED PERFORMANCE – IBM Rochester Support Center

This SSPA STAR Award goes to the IBM Rochester Support Center for proving they have sustained outstanding service and support with high customer satisfaction levels for at least *three consecutive years*.

INNOVATIVE SUPPORT – Oracle Corporation

Oracle Corporation has developed new, cutting-edge systems and processes for delivering exceptional technical support to their customers.

MISSION CRITICAL SUPPORT - Dell Enterprise Services

This award recognizes technical support that is a critical part of keeping customers "up and running" 24/7. Dell Enterprise Services clearly demonstrated how important their technical support is to the operation of customers' mission critical systems or services.

COMPLEX SUPPORT APPLICATIONS - RSA Security

RSA Security delivers sophisticated technical support for complex applications in mixed or otherwise complex environments, typically engineering and scientific fields.

WEBSTAR SERVICE AWARD – Oracle Corporation

This SSPA STAR Award winner–Oracle–delivers sophisticated technical support for complex applications in mixed or otherwise complex environments, typically engineering and scientific fields.

HALL OF FAME - Oracle Corporation

The SSPA STAR Award Hall of Fame is a Lifetime Achievement Award that has been presented to only nine companies in the award's history. We're proud to induct Oracle Corporation into the Hall of Fame.

Buzz in the Hall

At the close of the conference, Bill Rose was categorical when he remarked "this was the best conference *ever*." The agility of the SSPA staff and presenters in enacting a swift yet scrupulous move from New Orleans to Las Vegas was hard to believe given the

fleeting time-frame of six days. Moreover, member support was confirmed by blow-out attendance and tremendous positive feedback.

“Shaping Tomorrow’s Service & Support Models” was the theme that infused not only the marketing collateral, but the presentations and individual conversations as well. What I found immensely interesting was the candor with which the participants reflected on their experiences and different perspectives. SSPA members have conveyed the value they see in holding a private venue to share not only best practices, but trouble spots. The conference not only helped to solve current problems, make essential contacts, and plan for the future, but it helps cultivate key issues that will be explored in future conferences and subsequent SSPA research. In short, yes, it’s worth it.

“There is a lot of schmoozing, but the value of the schmooze should not be underestimated” – *Anonymous conference attendee, Las Vegas 2005*

Comments? Suggestions? We would like to hear from you. Please email the [SSPA News Editor](#).

[Download PDF](#)



[next article>>>](#)

Distributed by SSPA - 11031 Via Frontera - Suite A - San Diego CA - 92127

©2005 SSPA