



WebInteractive™ Improve e-Support Quality While Lowering IT Costs

WebInteractive 2.0 White Paper

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Improve e-Support Quality While Lowering IT Costs with WebInteractive

Executive Summary

It is undeniable that the majority of IT costs stem from end-station configurations and support. The constant need to install new software, repair or restore configurations, and otherwise support the typical office PC fills the day of most IT technicians. However, it is also undeniable that the trend is continuing and already-high IT costs are destined to rise. Due to the increasing benefits of remote workers, telecommuters, and branch operations the actual end-station is simply much harder to reach. While remote employees allow companies to expand operations and staff with less per-capita overhead, the effect on desktop support costs is adverse. In addition, consumer demands are dictating that more effective methods of online support be provided than the typical web site support FAQ's and e-mail support requests.

A remote support solution is required; it is a sound business decision in terms of reducing support costs, but more importantly it solves the more geographic problem of putting a support technician in contact with remote workers and with customers. Research from institutions such as Gartner and Morgan Stanley have indicated that increasing portions of IT budgets are going toward ongoing support efforts. More recent Gartner studies confirmed that system purchase costs accounted for just 15 percent of the IT budget, with ongoing operational expenses accounting for the rest. With the trends in worker mobility increasing even further and with customer expectations continuing to rise, the problem will compound further, and the costs of support will likewise increase.

Outside of corporate IT, technical customer support confirms the same trends, and brings new challenges as well. The customer, not the corporate worker, has a more complex relationship with a company and must be approached in terms of support quality rather than mere support costs. In addition, while corporate IT departments may at least to some extent dictate the 'standard' office computer, there is no such authority over the consumer. With the success of several distinct versions of the Windows Operating System (Windows 95, 98, 2000, Me, NT, XP, etc.) – the installation of a remote support tool, which is an absolute requirement if support costs are going to be held in check, becomes more difficult. Client software represents an administrative difficulty, but also a financial

obstacle; client software license fees quickly add up in large network environments.

Finally, there is a consideration that is often overlooked when implementing a remote support solution. That is, the human element; the natural interactivity between a company and its customers which will ultimately imprint a lasting impression of a company's quality and dependability. Dictatorial solutions requiring end-station conformity will not be well received. Nor will faceless systems that simply monitor and control a remote PC without the added element of human interaction and communication.

The need for a more complete customer experience is most evident in the recent introduction of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solutions. CRM brings the helpdesk into closer contact with other enterprise systems than ever before. Focused on increasing ROI through the improvement of customer lifecycle management, CRM solutions demand a strong integration between enterprise systems such as ERM, helpdesk, sales, and e-commerce databases. The integration of these disparate systems is considered the largest effort (and the most significant expense) involved in Customer Relationship management.

The solution is simple: Implement a helpdesk solution that will immediately relieve the cost concerns of IT support, that improves the customers perception of the helpdesk, and that utilizes an open architecture to facilitate integration with new and emerging enterprise tools such as helpdesk automation, CRM, and e-commerce. To solve the immediate needs of the helpdesk, the system should be based upon a technology that is available to all platforms and offers a consistent User Interface: the web browser. Features such as electronic white-boarding to help illustrate ideas, and web co-browsing to help support analysts assist the end-user in learning their own way. Keyboard chat and live voice chat – concurrent with remote support and monitoring tools – to provide a positive human experience.

To solve the greater need of Enterprise system integration, the architecture should utilize standard ODBC-compliant database systems, and should manage information using a centralized database architecture. By utilizing a standard database, the collective customer support data can be easily mined and integrated into other systems.

The answer is WebInteractive.

The High Cost of Support

There are two primary reasons why traditional support costs continue to monopolize IT budgets:

- 1) Many users are remote or mobile

- 2) The heterogeneous nature of the computing environment is adding complexity to desktop administration

Industry analysts predict that by the year 2002, over 100 million people will regularly work outside of the traditional office setting. Relying on the Internet rather than on privately owned corporate networks; these mobile workers are less accessible without costly and complex VPN solutions. Remote support solutions are preferable in these circumstances, and can be used to access end systems of "road warrior" executives, telecommuters, or *anyone* on the Internet from a central support center.

Implementing a remote support system such as WebInteractive allows any end-user to be reached and dramatically lowers costs of IT support. "...[Remote support systems] diminish the need for technician dispatching and speed problem identification, isolation and resolution by helpdesk personnel." According to Gartner. Beyond this, the interactive nature of WebInteractive reduces the number of support calls by inviting collaborative efforts between the support analyst and the end-user. Internet co-browsing, chat services, and electronic white boarding features stimulate a mutual understanding of the resolution. The result is:

- More effective support with fewer errors due to the ability to monitor and control the end system first-hand.
- Reduced chances of repeat support calls regarding the same issues due to collaborative learning.
- Increased customer satisfaction due to the personal nature of the support.

Simplifying the HelpDesk While Enhancing Operations

WebInteractive simplifies the task of supporting new and changing computing environments by empowering any end-user connected to the Internet to request remote support via a standard web browser. Client software is browser-based, eliminating the need for software installation and configuration, further reducing IT expense and increasing the flexibility of the system. The client software that enables the technician to manipulate the end-system via the Internet is largely transparent to the end-user. The technician is able to experience the problem first-hand without requiring that the end-user make special configurations or install special software. This speeds troubleshooting, giving the technician full control of the end-station while maintaining a calm and un-imposing atmosphere to the client. Via the remote control tools that are now available, the technician can:

- Troubleshoot specific problems as requested by the end-user
- Collaboratively whiteboard solutions
- Install and configure software
- Transfer files

- Download software upgrades, patches, or bug-fixes
- Configure (or re-configure) system settings
- Train users via web co-browsing to browse the Internet for relevant information, fixes, etc.
- Communicate via keyboard chat or real-time voice chat
- Restore an end user's PC to a previously saved "snapshot", immediately resolving even complex system problems

The quality of the interaction – as perceived by the customer – is on par with traditional telephone technical support, with the added benefit of a hassle-free yet extremely powerful remote control and communications solution. What's more, because the solution is web-based, the online request system is easily integrated into existing technical support web sites – the natural "first stop" for those who are searching for online technical assistance.

<p><i>Remote control tools can lower the annual costs of helpdesk operations by 6 to 13 percent</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Gartner</p>

Providing the support analyst with control of the end system results in more efficient problem diagnosis and resolution. This is because support technicians are able to see users' computers over the Internet as if they were local, and to observe system settings and real world cause-effect relationships. Each helpdesk technician can handle a greater call volume due to this efficiency, and reduces the number of support escalations – especially those escalations that would require on-site technical support. In summary, remote control solutions will reduce those areas within the support system that correspond to the highest costs:

- Support escalations
- Call-backs
- On-site technician dispatches

The Importance of Interoperability and Integration

Most "remote control" support solutions provide a limited means to take control over a remote PC for the purpose of troubleshooting, software updates, etc. However, the heterogeneous nature of the computing environment is often overlooked. As such, these applications are often limited to internal support for IT departments and are not suitable for use as first-line customer support solutions.

Also overlooked is the need for the support system to work with other enterprise systems – such as Helpdesk Automation systems, ERM and CRM systems, and e-commerce systems – to reduce costs *outside* of the IT department and benefit

other aspects of a company's bottom line. Consider the benefits of individual enterprise business systems such as Automated Helpdesks, Remote Helpdesks, CRM and ERM, e-commerce, sales contact databases, and others. When combined, the individual benefits are greater than the sum of the individual parts. Such benefit can only be achieved with a system that has been designed from the ground up to support controlled connectivity to a central database store.

"CRM depends on enterprise-wide collaboration, the most important investment enterprises need to make is the reengineering of functions, processes, roles, and responsibilities to facilitate planning and coordination among multiple departments and channels"

June/July 2001 SoftwareMag.com 'CRM Analytics'
by Scott Nelson

Typical "remote-control" software is limited to IT support, while Interactive helpdesk collaboration is an ideal complement to these additional business systems. WebInteractive was designed to integrate easily with the helpdesk system to deliver the most efficient support operations, while at the same time remaining extensible via its central ODBC database structure and its ConnectionPoint connection control system.

Companies may be required to invest significant resources to [integrate] solutions so that the CRM process can remain consistent across applications... META Group estimates that integration costs account for nearly 60% of an average CRM project's overall cost.

March 27, 2001 Supportindustry.com newsletter

Interoperability refers mainly to network reach and end-system support. Although some helpdesk systems include remote control tools, the tool capabilities may be limited in functionality and reach. For example, many provide only limited network support, which prevents the helpdesk staff from reaching users behind network firewalls or proxy servers.

WebInteractive focuses on reaching end-users as easily as possible, regardless of desktop- or network- configurations. To facilitate real-time Web-based support, the WebInteractive server's ConnectionPoint application coordinates all of the communication between the service representative and the customer. ConnectionPoint actively manages all connections, resolving any conflicts that might be caused by corporate network firewalls.

To set up a service request, the customer simply visits the Support Web site and enters a description of their problem, along with an e-mail address. Once a service representative has accepted a request, the WebInteractive server will automatically initiate the necessary components to enable the customer's browser. Typically, a service representative would then start an online support session with a text chat message acknowledging the request and introducing him/herself.

Interactive Communications Solution – More Than Just Monitoring and Control

Technical Support is a primary source of customer interaction. The usability and effectiveness of “first line” support – especially when the customer is experiencing a problem or issuing a complaint – effects the customer's overall impression of the quality of the company and its products. This is particularly true for customers looking for service and support online, who are frustrated when trying to find information or assistance that they need. Adding interactivity to online support will foster good customer relationships and consequently improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. With such a critical role in customer satisfaction, it becomes counter-productive to completely hide support behind an electronic face. Instead, the first line of support – whether it is a telephone call or a company web site's support page – must cater to the individual. In other words, human interactivity is a requirement, and online support tools must allow end-users to easily initiate a conversation with a real support technician.

Allowing end-users to set up a support request online is huge benefit in this area. In addition, WebInteractive provides communication features such as real-time keyboard and voice chat, electronic white boards, and collaborative web browsing features that fulfill the end-users need for a conversational experience – allowing the end user to get the attention of a support technician as soon as possible, and to be able to easily articulate the problem or request.

[unsatisfied] Customers view the support team as the "Helpless Desk" and prefer to rely on their peer support network rather than call the Support team, costing the company between \$6,000-\$15,000 a year per employee

Gartner Group
source: March 2001 supportindustry.com / Help Desk 2000
technology survey

WebInteractive's strength is that it is a real-time communications experience, rather than a simple remote control application. Voice chat allows the technician to communicate openly with the client *while* remotely controlling the end system. Likewise, keyboard or voice chat can enhance the experience of web co-browsing and electronic collaborative white-boarding to make the support experience educational and to improve the end user's experience.

Solutions Without New Problems

While IT spending can be reduced through the use of remote support systems, the implementation of such a system should itself be scrutinized. The ease in which a system can be implemented and maintained is as crucial as the technical capabilities of the system.

"...the complexity of a solution can outweigh the benefits

Gartner

WebInteractive eliminates this risk with a central architecture that allows both support technicians and end-users to work from a web-browser interface. In addition, the client software is web-based and plug-and-play—eliminating the need for support personal to oversee the installation of the client software, and overcoming a cost barrier by eliminating the need for end user client license fees. Instead, IT administration is able to support the customer's immediate issues, and resolve the problem quickly.

The use of a centralized server provides easy access locally to all data and critical systems. This information is stored in an ODBC-complaint database format, allowing information storage, retrieval, backup and recovery to be handled easily.

"[An IT staffer] would have to walk around with a CD at the very least. And most applications that you update have some dependencies on the desktop, so you have to do something different each time you update a desktop. That's particularly cumbersome if you have an extended enterprise."

Jeb Bolding, Enterprise Management Associates.
Source: InfoWorld.com; "Updating the desktop" by Stephen Lee

Conclusion

In order to effectively benefit a company's enterprise operations, a helpdesk solution must:

- Provide all aspects of support operations, including remote control, monitoring, and collaborative troubleshooting and learning.
- Enhance the quality of support while at the same time reducing IT costs.

- Provide common support tools to *all* end users, regardless of any custom configurations that may be encountered.
- Be accessible by anyone – including users of off-the-shelf PC's with little or no installed software, and users behind corporate firewalls.
- Be based on standard systems and technologies to allow integration and interoperability with the Internet and other networked data systems.
- Be cost-effective to deploy even in large networks, by using a common web interface and eliminating the need to purchase client software.
- Be seamless to the end-user.

WebInteractive combines Remote monitoring and control with an interactive communications system that is built around the web to provide a simple means to improve support quality while lowering IT costs. In addition, the solution's web-based architecture and open standards allow the advanced support features to work together with support web sites, intranets, and extranets as well as other critical enterprise business systems such as Customer Relationship Management and Helpdesk Automation systems, to further increase the solutions value to enterprise users.

Based upon a set of collaborative communication features, WebInteractive brings the immediate benefit of increased support quality with lower support costs, primarily through the use of:

- Web-based Design and Architecture
- Online Request Distribution
- Remote PC Monitoring and Control
- Remote Systems diagnostics
- Built-in RecoverIT™ features ensure that all files and system settings can be restored in seconds.
- Collaborative features such as Internet co-browsing and electronic white boarding.
- Communications features such as Keyboard- and Voice- chat

In summary, WebInteractive provides the most advanced feature set available in a real-time, plug-and-play remote support system.