

WebInteractive

Meeting Tomorrow's eSupport Needs Today

A White Paper From



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INTRODUCTION

eSupport systems facilitate live, real-time human-to-human contact over the Internet, bringing people into the online customer care and help desk processes wherever and whenever appropriate. While FAQs, searchable databases and related information retrieval systems deliver significant value in customer support and help desk contexts, such systems have strict limitations. No matter how advanced they may be, they simply cannot – and should not – replace the “human touch.” Moreover, as products and services become more complex there is a growing need for support systems that facilitate issue resolution “on the fly,” nourishing both customer loyalty and employee retention in the process.

This White Paper will show that eSupport systems can deliver profound productivity increases while dramatically reducing IT support costs at virtually any organization. From both a price and performance perspective, this White Paper will further demonstrate that Linktivity’s WebInteractive 3.0 product is the most effective eSupport solution on the market today.

Like Being There

The fundamental goal of eSupport is to offer customers the outstanding adaptive problem-solving skills and highly personalized service rendered by “in person” customer service representatives (CSRs), consultants and agents – but without the cost of those support representatives physically being there. While striking a balance between offering superior customer service and minimizing costs is no easy task, in an ideal world it’s clear that eSupport systems aim to essentially replicate high-quality “on site” customer care.

To be sure, the promise of eSupport is visionary, but it is also based on sound economic principles. As more people and businesses move online, there is a large and growing demand for online customer support systems that can quickly and consistently deliver tangible benefits for both the organization providing them and their customers. At the same time, these technologies may be applied to other related productivity challenges. Externally-facing applications of eSupport technologies include:

- eMarketing: pre-sales Webinars and product launch events
- eSales: closing online sales more frequently
- eSupport: customer service and technical support training

Internally-facing applications of eSupport technologies include:

- Help desk – technical support
- Remote computers access for mobile employees and “tele-workers”
- Knowledge transfer and training: just-in-time information exchange

The common thread running through these applications of eSupport technologies are that they help facilitate the exchange of information between people so that problems and issues can be resolved quickly and cost-effectively.

The Rise of eCommerce and Live Web Interaction

Over the past decade, eCommerce has grown from a novel concept into a worldwide phenomenon. On the consumer side in 2003, online revenues were over \$60 billion and are growing at 20+ percent annually, according to CNET and Internetnews.com.¹ This is just scratching the surface, however. The business-to-business (B2B) aspects of eCommerce make the consumer side seem like a rounding error. Gartner and other analyst firms have estimated B2B eCommerce is already in the *trillions* of dollars in 2004.²

In their rush to take advantage of this truly historic opportunity in the mid-1990s, many companies moved quickly to put up as much information about their products as possible. Thus, today, while the Web was conceived as an interactive medium, it is often still used the "old way," as a broadcast medium. Web users have become more sophisticated over the last five years and their expectations have understandably risen. If the Web provides low cost, instant communication with anyone, anywhere, and at anytime, then this expectation carries over into the customer service arena, where eSupport is expected to approach that of a "brick and mortar" store – and be just as immediate.

However, the vast majority of companies today are not meeting this expectation. Instead, either as a cost-savings measure or simply due to their inability to deliver, many organizations put the onus of sales, marketing and post-sales support on the backs of their customers. Self-help tools may be considered as a "ground floor" of online customer care. In this area FAQs, database/knowledgebase search systems and the like help customers find what they need, assuming it is online in the first place. This "tough love" approach to customer care simply isn't enough. While relatively inexpensive and beneficial to both parties to an extent, this "cookie cutter" approach is not a comprehensive solution to the customer care challenge. Moreover, as products and packaging become more complex, there is a growing gap between how much raw information is available online and how much a customer can and is willing to absorb. Treating all customers as if they were all alike is simply not a defensible long-term position.

The prevailing eCommerce strategy...



...is to treat customers as if they were exactly the same, time after time.

As a response to the inadequacy of self-help, many companies augmented this approach with e-mail and phone based support in the late 1990s. While these approaches bring human CSRs/agents into the picture, neither of them is ideal for online support. Because e-mail is asynchronous (not real-time), the customer can experience a 1-5 day lag time between the time the customer requests support and when they get feedback. Depending on the complexity of the sales, marketing or post-sales support issue, it may take several iterations before the problem is adequately addressed via e-mail. Thus, it can take up to *a month or more* for the customer to get their issue resolved. This leads to lost sales and frustrated customers.

¹ See <http://news.com.com/2100-1038-5110525.html> and <http://www.internetnews.com/ec-news/article.php/1571501>.

² See <http://wharton-gartner.surveyweb.com/wharton/abstract12.htm>.

In terms of phone based call/contact centers, while there is at least a live human on the other end (after the customer waits in the queue, and assuming they're calling during hours of operation), because there is no visual aspect to their interaction, this can also lead to misunderstandings and relatively long resolution times. Phone support is not proactive either, which means it has little or no place in online marketing or sales qualification processes. Phone support can also be very expensive, and many companies such as Microsoft now charge for phone support or only offer a limited number of support calls with a new product purchase.

eSupport systems have emerged as a natural response to the inadequacies of self-help/automation tools, e-mail response systems, and phone-based support approaches to customer care. As illustrated in Figure 1, self-help and automation technologies are useful when customers are window-shopping or when they have the time to solve a support issue that isn't particularly pressing. When they need immediate help around a mission-critical process or project, however, automation and self-help tools are rarely adequate. The more complex the problem, the less likely the customer is going to find a solution online in a timely fashion. One nightmare experience in this regard can send even the most sanguine customer packing.

Because eSupport systems facilitate live, real-time human-to-human contact over the Internet, placing people front and center in the online customer care loop, they can dramatically raise both customer and employee satisfaction and loyalty – while reducing costs and/or generating revenues. In short, eSupport is a win-win scenario.

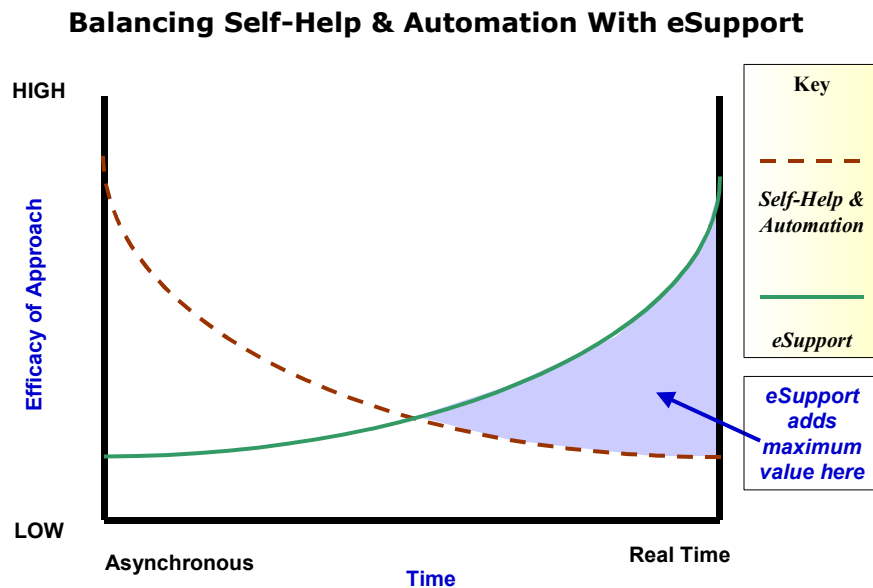


Figure 1

Help Desks and Remote Computer Control

If the customer care being delivered revolves around software and hardware, there is an even deeper level of synergy with eSupport systems. Software company CSRs/technicians can download patches directly to damaged PCs and servers as well as train on products and services. Every company with a help desk can use the same technologies to view remote desktops, and if granted permission by the end user, fix computers "on the fly." In both cases, first time call resolution rises dramatically because a range of support capabilities can be brought to bear on each call.

Compared to the alternatives of phone-based support or on-site software technician visits, eSupport has several clear advantages. As alluded to above, trying to fix computer problems over the phone can be confusing and time consuming. Like an anxious child in the back seat of a car yelling, "Are we there yet?" a phone-based approach frequently runs into problems because the technician cannot see or control the end user's computer and the call descends into a case of the blind leading the blind. Escalations and callbacks are thus common and increase support costs while compromising customer satisfaction. Because eSupport systems can generally show both screens, companies can effectively teach their customers and/or employees to "fish," rather than simply giving them a fish (i.e. just fixing the problem) and then having them call back with the same problem later. In short, eSupport systems reduce future callbacks because they can be used as a training vehicle.

This factor becomes increasingly important when one considers that the number and complexity of operating environments and applications is increasing. There are more operating systems and software programs available than ever before, and these tools are becoming globally distributed. Whereas a few years ago the typical help desk may have been supporting a few dozen applications, today they're often supporting *hundreds*. Many companies have more than one computing device per employee as well, such as PDAs and tablet PCs.

The other option, on-site technician visits, has advantages and drawbacks as well. There is the physical travel time to and from the customer site to consider, which is costly for both the software vendor and the customer. Company vehicles, gas, insurance and other expenses have to be factored in. For small- to mid-sized companies that may have a limited geographical presence but sell worldwide, on site visits can be nigh impossible. Moreover, due to corporate downsizing, organizations are trying to do more with less. Considering that salaries for IT and technical support experts can range up to about \$100K annually, reducing headcount by a few percent can dramatically streamline support costs.

By contrast, eSupport systems can significantly reduce desk side visits and the amount of time a support professional spends with a user. Technicians can resolve more customer and employee issues over a given period of time, reducing or eliminating support queue backlogs. Because eSupport can significantly raise successful resolution rates of software problems on the first call, end users are more satisfied and both parties save time and money.

In terms of time, a study by the Service & Support Professionals Association (SSPA) found that the leading complaint about technical support today is that it takes too long to resolve problems.³ Indeed, 71 percent of survey respondents indicated that "Time to Resolve Issue" was their chief complaint, which was twice that of second most common complaint ("Quality of Product"). eSupport systems can thus help make software support business units more

³ Sweeny, Thomas. "Virtual On-Site Support: A New Approach to Overcoming Support Transaction Inefficiencies". Published by the Service & Support Professionals Association, 2003. p. 14

effective and profitable. eSupport solutions reduce those areas within the support process that correspond to the highest costs: on-site technician visits, support escalations and callbacks.

BENEFITS AND REQUIREMENTS

As partially described above, there are several inherent benefits of delivering strong eSupport to customers because such systems:

- Increase customer and/or employee satisfaction levels
- Reduce the cost of delivering support
 - First call resolution advantages
 - Shorter call time lengths
 - A reduction in the total number of calls
- Raise customer loyalty and Web site "stickiness"
- Create a competitive advantage by providing a continuum of services to customers (can be fused with self-help, e-mail and phone support)
- Increase revenues
 - Creates new avenues for up- and cross-selling
 - Training can be charged back to the customer at a premium
- Save time for both the customer and company/organization delivering it
- Help facilitate eMarketing, eSales and internal information exchange processes

In terms of post-sales support, research suggests that customer loyalty is critical to the long-term success of any company. Common sense and formal studies both suggest that it's much more expensive and time consuming to win a new customer than keep a current one. If a company can deliver on the promise of eSupport, it follows that their sales people also can focus more on winning new customers rather than "putting out fires" with existing ones. Building loyalty by offering outstanding technical support is a leading way to retain current customers.

Key eSupport Requirements

For companies considering augmenting, replacing or installing a new eSupport system, there are a number of important factors to weigh. Key requirements to consider include:

- Functionality
- Implementation timeframe and administrative capabilities
- Ease of use
- Secure (yet be firewall friendly)
- Integration
- Price

Functionality

Although there are other features and functions of eSupport software systems available, the most critical are that such systems support high-quality:

- Keyboard and Voice Chat
- Queuing and Queue Transfer/Call Escalation
- Remote Computer Control and/or Monitoring
- Screen Sharing
- Video Conferencing

- File Transfer Tools
- System Recovery Tools
- Application Sharing
- Internet Co-browsing

Implementation Timeframe and Administrative Capabilities

In an ideal world, new software systems would be up and running as soon as they're purchased. In reality, it may take months or even years before some eSupport systems are launched. During and after launch it's also imperative that the system supports all necessary organizational requirements. Some key aspects to consider in terms of administration include:

- Scalability – Can it scale up to any number of necessary CSRs/agents/technicians?
- Uptime – Is the system highly reliable/dependable?
- Performance reports – Does it measure CSR/agent performance levels and allow the company to easily manage organizational service levels strategically?
- Information capture and retrieval – Can all call/queue data be stored in a standard database and retrieved as necessary for training and auditing purposes (HIPAA, etc.)?

Ease of Use

Ease of use has two aspects to it. From the end user's perspective, the tool's interface must be simple and intuitive. The client software should ideally be Web-based ("plug-and-play" browser technology) so that new users do not have to wait for software to download, reboot their computer, or follow complicated installation procedures or read a manual before using it. From the CSR/agent perspective, it should also be easy to manage the queue, initiate and end calls, escalate/transfer calls, and integrate into any necessary knowledge repositories.

Another aspect of ease of use is that the system should operate effectively in real-time and have the shortest possible lag times between responses (an outstanding compression algorithm, etc.). It should work on slow connections such as 56Kbps dial up connections without suffering dropped connections or increased lag times. Finally, it should support all major operating systems and software types, and be able to provide common support tools to all end users regardless of custom configurations.

Secure (Yet Be Firewall Friendly)

The Linktivity Server never sends meeting content in clear text. The Linktivity Server uses an encoded proprietary data format (based on industry standards) for transmitting data to and from the Host and the Participant. Secondly, within the support session itself, the end user should always be in full control. There should be no data that can be accessed by the support tech without the express permission of the end user. This is sometimes referred to as having a "permission-based" approach.

At the same time, the eSupport system should be as firewall friendly as possible. It should require little if any changes in established security processes and technologies deployed by customers. So, it should have maximum "reach" yet be powerless without the explicit consent of the customer.

Linktivity relies on industry standard SSL and HTTPS for the encryption of "front-end" transactions, such as user logins and management functions, registrations, scheduling, and other similar transactions. The Linktivity session can be fully secured using server certificates and SSL, making all of your business collaboration data totally secure. In addition, Linktivity provides 128-bit dynamic encryption.

Integration

Companies today have a variety of customer-facing software systems and associated technologies. Call/Contact centers, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, sales force automation (SFA) systems, e-mail response applications, eCommerce systems, helpdesk automation applications and other data sources may all be of additional value when integrated with eSupport offerings. It follows that eSupport software should be based on standard specifications that allow integration and interoperability with organizational data systems.

Price

Customers naturally want all of the above to be accompanied by the lowest possible price. It's important that eSupport systems be cost-effective to deploy even in large networks. In this regard, considerations include whether or not the system supports a standard Web interface, and if it requires expensive per-user fees or long-term service contracts.

WEBINTERACTIVE CASE STUDIES AND ROI

Linktivity's WebInteractive is an award winning, Web-based, real-time remote support system that provides an effective and easy way for support professionals to manage eSupport requests. While it can be used to deliver a variety of functions, it is particularly adept at delivering remote PC support. WebInteractive provides all the tools needed to manage a queue of online requests, communicate with customers online and monitor/resolve remote PC issues.

WebInteractive requires no client software installation and is built on an advanced client-server architecture designed to promote collaborative problem solving and training to reduce IT support costs and increase the quality of customer support. Using WebInteractive, support professionals can:

- Manage multiple support requests from an online queue
- Communicate with customers in real-time via voice or keyboard chat (and even video)
- View and fix/operate a remote customer's PC
 - Download software patches
 - Upload customer files for analysis
 - Restore a remote user's PC to a previously working configuration
- Illustrate and annotate problems using a whiteboard
- Direct a remote customer to a Web site via co-browsing

WebInteractive meets or surpasses all of the key criteria outlined in the previous section. It delivers strong functionality and short implementation timeframes coupled with robust administrative capabilities. It's also easy to use from both the customer and CSR/agent perspective, secure yet firewall friendly, and can be integrated with e-mail response and other data repositories. It accomplishes all this at a very attractive price point. However, it's WebInteractive's own customers that tell the most compelling stories about it. Let's briefly examine a few of the ways that companies are using WebInteractive to deliver on the promise of eSupport today.

Information Technology Group

Information Technology Group, Inc.™ (ITG; www.itgusa.com) is a southern California-based technology consulting firm specializing in accounting software, custom programming, network

design and implementation, training and support. Established in 1994 by a team of certified public accountants and technical experts, ITG has the unique ability to create comprehensive solutions that meet the changing needs of today's growing businesses. Headquartered in Simi Valley, CA, the company has 25 employees and revenues of over three million a year.

David Cieslak, Principle, says that while a number of factors drove ITG to upgrade their eSupport system in late 2002, supporting customers in an increasingly broad area was a key factor. WebInteractive has proved to be just the ticket since it was launched in April 2003.

"Our clients were asking us to support their systems beyond our immediate geography in southern California, whether that was branch offices or mobile users," explains Cieslak. "Now we have clients with branch offices all over the U.S., as well as international customers. And it's all done from our desk."

He says that cutting costs for them as well as their customers was another key factor.

"Our clients are always looking for ways to keep responsiveness up and costs down, and Web-based support allows us to do both. We can respond to the immediate issue and it keeps support costs down because we're not charging for travel time, and so on."

Today, ITG supports hundred end users at its various customer's sites, and in WebInteractive found an ideal fit in terms of reach and security.

"You can think of us kind of like a help desk but we don't know who is going to be sitting where when, or who will need help on a given day. So we were looking for something that didn't require any pre-installation or set up, that was firewall friendly, and from a security perspective didn't require us to open up all sorts of ports – sometimes we knew we wouldn't even get that opportunity – so we had to have something that was very security friendly."

Because ITG's customers consider eSupport a premium service, they are able to charge a premium for it, although it ultimately reduces costs on both sides due to increased efficiency. Explains Cieslak, "We actually surcharge our clients \$25 per incident when we get online and use WebInteractive. That's on top of our normal time and billing...We charge travel time if we send [our technicians]. But with the \$25 surcharge the client response is, 'Are you kidding? That's just a fraction of the cost of what I would have paid you if I had to put you in a car and get you here.' It saves them money."

From a ROI/cost perspective, Cieslak has no doubt he made the right choice: "There was a monthly charge for [the eSupport service] we were using before. We were paying so many dollars per month, per seat and at some point we were saying, 'Wow, this is just too much.' It's not like we were losing money, but we were saying, 'Hey this is a smarter model still.' It gave us more control over our budget" when his company switched to WebInteractive.

Cieslak believes there are three major advantages and benefits of the WebInteractive system for ITG. He explains that first and foremost "it's the ability to do real-time customer support. But we also use it for the sales process, to demo products to prospective end users. And all of this in a way that is a money making proposition because we apply the additional charge."

As an added bonus, WebInteractive also supports ITG tele-workers: "Some of our employees are spread out as well. We have an office in L.A. but we have one employee in Scottsdale, Arizona. He actually uses WebInteractive all day long to provide technical support to our L.A. clients from his home office. So part of the value proposition is that while it allows us to

service customers in real-time no matter where they are, our employees can also provide that service from anywhere.”

To recap, ITG uses WebInteractive in several capacities:

- For pre-sales “Webinars”
- To help close more sales
- For one on one post-sales technical support (outsourced help desk)
- For internal knowledge transfer and to so support tele-work

One particular recent situation summed up why Cieslak is so pleased with WebInteractive: “I had a situation with a client about sixty miles away a few weeks ago...I happened to have one of my staff people down there. She was in the middle of installing something and hit an issue and said ‘What do I do?’ So she called into the main office and I was there and jumped online and helped her solve the problem. So we’re supporting our own people as well [with WebInteractive]. We providing cross-support within our own consulting staff. It’s really helping us, in so many different ways, to put the right people in front the right machines at the right time with very little in the way of restrictions or overhead. We can get right on it and make it happen.”

Finally, regarding ROI, he said WebInteractive gives them equal or better functionality when compared to the ASP they were using before while eliminating the monthly cost. “Our payback was less than six months,” says Cieslak. “We’ve already paid for the product. At this point it’s just dollars saved above that.”

Telecommuting On the Rise

The advantages of tele-work are multi-faceted. An article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* stated that 25% of IBM’s 320,000 workers worldwide already telecommute out of home offices, saving IBM more than \$700 million a year in real estate costs (Lorek, L.A. “Companies find benefits from telecommuting”. *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 29, 2002). Moreover, according to the same article, “two out of every three cars on the road in the United States each day hit congestion, according to a Texas Transportation Institute study released in June. That costs U.S. commuters \$67 billion in lost time, wasted fuel and vehicle wear and tear.” The article concluded that:

“Telecommuting is definitely on the rise,” said Tim Kane, president of the International Telework Association and Council, or ITAC, based in Washington. Nationwide ITAC estimates 28 million people telecommute one to three days a week -- up 42 percent from 19.6 million in 1999. By 2005, about one-third, or 50 million, of the nation’s workers will be part- or full-time teleworkers, Kane said. Rather than try to fight telecommuting, companies need to embrace it, Kane said.

College Center For Library Automation

Established in 1989 by the Florida Legislature, the College Center For Library Automation (CCLA; www.ccla.lib.fl.us) provides service and leadership in automated library and information resources to enhance the educational experience at Florida’s 28 community colleges (serving some 70 libraries in all). Headquartered in Tallahassee, Florida, CCLA is considered a model library services organization, operating the first and only statewide, centralized automated library system in the U.S. serving community colleges. The CCLA has roughly 70 employees and five full time first- and second-level support technicians.

Library Support Technician Sharon Moskowitz explains that the CCLA is currently transitioning from a mainframe-based system of library automation to a Web-based client-server approach due to its efficiency, cost and modernization advantages. In terms of fixing remote computers, she won’t miss the old system. With the mainframe system, she explains that, “we couldn’t fix or control their computers remotely. We handled trouble-shooting over the phone and told

them to 'Go into the start menu and go into the second line and tell me what's on your screen now,' and so on. It was very cumbersome." Moskowitz says that the CCLA reviewed several systems in May and June 2003, and selected WebInteractive in August for several reasons:

1. Its price was very attractive
2. The technical ability to show "our desktops as well as theirs because we do so much in a training capacity that it was really important."
3. The product was easy to use and helps make technicians more efficient

System installation was straightforward and WebInteractive was up in running in a week, according to Moskowitz. However, getting dozens of independent library IT departments all over the state to agree to allow CCLA to use WebInteractive took more than a month, so the system wasn't rolled out until the end of October. Since then, the WebInteractive value proposition has become clear:

- Time: "The time it takes to get on someone's machine and fix it has been reduced. It saves our tech people time and saves the person with the problem time. So it helps both sides."
- Training: "Now we can get more information across more clearly. Before, over the phone, the understanding of whether if we had actually gotten through general concepts as opposed to 'OK we fixed this problem now but she's going to call us back in two days because she won't remember how to do it.' That's been a huge help."
 - She elaborates: "One time, we were on with a librarian who is very bright but lacks confidence. On the old system she would call with an issue and then call back the next time she did it and call back again...You know, it would take her a long time for her to understand that she know how to do this. She would have the skills but then would say, 'Oh I broke the Internet' and so on. But with this system we can look at her system and say, 'OK do this.' And she'll do it and we can say, 'That was absolutely right.' It's a confidence building measure and she knows she doesn't have to call back because she's certain she's got it down."
- Cost: "We were concerned about [remote librarian] staff costs because they were spending all their time on the phone with us. But the main issue was minimizing our own costs."

While the CCLA measures cost per call, because WebInteractive has been running for just a few months, she was reticent to disclose their ROI data, partially because she believes the operating environments are so different that it's like comparing apples to oranges. However, she does anticipate the results will be positive and that they're already seeing the benefits of the system as a training tool: "We have consultants that drive out and train people at libraries and they do see the potential for this tool to be used to deliver some training that way, and so maybe they won't have to drive around as much," she explains. "Our consultants can remotely show the functionality on new the new library automation software, like how to set up catalogs, order books, check out and return books and so on."

Finally, she adds that overcoming security concerns on the part of the libraries they serve has been a hurdle. "In our position we're dealing with 28 IT departments at those colleges and we don't have any control over them," she says. "So security issues have been very much in the forefront. But that's not a technology issue. Frankly, if we never heard back from IT and we went ahead and used [WenInteractive] there's no way they would ever know it, but diplomatically we're not going to be working that way."

Additional ROI Specifics

While the case studies above illustrate the range of situations in which WebInteractive delivers value to customers, because of their relative infancy, specific ROI numbers are still being

worked out. However, other WebInteractive customers have already released ROI figures. A few such highlights include:

- Engraphix Imaging Systems, Inc. found that by the end of the second week the implementation of WebInteractive generated more than \$2,500 in additional revenue from service level upgrades.
 - States Chris Vandivere, Manager, Professional Services Group: "After the first three days in service the cost of the WebInteractive implementation was offset by the revenue generated from the associated service level upgrades...An additional ROI factor that has not been calculated to date is the 50-70 percent reduction in call time on a per call basis, which has dramatically increased our level of service."
- Paymast'r Services Inc. uses Linktivity's WebInteractive and WebDemo products in tandem to deliver significant ROI.
 - "We had been spending a fortune in telephone charges, concurrent user fees, and all other sorts of costs for other systems that weren't working well," says Curt Bishop, VP of Paymast'r. "Linktivity's solutions cost half of what I spent in a year of recurring charges previously, and we've made that much back by far."
 - "In one recent week alone, we did 119 sessions using WebInteractive and WebDemo, showing new potential clients what we do and fixing problems existing customers were having," Bishop adds. "That kind of productivity was unheard of before this system."
- Three Rivers Systems, Inc. says that WebInteractive's ROI turned positive in within three months. Customers reported they were saving time and appreciated having faster resolution to their technical queries. Three Rivers' SLA levels went from an average of seventy percent to ninety-eight percent over a course of five months. In addition, the overall cost of both internal and product support staff dropped 30 percent.
 - "Using WebInteractive definitely puts us ahead of the pack compared to competitive products in terms of customer support," says Chris Moreland, Senior Systems Engineer/CIO at Three Rivers Systems. "Clients and potential clients are blown away with the ease of accessing support technicians and by the ability they have to address any technical issues that arise."
- Castelle (Nasdaq: CSTL), a leading provider of fax solutions for Fortune 1000 companies and small to medium-sized businesses, has been growing at a tremendous rate. Due to the growth, the company experienced a rise in customer service calls mostly regarding installation issues, and needed a way to reduce the amount of time spent, in order to better serve customers and increase Castelle's capabilities. Castelle searched for a solution that would allow them the ability to login into customers' desktops, in order to evaluate issues and assist with the installation of Castelle's FaxPress™ software.
 - "WebInteractive has and will continue to be an essential tool in conducting our business efficiently," stated Chris Salcido, senior product sales engineer for Castelle. "In a short time, the software solution has had a positive impact on our ability to provide top-notch customer service. We have seen increased customer satisfaction with the product and in turn with our company."

As these case studies suggest, WebInteractive can deliver profound ROI in a short amount of time. It's also clear that the product's functionally equal to or better than the alternatives. If this is the case, then the deciding factor for potential customers will likely come down to price.

Most of WebInteractive's competitors offer an ASP system, which means that clients are charged a set up fee, followed by permanent monthly fees based on seats used and/or usage. Set up fees vary, but are generally at least \$1,000-2,000. Monthly ASP fees range from \$250-400 per agent, per month. Plus there are annual maintenance fees that can range into the hundreds or even thousands of dollars. Under the ASP model, over the course of the first year, five full-time CSRs/agents can cost \$20,000 or more.

Compare that to WebInteractive price of just \$3,700 for five agents. The agents can use the system as much as they like and *there is no recurring charge* the next year – these are perpetual licenses. Because the software implemented on site, it can also be customized and integrated with other organizational customer care and support systems as needed in a way that ASPs simply can't muster. So from a price and performance perspective, there is simply no other product on the market that compares to WebInteractive. (Note that Collaborative Strategies LLC, a San Francisco based management services firm that focuses on electronic collaboration, recently produced a White Paper for Linktivity that further documents the long-term cost savings associated with the product approach versus the ASP approach. Visit the Linktivity Website at www.linktivity.com for a copy.)

Another way to illustrate the advantages of WebInteractive is to compare it to related technologies in a broader sense. If one considers the cost of deploying and maintaining customer care and employee support technologies and contrasts that against how long each approach generally takes to deliver an effective response, WebInteractive delivers the most compelling value proposition (Figure 2). While self-help tools, email and Instant Messaging (IM) technologies are also relatively inexpensive, none of them delivers the mix of collaborative capabilities, short response times and low cost that WebInteractive delivers. While phone and on site support offer relatively strong real-time customer support capabilities, they are significantly more expensive as well.

eSupport Implementation Checklist

Technology is just one part of the eSupport equation. Organizations considering expanding or implementing new eSupport system should also review this process checklist:

- Survey employees and customers to determine exactly what they want in an eSupport system. Leverage technology aligned with these goals.
- Determine to what extent the eSupport solution should be integrated with existing knowledgebases or other front-end systems. The emerging model for customer service/support is built around serving numerous channels equally.
- Ensure the organization has the personnel necessary to manage and maintain the system, as well as properly trained and motivated CSRs/agents.
- Optimize workflow and escalation processes so that customers and agents will be pleased with the system.
- Create an internal and external marketing campaign. Customers and employees should be “chomping at the bit” to use the enhanced eSupport system before it's rolled out to maintain momentum over time.

Cost Versus Response Time

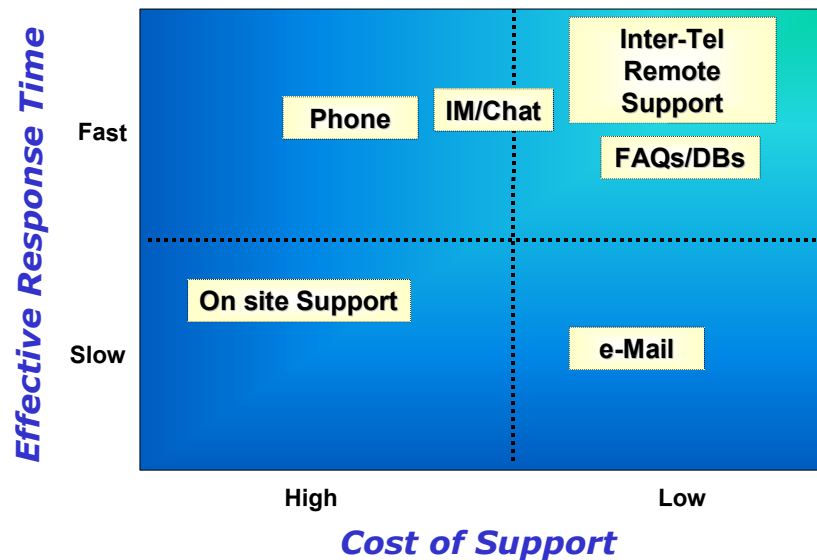


Figure 2

CONCLUSIONS

With proper execution, eSupport can be a boon to support and service organizations alike. Products such as WebInteractive can deliver significant value to organizations around a variety of key processes. If one reviews the role eSupport plays in customer care and support processes, it's evident that eSupport is a critical component of online customer care and delivers a variety of tangible benefits both within and outside the organization deploying it.

This strong value proposition is linked to the product/service life cycle, as shown in Figure 3. While self-help and automation tools and technologies add significant value in marketing, sales and support processes over the course of a given product's or service's life cycle, such systems have clear limitations. No matter how good these systems are, they simply cannot – and should not – replace the "human touch." As products and services become more complex over time, there is a growing need for eSupport systems that can solve complex problems adaptively "on the fly" and deliver service levels that will maintain and nourish customer loyalty. No technology will ever be able to do that more effectively than a human being.

eSupport's Role in the Product/Service Life Cycle

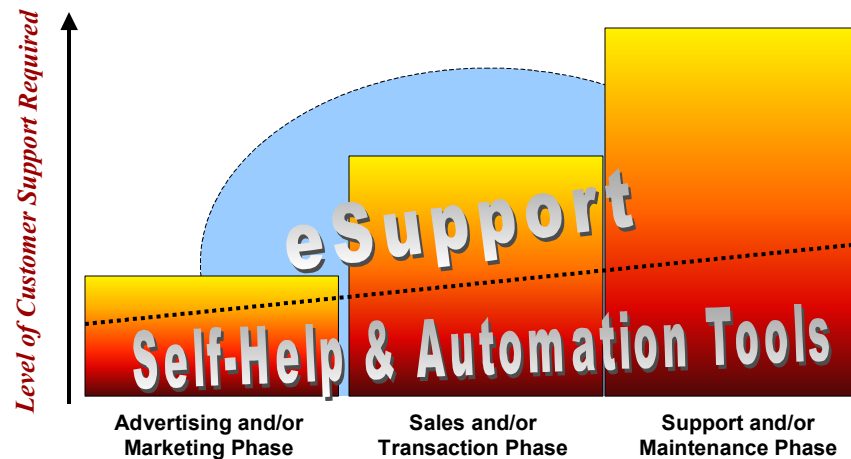


Figure 3

It largely comes down to a matter of what is the right mix of the "human touch" in marketing, sales and support processes versus how much it costs to deliver such service levels. Each organization is unique and so will have to determine this independently. However, as this White Paper has demonstrated, WebInteractive delivers on all the key components of eSupport at a price point that is the most compelling of any on the market.

WebInteractive is available now and can be purchased by calling direct at 800-809-1245 or visiting www.linktivity.com. Doesn't your organization owe its customers the best customer support possible? If not, how long will it be before the competition is doing so? What is the likelihood of any organization surviving if it delivers poor customer service? As has been demonstrated in this White Paper, companies that fail to deliver solid customer service are much less likely to succeed in the long run. WebInteractive's value proposition for software companies is particular strong because of the additional synergies of being able to fix computer problems remotely. However, any company with help desk can significantly benefit from WebInteractive's capabilities. The future of eSupport is here. Are you going to make the call?

Linktivity is a division of Inter-Tel®, Inc. Linktivity provides real-time communications and remote control software to enable instantaneous, platform independent, browser-to-browser web conferencing and help desk support solutions. The Linktivity family of products includes WebDemo™, a Web-based, real-time conferencing and collaboration software tool and WebInteractive, a real-time server software tool that provides Support Professionals with an efficient way to manage and resolve online PC support requirements. For more information on WebInteractive or WebDemo, call 800-809-1245 or visit www.linktivity.com.