



The Place to Be: Support Industry Converges on Best Practices

By Shawn Santos, Director of Member Programs, SSPA

When you assemble over 600 of the support industry's most innovative, experienced and engaging professionals in one place, best practices are defined and networks are forged. SSPA's 2007 Best Practices Conference, which took place May 6th – 8th in San Diego, was the place to be for support management dedicated to sharing and learning the best practices that are driving results in the support industry.

The theme, "Optimizing Support to Deliver Exceptional Customer Value", was extremely relevant to conference attendees, which comprised members of the largest global technology companies, diversified small- and medium-sized businesses, noted industry consultants and support technology vendors—all of whom share in the mission to advance the support industry and develop effective ways to make technology customers more successful.

Meeting of the Minds

Judging from the conference keynotes, many breakout presentations and the overall din of the networking halls, one thing is clear—the support industry is in the midst of a major transformation that is defining our operational and customer goals for the next era. As J.B. Wood, SSPA's CEO says, "SSPA believes that by the year 2015, service, support and maintenance will look nothing like what we know today...there are a significant number of factors that are driving major change in our industry" (for more information on the transformations that are impacting the support business model, visit the "[Value-Added Support](#)" section of SSPA's website).

On the opening day of the conference, there were two types of thought-leadership underway: SSPA's Advisory Board and SSPA Training Day Sessions.

Members of SSPA's [Advisory Board](#), including representatives from IBM, Cisco, BEA, Sun, Intuit, Network Appliance, RIM, Sony and Xerox convened to discuss several industry issues that present challenges—

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and opportunities—for their support organizations. Although the agenda was brimming with many interesting discussion threads, several issues garnered special attention and promised to attract SSPA research in coming months:

- Globalization and emerging markets.
- Consumer support models, specifically, the future of support in technically complex multi-vendor environments.
- Strategic service differentiation.
- Proactive and pervasive support, and its impact on the perceived value that support organizations provide.
- The *real* costs of outsourcing and offshoring support functions.

Training Day sessions were another important part of SSPA's conference line-up. Led by noted specialists in key areas of support industry operations, SSPA Training Days are in-depth workshops that focus on the advancement of services strategy and tactics using real-world tools and techniques. 2007 Best Practices Training Days were well-attended and included the following sessions and presenters:

- Achieving Self-Service Success, **Allen Bonde, eVergance**
- Can We Talk? Better Communication Between Support and Product Development, **Frederick C. Van Benekom, Dr.B.A., Great Brook**
- Paying for KM: Building Honest ROIs that Stand the Test of Time, **Francoise Tourniaire, FT Works**
- Turn Over the Keys! Let your Staff Drive Performance Improvement, **Dave Brown, Support Center University**

The Main Stage

Monday morning marked the official opening of the 50th conference for SSPA and founder Bill Rose, who proudly announced his new position of Executive Director Emeritus, his improving golf game, and the appointment of SSPA's new Executive Director, **Steve Smith**.

As many of you already know, Steve joined the SSPA to help lead the services and support industry into the next decade. Steve has demonstrated his abilities to drive innovation and change throughout an impressive 17-year career spanning several industries, most recently during his tenure at IBM.

In his engaging keynote, Steve delivered SSPA's vision of Value-Added Support and illustrated how the SSPA is aligning itself to help member companies along this path, including a discussion of SSPA's 3 key initiatives for members of the Association: 1) improving operations, 2) creating value for support services, and 3) driving innovation in the support business model.

Steve also detailed SSPA's new programs and alliances that will

contribute significantly to the success of SSPA member companies, such as SSPA's Advisory and Inquiry Services, the Wharton Program for services management, Operational Assessment services, the Services Research and Innovation Initiative (SRII), and Organization Certification with the SSPA/J.D. Power & Associates program, to name a few. Steve closed by emphasizing that the SSPA strives to be considered an extension to the team of every member of the Association, and put forth examples of how this relationship can be supported through specific SSPA programs and member touch points.

Monday and Tuesday hosted a number of keynote speakers that were best characterized by John Ragsdale, SSPA's VP of Research, in his blog "[Eye On Service](#)":

- **Jeanne Bliss, CEO, CustomerBLISS.** The title of Jeanne's keynote was "Beyond Herding Cats: Delivering Experiences Customers DESIRE!" I would describe the presentation as Tom Peters, on steroids, for the new millennium. With her background as Chief Customer Officer for a variety of companies (Lands' End, Allstate, Coldwell Banker, Microsoft, and Mazda Corporation), Jeanne gave example after example of companies attacking innovation in customer service in a variety of ways. This was a very dynamic presentation, filled with humor, personal asides, and a passion you don't normally find in conference speakers. In other words, she nailed it!
- **Rusty Walther, SVP of Global Support, Network Appliance.** What a character. This was an extremely well received session, entitled "Go BIG or Stay Home: Surviving and Thriving During Major Change." Rusty outlined a plan of attack for assessing if a support organization is ready and able for VAS, guidelines for executing the change, and how to handle the inevitable challenges that arise. The whole time he was speaking, I was thinking, "Damn, this would be a great book!" Turns out he's writing one—so stay tuned.
- **Julie Hogan, Region Vice President, Xerox Services.** When support managers tell me they are hampered by executives who aren't customer centric, I always give the same advice: change them or leave. Julie showed part of an internal Xerox video of their CEO discussing customer passion and being customer focused. Now that's something I wish every CEO did! Julie's presentation, "Xerox Corporation Total Alignment: Creating a Customer-Focused Culture," gave a detailed blueprint for how Xerox has linked individual employee objectives, performance feedback and cross-organizational alignment with company and customer goals to deliver on the customer promise.
- **Chip Bell, Founder and Manager of the Chip Bell Group.** Chip gave a wonderful presentation on creating exceptional customer experiences. He had promised to educate members on how to "release employee passion, encourage boldness, and reinvent problem processes – and leave ready and able to get your associates engaged, enthused, and eager to give unforgettable,

magnetic service.” And he delivered.

Battling the “Perfect Storm”

John Ragsdale, SSPA’s charismatic sage of support technology, rounded out the morning’s keynotes by describing support’s “perfect storm”—characterized by the confluence of rising technical complexity and exploding incident volumes that are coming together to form a daunting challenge for support organizations. To help companies face this challenge, John offered an alluring, yet practical solution by recognizing innovators in the support technology space that have products and services which solve existing problems in new ways, or provide innovative solutions to emerging business issues.

This recognition came in the form of the **Spring 2007 SSPA Recognized Innovator Awards**, which covered support technology innovators in **Analytics/Business Intelligence**, **Web 2.0**, and **Offer Management**.

Winners in these categories were selected by John in collaboration with an experienced panel of judges, including SSPA members and consultants with expertise in the support technology space. John went on to offer attendees “Innovation Tours” of the Technology Services Expo and stopped by each Recognized Innovator Award winner’s booth for a specialized product demonstration.

The Spring 2007 SSPA Recognized Innovators are:

Analytics/Business Intelligence (tie)



Web 2.0



Offer Management



The Best in Best Practices

Since 1990, SSPA’s STAR Awards have recognized companies that have implemented and properly managed the most innovative and efficient processes for service and support delivery. The judging process is rigorous—applications are pored over by a select industry committee including SSPA staff and members of SSPA’s advisory board. The

proving grounds are in specific baseline data, a detailed description of operations and processes, performance metrics, returns and benefits, and other information about what makes the applicant's support operations fit for recognition.

The **2007 SSPA STAR Award for Best Practices** winners by category are:

- Best Online Support – Aspen Technology
- Best Knowledge Management Practices, Consumer – McAfee
- Best Knowledge Management Practices, Enterprise - Oracle
- Best On-Site Service – Sun Microsystems
- Best Use of Metrics & Business Intelligence – IBM Rochester
- Best Customer Commitment, Consumer – Intuit
- Best Customer Commitment, Enterprise - Cisco
- Best Support Staff Practices, Consumer - Intuit
- Best Support Staff Practices, Enterprise – Network Appliance
- Best Service Delivery Optimization, Consumer – HP
- Best Service Delivery Optimization, Enterprise - Cisco
- Best Practices in Value-Added Support, Consumer - HP
- Best Practices in Value-Added Support, Enterprise - Oracle

Breakout Session Round-up

In a recent SSPA survey, conference attendees indicated that breakout sessions are where they find much of the value of attending SSPA events, and over 90% said they would recommend SSPA conferences to a colleague based on the high quality of the breakout sessions alone. Based on my own experience, I couldn't agree more.

While I couldn't attend all of the approximately 80 different sessions in nine tracks, of those I did attend, I had many favorites. Of my favorites, here are five that immediately come to mind:

- **Power to the People: Using Online Customer Communities to Improve Service and Support**, *presented by Joe Cothrel (Lithium) and Tarik Mahmoud (Linksys) in the Tools & Technology Track*

This presentation was extremely relevant to me, as the SSPA is currently at the planning stage of launching an on-line community for member companies (stay tuned for launch updates this summer). Joe and Tarik seamlessly presented the "10 secrets to success" in planning, launching and managing on-line communities, and the tactical insight of Linksys's community manager was invaluable at understanding the day-to-day requirements of an on-line community.

- **Less is More: Differentiating Products with Service**, *presented by Gregory Root (Motorola) in the Services Sales & Marketing Track*

How do you sell maintenance on a computer that is virtually

indestructible? That's what I was asking right before one of these devices was launched in the air, flew past my head and bounced off the wall next to me. The acrobatics definitely got my attention, but it was the content that kept my interest. Greg presented an intriguing case of driving product sales with an innovative, yet straight-forward service offering. 90-day business results netted over 230% in average service attach rates, product teams now see service as a strategic advantage and customers are asking about additional services. That's something to write home about.

- **Going Global: Transforming Support and Service**, *presented by David Keeling (Acision) in the Support Optimization Track*
David's tour through the pitfalls and opportunities of "going global" was intriguing. His presentation described the intricacies of planning and aligning a support organization to a global model, and how customer satisfaction can be positively impacted through proper planning and implementation.
- **The Path to Becoming a Knowledge Organization**, *presented by Robert Rose and Tom Fuhiman (Altiris) in the Best Practices for Small & Medium Sized Companies Track*
Robert and Tom described their best practices (and lessons learned!) in laying out a roadmap for successful knowledge initiatives. Rather than a technology-focused KM session (which are also valuable) this session focused on winning internal champions to help facilitate the most effective—and rewarding—KM processes.
- **Making More and Spending Less Through Online Support**, *presented by Francoise Tourniaire (FT Works) in the Web Self-Service & Online Communities Track*
In the support industry, Francoise Tourniaire's reputation precedes her. When you find the opportunity to meet her in person, it all becomes clear—with Francoise, there are no degrees of separation between a good reputation and reality.

This session was a candid, defensible look at what works—and what doesn't work—with online support. Importantly, Francoise covered the permeating issue of creating effective ROI breakdowns for online support initiatives, and how distinct online support offerings can be best suited to different products and customer groups.

Bill Rose: "I'm Not Dying"

At the close of the event, hundreds of guests flowed into the main conference venue for a special tribute to SSPA's retiring Founder and Executive Director, Bill Rose. The feelings of sincerity, vivacity and appreciation were palpable—Bill was joined by industry notables, colleagues and many friends and family for this memorable send off.

The tribute might well be described as one part sentiment, one part roast, one part "It's a Wonderful Life", and two parts Djembe jam fest (one of Bill's many interests includes percussion, particularly from West Africa).

Bill founded the SSPA nearly 20 years ago, and has been a potent force driving the industry ever since. Most notably, Bill is widely accredited with creating the support profession and growing the SSPA to be the largest and most significant Association of its kind. Bill is a unique guy; but in a good way. His unique approach to life continues to surprise and inspire his many friends, mentees and colleagues. My feeling is that this won't be changing any time soon.

What was Bill's reaction to the surprise tribute? In his own words, "Guys, this is great—but I'm not dying!"

That said, I encourage you to keep in touch with **Bill** who now holds the title of Founder and Executive Director Emeritus, SSPA.



Dr. Bill Rose

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.

Comments? Suggestions? We would like to hear from you. Please email the editor at sspanews@thesspa.com.

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