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The Essentials Series: Faster Problem Resolution
with Efficient Remote Support Capabilities

Simplifying the Troubleshooting Process with User-Centric Remote Control

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by Ed Tittel

Introduction to Realtime Publishers

by Don Jones, Series Editor

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Don Jones

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Simplifying the Troubleshooting Process with User-Centric Remote Control

The first article in this series explored the dilemmas of today's Help desk environment: higher customer expectations, the challenges of an increasingly mobile workforce, and the need for shorter support calls and first-call resolution. The article also introduced you to user-centric remote support solutions that meet user needs and streamline the Help desk process. This article focuses on the Help desk troubleshooting process, and how a user-centric remote solution simplifies that process for users and agents alike.

Benefits of User-Centric Remote Support and Control

A user-centric remote support solution provides immediate, direct support for mobile and remote users. Rather than spending time attempting to resolve computer issues on their own, users may initiate a remote support session with a live agent by phone, over the Web, or through email. To obtain assistance over the Web, a customer can use a standard Web browser and an ordinary Internet Protocol (IP) connection. The burden of resolution transfers to an experienced Help desk agent, and the user gets back to work more quickly.

Note

Users who call in for support can choose to remain on the phone with the agent or switch to Web chat once a remote session begins.

Many of today's remote support solutions are based on Software as a Service (SaaS), which delivers many types of services over the Internet. Because a SaaS-based remote support solution is remotely hosted, organizations don't have to worry about security and staffing to support a third-party solution. They can instead focus on their organization's core competencies.

Improves Efficiency

Rapid entry into sessions—quick connections to support queues with live agents standing by—speeds call resolution times. In addition, many remote support solutions enable agents to handle multiple calls or sessions simultaneously, viewing side-by-side sessions in separate on-screen windows or in tabs. To address common questions and keep one user engaged while working with other users, agents use Web chat to push pre-scripted messages to users. As a result, agents can handle higher call volumes than is possible for traditional telephone support technologies.

Note

Another method for reducing call volumes is to eliminate repeat calls by teaching and demonstrating to users how to solve common problems for themselves.

The screen-sharing and remote control features of remote support solutions eliminate the need for mobile users to follow instructions over the phone, reducing the time needed to resolve problems for “technically challenged” users. With these tools, agents can show a user how to perform a task, or fix a problem for the user while the user watches the agent’s actions.

The first-contact resolution rate is an important metric that Help desk managers watch closely. The first-contact resolution rate is tightly tied to a Help desk’s overall efficiency and performance rating.

Note

Using a remote support solution, your organization can experience a 50- to 95-percent increase in first-contact user resolution rates at the tier-1 support level.

This stems from users getting into the support queue quickly, the agent’s ability to diagnose problems accurately using the remote control feature, and the user’s ability to resume work with minimal downtime. In addition, agents can spend extra time with some users coaching them on computer tasks so that users become less dependent on support in the future.

Help desk callers get an immediate benefit from a user-centric remote support solution because they can be productive again in a few minutes. A remote solution fosters increased customer loyalty through newly acquired soft skills and faster incident resolutions.

Saves Money

Because you pay for services over the Web rather than the infrastructure costs of a Help desk, a remote support solution can greatly reduce an organization’s operating costs. Many vendors claim that you should see a return on investment (ROI) within the first year of implementing a SaaS-based remote support solution; some say you’ll achieve actual ROI in as little time as 3 or 4 months.

By allowing agents to fully control a PC remotely, some organizations save thousands of dollars in travel costs. Let’s look at a few examples:

- Salespeople can easily set up sessions to provide demonstrations using a remote support and control solution at a fraction of the travel costs. For example, if a prospective customer is 4 hours away from the main office, a salesperson can eliminate the initial sales visit by expediting a demo with the prospect remotely. If the prospect is highly motivated to buy, the salesperson can then make a visit to close the deal.
- A user-centric remote support solution with file transfer capability eliminates the need for IT staff to travel to remote locations to perform upgrades and routine maintenance. To minimize downtime, agents can handle these tasks remotely, during off-peak hours when remote employees are not working.

Note

The file transfer feature of a remote support solution also reduces the complexity of having to ship laptops used by mobile or remote employees to a centralized IT department for repair or maintenance.

Ensures Security

When receiving assistance, users don't have to worry about the security of their computers or stored data. Remote support sessions operate via port 80, 443, or 8200 without any firewall reconfiguration. In addition, they use the Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) and 128-bit end-to-end Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) encryption. Agents must provide strong passwords to gain access to the system, and they must get customer permission to access a remote PC before establishing a support session. Users must also enter a unique connection code into the Web interface when first invited to participate in a support session.

Note

Multi-level security features help organizations maintain compliance with regulations, such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (GLBA).

Improved Problem Investigation and Diagnosis

Today's user-centric remote support solutions are vastly improved as compared with older remedial screen-sharing programs. Using just a small plug-in downloaded over the Web, users gain access to remote control sessions that enable agents to run sophisticated diagnostic tools and resolve technical issues.

For example, real-time direct access to a user's PC or Mac permits agents to see for themselves the problems a user is experiencing. Over a secure connection, a Help desk agent can log in as the administrator on a user's PC to dig into system configuration, settings, drivers, and software—and can even access hidden system files. The agent may also run diagnostic utilities to collect user system information, including operating system (OS) details, total and available memory, applications and services currently running, and more—with just one click. If a reboot is needed, the agent can send a Ctrl+Alt+Del to restart the remote PC, without interrupting the session in progress.

Tip

Because of differences between the OSs, remote support for Macintosh systems from a PC has always presented challenges. If your Help desk supports a heterogeneous environment of Macs and PCs, look for a solution that allows PC-based agents to view or share control of Mac users' desktops as well as PC users.

To enhance the user experience, annotation tools and shared control provide an easy, transparent mechanism for sharing key information items and observations. An agent may use a pen or highlighter tool to draw attention to something on the user's screen, such as circling a menu or drawing an arrow to a particular part of the screen. The user can use the same tools on his or her end to clarify a question or pinpoint a problem for the agent. In addition, some remote support solutions support multi-monitor navigation, enabling an agent to easily navigate around a user's multi-monitor computer setup.

Agents may contact another agent or a group in the background to collaborate on a difficult or unfamiliar customer issue—the exchange remains invisible to the user. Alternatively, another agent can be brought into the session to work as a team with the user and the original agent (referred to as *visible collaboration*). If the incident must be escalated to a higher level, the agent can seamlessly transfer the session to the appropriate person. This is a key feature in incident handling and necessary to preserve a high level of customer service.

Finally, remote support solutions allow session recording for later review, training purposes, and to maintain a record of support encounters. You can incorporate recorded session data into your customer relationship management (CRM) tool in polling intervals, on demand, or per a custom schedule.

Tip

If integrating session data with your CRM system is important to your organization, look for a remote support solution with a data replicator feature that automatically downloads session data to a local Microsoft SQL Server database.

Coming Up Next...

The third article in this series will examine how remote control and diagnosis features address typical user problems.