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Case Study: Novell Uses Collaborative Remote Support To Transform Its Customer Experience

How Novell Transformed Its Global Technical Support Operations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the services industry, the ultimate goal is to increase customer satisfaction while lowering support costs with improved productivity. Unfortunately, introducing new tools for productivity gains often results in lower satisfaction. But Novell cracked this nut. During a time of constrained budgets, limited resources, and increased service demands, Novell implemented a new remote support tool from Bomgar and realized significant productivity and customer satisfaction improvements. Novell worked with Bomgar's Remote Support Software to overcome common people, process, and technology issues to ensure a smooth customer experience. Novell introduced multichannel communications to improve its customer service model; created a standard support environment; improved collaboration and staff efficiency; and provided a more flexible environment where customer challenges are solved in real time. The result? Novell shifted 90% of its incoming support calls to an online chat model. This improved staff productivity by 30% and cut the average cost per request in half — all while improving customer satisfaction by 15%!

SITUATION: NEW MAINTENANCE PROGRAM DEMANDED A CHANGE IN CUSTOMER SUPPORT

In 2007 Novell enabled its premium and volume customers with unlimited access to technical assistance and product support. This shift required a change in how Novell delivers support to its external customers. Novell supports about 50,000 customers in 43 countries. The company has more than 300 remote support representatives worldwide who provide around-the-clock support for all product lines. The support centers are located in the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, India, and the Czech Republic. Novell has a diverse product line consisting of operating systems, identity management solutions, IT management tools, collaboration tools, cloud technologies, and intelligent workload management tools. Novell's customer support has received a variety of support awards and certificates.¹

Novell Needed To Increase Customer Satisfaction And Support Volumes Without Added Staff

Customer service strategies sit in varying places on a continuum between providing services and reducing service costs. Revenue and sales goals often focus customer service strategies on acquisition but not on retention. Reducing average handling times may satisfy cost goals but risk compromising customer satisfaction. Finding the right mix was a shared challenge among the Novell customer support and management teams. Novell estimated that its changes to the maintenance program would increase incident volume by 25%. The company made the changes in its customer support strategy with the following goals: 1) increase customer satisfaction by 10%, and 2) at the same time, improve technical service/support productivity to absorb the additional 25% in call volume.



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To reach these goals Novell needed to shift its traditional phone-based support volume to a collaborative online customer support community incorporating a variety of best practices and methodologies. The customer support group needed to innovate because of the direct effect of customer service to both the top and bottom line. Novell needed to focus on creating value and improving support staff productivity without breaking the bank. But the group faced two primary challenges:

- **Integration into existing areas.** Novell required tight integration between support and the overall Web experience. Additionally, the team wanted to ensure that its existing CRM solution was integrated into the online customer support community.
- **Short implementation cycle.** The announcement of the new support licenses drove the timeline for changes in the online customer support community. The team had approximately four months to plan, test, and implement the new processes and tools.

Novell Turned To Bomgar To Overcome The Three Challenges Of Remote Support

When implementing an online remote system, Novell was faced with both technology and behavior challenges. Novell implemented Bomgar's Remote Support Software solution and addressed three particular challenges in its remote support:

- **People: Provide time for both customers and staff to acclimate.** Novell was concerned about how customers would respond to the online chat/diagnostic solution. However, customer feedback indicates that most customers like it. Periodically the team hears from customers who are concerned with having to use a chat tool to start communicating with them. Some of this is related to customers simply not feeling comfortable with chat as a method of communication. Another reason is that there is still room for optimization of the online request system.
- **Process: Allow customers to opt back to the old way.** Moving from phone to chat is a significant behavioral challenge for both customers and support representatives, so Novell created and implemented a training plan for both. Fortunately, Novell's customers are very technical and adaptable. However, even with proficient training, it's still a difficult transition for some to move to a chat interface for support. To overcome any objections, Novell still lets customers request phone support. Today, both the phone and the remote diagnostic and control tools are often used in combination to resolve customer issues.
- **Technology: Integrate with existing tools.** Novell already had an existing eService Web portal and CRM solution, so the remote support solution needed to deeply integrate with these existing technologies. Novell used Bomgar's application programming interfaces (APIs) to achieve this tight integration and obtained a seamless view of the customer experience.

BEST PRACTICE: USE REMOTE SUPPORT TO CUT COSTS AND IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE

Novell adopted a collaborative online support model that quickly and seamlessly transitions customers to assisted support directly after initiating a Web incident. Novell's new solution:

- **Introduced multichannel communications to freshen up its service request process.** When customers determine that they require assisted support, Novell provides them with a mechanism whereby they can log in to Novell's eService portal, create a service request, and collaborate with a Novell support representative via chat, with the option of using remote diagnostic and remote control upon permission. Both customers with new service requests and returning customers who need additional help on existing requests have the option to chat and accept remote diagnostic and support help. Novell still offers phone support as an option for critical and down system situations.
- **Created a standard support environment with remote support tools.** Novell implemented an enterprise-wide remote support solution to support its 50,000 customers in 43 countries. These customers primarily interact with Novell through its eService portal, where they can create and manage their support experience. Novell chose the Bomgar remote support solution because it allows customer support to remotely manage and control customers' machines and collaborate with customers via chat. Bomgar seamlessly integrated with Novell's existing eService portal and CRM solution. It also allowed Novell to quickly and securely start a support chat session and then easily transition customers to remote diagnostics within the same technology.
- **Improved collaboration and support efficiency.** Novell's customer support representatives had to adapt their troubleshooting skills to work with chat, but they immediately saw efficiencies by handling multiple chats at once. The Bomgar system also increased collaboration between representatives by letting them share remote support sessions and work on the same issue simultaneously.
- **Extended flexibility in customer interaction to resolve issues in real time.** Novell adopted chat and remote support features to allow its customers to choose their preferred way to interact with the customer support representative. The customer support professional was able to smoothly transition across multiple modalities — from chat to remote diagnostic to remote control — to quickly gain access to the customer's screen and resolve the issues.

BEST PRACTICE RESULTS: MEETING AND EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS OF THE CUSTOMERS

Novell accomplished a remarkable customer support model transformation from 2007 to 2009. The catalyst for this change was a necessary business shift from premium (limited service requests) support to a maintenance (unlimited service requests) support model. Novell quickly adapted its customer support model, but it led to a significant increase in the overall number of service requests and a corresponding increase in the cost per issue. Novell now has:

- **Nearly migrated all of its phone-based support to online alternatives.** Today, 90% of Novell's traditional phone-based support volume has been migrated to collaborative online offerings, including improved self-help resources, Web chat, remote desktop sharing/diagnostics, and remote control.
- **Increased customer satisfaction and staff productivity while lowering operating costs.** Customer satisfaction with Novell's overall online experience improved 15% during the same period. This migration also resulted in a 30% productivity improvement by its support personnel. But most impressive, fully burdened costs per service request were trimmed in half while Novell recognized a tremendous cost per call deflection.
- **Achieved real-time feedback.** Novell knew measurement would be critical with the business model shift, so it used Bomgar to present the customer with a simple, two-question survey following each chat session to gather feedback on each service request. The survey tool is configurable so that Novell can target feedback from a specific technology, process, or organizational change that it's implemented.
- **Responded to customer preference for chat and remote diagnostic tools.** The average number of monthly chat sessions has significantly increased from slightly more than 2,000 chat requests to a monthly average of nearly 7,000. In most cases, customers prefer using the chat tool rather than the phone. It offers a more efficient way to interact and collaborate with Novell, especially when diagnostic tools can be invoked directly within the chat tool.
- **Adapted to a changing customer base.** Novell's customers had been accustomed to receiving support primarily over the phone. Customers needed to adapt to a new model of receiving support via chat and remote support, but Novell allowed the customer to decide which path to take. Although Baby Boomers and Generation X customers grew up with using the telephone to do business, Novell's customers — particularly Millennials — were very responsive to receiving online Web support with chat and remote support.
- **Removed language and accent barriers.** Novell leverages offshore support centers where support engineers spoke English as a second language. Prior to enabling remote online support and chat, customers expressed dissatisfaction with heavy accents, despite the fact that these engineers possessed superior technical skills and spoke fluent English. Introducing chat features and remote support mitigated the offshore accents. Currently, Novell's India Support Center produces some of the highest customer satisfaction levels in the organization.

Next Steps: Novell Continues To Strive For Improved Customer Experience

Novell's results have been impressive, but the company is not resting on its laurels. It will continue to work with Bomgar to improve the customer support experience. Next on the docket, Novell will:

- **Go from good to great with better right-channeling.** Novell is working with Bomgar as its integrated remote support vendor to extend its capabilities to implement more automatic call distribution (ACD) integration within the chat system. The goal is to profile information about the incoming chat and then correlate it to the skill set of its support representatives. Customers not only get to a Novell support representative but will get to the “right” support representative.
- **Evolve capabilities to include self-help and self-diagnose.** Novell is also creating new tools and Web interfaces that increase the customer’s ability to self-diagnose and seamlessly transition from self-help offerings to assisted online remote support. For example, self-diagnostic information or Knowledge Base search information can be transferred directly within the assisted remote support experience.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Source: Novell (<http://support.novell.com/quality.html>).