

IBM transforms technical support services with MySupport Portal.

Overview

■ **Challenge**

IBM's difficulty in providing customers with the right technical support information—when they need it—was placing IBM at risk of losing support contracts to competitors

■ **Why Become an On Demand Business?**

IBM needed to transform the way it provided customers with technical support by moving to a sense and respond model, while keeping costs to a minimum

■ **Solution**

IBM protected its competitive position by implementing a new, hosted customer support system, MySupport Portal, that not only senses customers' technology needs by "remembering" prior interactions, but also provides a single, unified way to obtain realtime information from all critical back-end systems

■ **Key Benefits**

MySupport Portal is a contributor to the IBM total year-to-date eSupport cost avoidance of \$600 million; 200% increase in number of registered users; increased customer loyalty; enhanced ability to attract new customers



IBM used WebSphere® software to create MySupport Portal, an online gateway that provides customers with a single, unified way to obtain technical information.

Technical support is a service that's tailor-made for the Web. The ubiquitous nature of the Internet allows companies to create virtual help desks, where customers can untangle their issues 24x7 and support reps, like doctors on call, are ready to diagnose problems quickly and efficiently.

At IBM, the marriage of technical support and the Internet has produced multiple technical support sites over the years—but as the number of sites grew, customers were finding it difficult to locate the information they

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—Gary Brideau, IBM Program Manager, MySupport Portal

Anticipating and responding to customer and market demands in realtime

On Demand Business Benefits

- MySupport Portal is a contributor to the IBM total year-to-date eSupport cost avoidance of \$600 million
- Employees can access realtime data, leading to increased productivity and faster answers for customers
- Ability to deliver highly personalized support services in realtime has resulted in 200% increase in number of registered users
- Ability of customers to resolve technical issues on their own has reduced call center costs
- Integrated, open and scalable solution allows company to easily expand its IT infrastructure as its business grows

needed to resolve their problems in a timely fashion. For example, a user might receive 15,000 results for a simple error code search. Faced with such an overwhelming response, many customers would choose to phone the call center for help—an increasingly common option that was driving up IBM's support costs. In addition, IBM's existing technology required that customers enter a name and password for each different support system they accessed. Many customers considered this a major inconvenience.

“Technical support is often a deciding factor for companies considering a technology purchase,” says Gary Brideau, IBM program manager, MySupport Portal. “But we couldn't deliver consistently high levels of service. In fact, we were making it hard for our customers to do business with IBM, because it was so difficult for customers to find technical information. As a result, we risked losing them altogether.”

To solve its problem, IBM needed to transform the way it provided customers with technical support by moving to a sense and respond model of support. IBM needed to not only make it easier for customers to locate and download content, but also sense what kinds of things a customer might need based on a personalized profile of recently asked questions. By doing so, customers would be better able to resolve questions on their own and not have to rely on the help desk staff. “Our main objective was to increase customer responsiveness,” says Brideau. “But it also was important that we lower our costs. We're on a tight budget, so we didn't want to devote a large amount of time and resources to maintaining the system.”

IBM launches MySupport Portal

To strengthen its service offerings, IBM created a hosted, interactive customer support system, MySupport Portal, that not only senses customers' technology needs by “remembering” prior interactions, but also provides a single, unified way to obtain realtime information from all critical back-end systems. The solution automatically presents users with information tailored to their technology needs by dynamically refreshing Web pages based on their previous selections. This allows customers to proactively receive information that has been updated since they last logged in. And, to minimize costs and eliminate the need to localize support services at the department level, IBM's Advanced Technical Hosting Environment in Southbury, Connecticut, hosts the solution. The MySupport Portal has contributed to the \$600 million year-to-date cost avoidance associated with IBM's technical eSupport initiatives.

“By implementing MySupport Portal, customers are finding the information they need to resolve their questions much faster,” says Brideau. “As a result, staff productivity is higher and customers are making IBM technical support one of the premier places to go on the Web for solving technology issues.”

When customers log on to MySupport Portal, the system pulls their profile data from an IBM registration database and instantly presents them with a relevant page of information based on either their last session or their previously identified interests. Says Brideau. “A wealth of information is on our systems. Now we’re just allowing customers to target the information and find it faster themselves.” As a result, customers can obtain answers quickly and easily, empowering them to solve problems and enhance their own productivity.

WebSphere software from IBM powers new support site

The new portal is based on IBM WebSphere Portal and IBM WebSphere Application Server running in a resilient environment based on IBM @server® xSeries®. IBM WebSphere Application Server provides the runtime environment for the J2EE technology-based components, while IBM WebSphere Portal enables the company to quickly build interactive portlets tailored for Web-based technical support. In addition, IBM can reuse the portlets it builds again and again. “IBM WebSphere Portal saves us from having to develop multiple solutions to do the same thing,” says Brideau. “From a maintenance point of view, this saves us both time and resources.”

A key component of the new portal is IBM WebSphere Personalization, the technology that allows IBM to develop customized Web pages to meet the particular interests and needs of each customer. IBM WebSphere Campaign Manager, a feature of WebSphere Personalization, enables IBM to send e-mail “flashes” to notify customers of new content or downloads matching their profiles.

At the back end of MySupport Portal is IBM DB2® Universal Database™. The information management system stores data on registered users and tracks whether a customer is required to have a service or support agreement with IBM to view a document. It also decides whether a customer can submit problems over the Internet based on the same criteria.

Key Components

Software

- IBM WebSphere Application Server
- IBM WebSphere Personalization
- IBM WebSphere Portal
- IBM DB2 Universal Database

Servers

- IBM @server xSeries

Services

- IBM Advanced Technical Hosting Environment

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– Gary Brideau

Stronger customer relationships

MySupport Portal delivers major business benefits to both IBM and its customers. It has improved customer satisfaction and productivity while increasing the client retention rate for support customers. In addition, the site's enhanced functionality has improved IBM's ability to attract new customers to the program—a key factor that is helping IBM strengthen its market position. Indeed, since launching MySupport Portal, the number of registered users has jumped 200 percent, from 80,000 to 241,000. "People are seeing the advantages of being able to resolve problems on their own," says Brideau.

"The ability to resolve technical problems in realtime has made our support customers more productive," says Brideau. "That in turn has allowed us to optimize our resources and redeploy support staff to other areas. And by opting for a hosted solution, we can assure 99.999 percent availability while keeping expenses to a minimum."

Moving forward, IBM plans to continually enhance the MySupport Portal with links to additional technical resources. And, because the system is based on the flexible, open WebSphere family of software products, the company can easily add new features and services as needed.

Says Brideau, "The beauty of MySupport Portal is that any organization can easily implement a similar solution. Not only do we deliver the technology, we also can host the entire solution, which helps companies focus on their core business and lower costs."

Visit us at:

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For more information about IBM MySupport Portal, visit:

<http://www-120.ibm.com/support/portal/.scr/Login>



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