



TenStep Supplemental Paper

21 January 2004

Knowledge Management Is the Solution

Knowledge is as much a product of learning (e. g. “the last time this happened, the right solution was to use the IRA account number, instead of the main account number”) as it is a function of understanding the abstract relationships that affect underlying causes.

There are real challenges to maintaining a high level of customer satisfaction, including:

- **Increased call volumes cause mounting delays, which drive customers away:** When the competition is never more than a mouse click or a phone call away, frustrated customers can - and do - go elsewhere to satisfy their needs when they get stuck on hold.
- **Ratio of customers to agents:** The difficulty in maintaining a traditional ratio of contact center agents to customers is exacerbated by the growing customer population. In a business environment in which Internet access can multiply the customer base by several orders of magnitude, it is simply not possible to maintain traditional agent to customer ratios.
- **Developing experienced and effective agents takes time and money:** Developing the human resources to succeed at customer service takes time and costs money. Good people are often hard to find and organizations can be hard-pressed to find and develop sufficient support staff and to cultivate their expertise.
- **Turnover and job changes can mean knowledge gets lost:** If hard-earned knowledge about support issues remains locked in key agents’ heads, it walks out the door when they do. Organizations that invest heavily in developing service and support staff can easily lose their investments when such staff leaves or moves into other positions.
- **New agents need extensive training to become productive:** Entry-level agents must learn and master large amounts of information while developing communications and relationship skills. It takes time and effort for service and support agents to come up to speed and assume a full workload..
- **Identical queries must be repeatedly researched and answered:** When knowledge isn’t shared, agents must repeatedly research and reply to the same questions. This causes considerable duplication and waste of effort and resources.
- **Information accessible to some agents may not be accessible to all agents:** In traditional, labor-intensive support organizations, expertise grows over time and is related to ability, background knowledge and problem-solving skills. Some agents know more than others and can therefore handle a wider range of queries. This can lead to inconsistent and unsatisfying service and support encounters for some customers.
- **Expertise can be shared:** A knowledge management solution not only captures scarce expertise, it makes that expertise available to all support and service

TenStep Supplemental Paper

agents. Thus, organizations can leverage their knowledge and make it much more broadly and consistently available to their customers, partners or end- users.

- **Turnover and job changes do not cripple the system:** A key capability of knowledge management solutions is capturing knowledge and making it accessible to all service and support agents. Thus, knowledge no longer stays with those who hold or discover it; it becomes an organizational asset available to all who need it. This addresses two essential problems: the challenge of making the job more effective and satisfying so that key people stay with the company; and the problem of how to maintain these effects. Customer queries, therefore, must be addressed within the context of the situation in which their questions occur. Automatically resolving such queries through proper KM requires that the system prioritize the substitutions, corrections or workarounds that are most likely to remedy the situation. This knowledge can then be made available to end users or support agents.

For most organizations, training support agents can be an exercise in repetition and frustration. It takes time for individuals to learn the right set of symptoms, fixes and information to satisfy customer issues. No sooner does an agent master this complex body of knowledge than he or she changes jobs or leaves the organization, taking his or her knowledge.

KM solutions attempt to make these vast, implicit bodies of knowledge as explicit as possible and make it possible to organize, search, use and adapt any explicit body of knowledge in response to changing customer needs, circumstances and technologies.

Employing a knowledge management solution can make a huge difference in resolving the issues described previously:

- **The ratio of call agents to customers can be controlled and the interaction can be made more efficient:** A knowledge management solution that enables enterprises to offer customers, partners, and end users effective self-service access to support knowledge permits consumers of knowledge to handle many of their own queries directly. This lets the organization leverage its service and support staff to concentrate on more difficult calls and to provide faster escalation and resolution.
- **Increasing call volumes can be handled via Tier Zero:** The self- service aspect of a knowledge management solution means that customers can search for answers to their questions 24 hours a day via the web. By providing this Tier Zero support, live agents can devote their time and resources to answering more complex questions. According to the Gartner Group, the average call to a help desk can cost as much as \$27, but it can cost as little as a quarter of that for a user to check an online knowledge base.