



Moving from Product Resolution to Service Solutions

By Robert Bell, Director, Product Support Services, Eclipsys Corporation

Customer support is all about serving the customer – as best and as little as possible. Traditionally, support organizations worked hard to provide excellent customer service – but because service is expensive, we tried to minimize the use of service to save costs. But what if a cost effective way existed to do what you do best *more* often? And instead of just minimizing costs, you could actually increase revenue? In this article, Robert Bell will discuss how Eclipsys has been able to do just that – as well as citing the other benefits of turning customer support from a resolution-oriented cost-center to a revenue-generating service organization.

The Best and Little as Possible

Traditionally, customer support organizations have focused on diametrically opposite goals: “To provide the best service to its customers as little as possible.” Call avoidance has been the primary mission, and with good reason – support is expensive. In the ‘break-fix model’ of support, customers pay a fixed fee for software maintenance, usually an industry standard of 18-20% of the software cost. Without the ability to generate additional funds, this support model is forced into call avoidance to minimize costs and maximize profits. When customers sense the support organization is more interested in closing and avoiding calls than fixing their problems, customer satisfaction usually drops.

In November of 2006, SSPA President and CEO J.B. Wood gave a presentation titled: “**Ten Things We Need to Change to Empower Support’s Future**,” where he spoke about the future of services, how customer expectations are changing, and the growth of Software as a Service (SaaS). Support dollars are becoming constrained while customers are demanding more services – for less money. Customers are looking to focus on their core businesses and do what they do best. They are forced to rely more on the vendor to install and maintain, and even host their systems. These services are what the vendors should strive to do best.

Our products and solutions were becoming more complex, and thus harder and more expensive for our customers to maintain. This also

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meant fewer dollars available to purchase our products. In some cases our customers didn't have the infrastructure requirements, staffing and hardware, to support our solutions. We had to find a way to resolve these barriers keeping us out of this market opportunity.

A Diamond in the Rough

We designed our initial service offerings as short term solutions for the customers who needed them so Eclipsys could complete a sale. We quickly learned that these customers achieved a more than satisfactory status, as the uptime and system levels were quite high. Satisfaction scores and renewal rates were very high – even when the customer's infrastructure needs were addressed, customers chose not to take the system support back from Eclipsys. We knew we had something special. Could we expand and sell this service to our other customers who weren't necessarily having problems – and improve their outcomes as well?

This sounds easy, but it required a culture shift for our support organization. As in most traditional support organizations, we had no established processes for upselling, billing, and providing services. We were not revenue generating – that was (and still is primarily) the function of our professional services and consulting groups. However, those departments are set up for projects – not the ongoing delivery of services, which is the direction we were migrating. Our goal was to move past the reactive break-fix and proactive services models into a cost-effective, value-added service delivery process.

First, we reached out to our existing customers to gauge the effectiveness of what we had delivered so far: How were we doing? What did they like? Dislike? What more could we do? Where could we improve? We took this information back to our management team and evaluated the responses. Where were the gaps? Could we provide the additional services? How? What were the revenue margins? We looked at other "one-off" services within the company and evaluated those services for inclusion and expansion. We solicited sales, development, and other departments for feedback on other areas to be considered. Looking at what we thought were the most beneficial services, either by customer satisfaction, cost/revenue, or highest amount of sales, we came up with our recommendations on the services to develop and how to build the team.

Getting Traction

In order to achieve executive sponsorship and gain funding, we had to show both productivity gains and profitability. Since we had a couple services in place, this was done relatively quickly. We had already achieved an ROI with our first two customers in just 6 months on service revenue alone. We created an executive dashboard and developed service level reports – the key to continuing to refine and build the business. Add in the high customer satisfaction and the support of our sales team, we were ready to go. Our self-funding proposal was accepted, and we began to rollout our project.

Working with our marketing department, we created our first ever support services brochure, which listed our packaged solutions and explained how customers could design custom solutions to best suit their needs. We posted this brochure on the support website and used it to help educate our support team on our offerings. We developed a pricing structure complete with discounts and compensation and added our services to the company sales book. We attended the company's annual sales meeting and presented these formalized solutions. At our user conference, we setup a support booth, both as a way to meet our customers face to face and to sell them our remote service solutions. We even created public documents in our customer relationship management database, so our existing customers could see our services as a potential solutions and preventative options to their issues.

Changing the culture of our support team took time. By nature, support analysts are not comfortable 'selling' services. If done incorrectly, customers hear you quoting prices for services that they should already feel they have. Explaining the services we offered was easy, but explaining to the analysts how to soft-sell services as part of the issue solution – moving from product resolution to service solutions - took time. As the support services group grew and expanded, confidence from our support team grew too and they became more comfortable offering the solutions to customers.

Rolling Into Place

Our final step in the rollout process was to evaluate our work. Since we had done some preliminary reporting and dashboard as part of the initial services, we had some legacy data to work with as a benchmark. We soon discovered, however, that we were a victim of our own success - our customers didn't necessarily realize all the hard work we did for them. By preventing issues and system problems, some customers didn't realize the value of our services. Since they didn't always see our actions, they didn't tie their impressive results to our services. To counter that, we quickly developed a customer report to show how our services managed their system and how we prevented and quickly resolved issues. This reestablished our credibility with our customers, and the slight dip in customer satisfaction was soon regained.

Once the services were rolled out, we looked to improve them and maximize their potential. By having several services used by several customers, we had the necessary experience to leverage our repeatable business needs. We found a great partner in Citrix, who helped us do just that. Citrix has several remote connectivity solutions that work very well for us. By utilizing Citrix' solutions, we standardized parts of our service. But the real value in partnering with Citrix came somewhat unexpectedly. Citrix offered, and we agreed, to come and evaluate how we were using their products. With their guidance, we automated more reporting, survey tools, and increased our auditing and HIPAA compliance. With their expertise, we found several solutions to issues we didn't even know we had. We've even introduced their products to

other areas of our company, outside of support services.

As a result of these positive outcomes, we've expanded our relationship with Citrix, completing the product feedback loop to them. We now are a Citrix reference site, have a seat on their Advisory Board, and participate in product direction discussions and beta release software testing. The marketing exposure for both companies has been very positive. It has changed how Eclipsys looks at its vendor relationships.

Eclipsys is very proud of the work we have done in migrating Customer Support from a product resolution to a support solution model. In 2006, we decreased our call resolution times 67% and increased our first call resolution by 10% across all cases after Citrix's GoToAssist application was introduced. We far exceeded our revenue goals, posting a 575% increase in revenue totals during the same year. And perhaps most importantly, our overall support customer satisfaction scores increased by 10% in 2006, a sign the changes have been positively accepted by all customers, not just the ones who have opted for the value added services. We are proud to report all our customer support survey attributes score in the top 20%.

As our customer's needs change, so must our business practices. Value-added support is a key part of the future. Services should not be offered to the customer in silos but as flexible, integrated packages. We must begin to recognize, measure and manage the threat of growing technical complexity our customers face. New metrics and goals are needed to drive these changes; then we can continue to look for areas of opportunities to grow, to improve, or even begin. We need to move past the concept that support shouldn't sell and change the traditional concept of support resolution to service solutions.

Services will have a place in your company's future; it's up to you to decide who will define and drive it.

About Robert Bell.....

Robert Bell is a Director of Product Support Services for Eclipsys Corporation, where he has worked for over 11 years. He is currently in charge of support and services for all Eclipsys financial products, as well as all Customer Support Processes, including HIPAA compliance, third party vendor relationships, security compliance, and Eclipsys connectivity solutions.

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