

## SELF-SERVICE MEETS WEB 2.0: SERVING THE 21ST CENTURY CUSTOMER

The idea of the customer as king has become engrained in our way of thinking. This is the case today, more than ever before, as Web 2.0 and social networking technologies are being adopted by organizations and individuals.

For businesses, Web 2.0 is adding another level of complexity to the traditional challenges of reducing costs and increasing profits while building customer loyalty. The extraordinary success of social networking, forums, blogs, tags, wikis, videos and online support is a testament to the public's insatiable appetite for online communities based around collective interests. Recent polls indicate that consumers overwhelmingly prefer the internet over more traditional methods of dealing with a business.

This article looks at self-service technologies and how, by embracing rather than rejecting them, they can be the golden ticket to more personalized and profitable online experiences for both customers and businesses.

### Why self-service?

Cost is one of the primary drivers for the adoption of self-service channels. Research has shown that the cost of managing a self-service channel is only 2 percent of the cost of operating a call center. These figures explain why many companies aim to drive savings by diverting high-volume, low-value calls to the more preferred online channel.

Cost savings, however, are just one of the motivators behind conducting business online. Time made available by customers serving themselves can free up staff to focus their energies on serving customers with more complex, higher value questions.

Self-service technology also has the potential to boost sales, through cross- and

up-selling. By analyzing information, such as customer buying habits, businesses are able to present targeted promotions. Statistics show that this kind of offer can have conversion rates of up to 20 percent.

More importantly, the money savings can be demonstrated to customers. With next-generation self-service, customers can also apply loyalty points to new services.

### The self-service ecosystem

To attract customers to online self-service channels, companies need to provide an experience similar to that of the Web 2.0 and social networking tools of today leveraging personalized and consumer-friendly applications.

And it's important that self-service channels are not seen as unimportant, as customers have equally high expectations of online service as those provided by customer services. To ensure quality in both, companies need to move away from static self-service applications and move towards an environment that allows users to participate, share and contribute to an online community that they feel part of.

With this in mind, a self-service ecosystem should deliver the following features:

- Online product purchasing ability
- Dynamic online bill payment and presentment
- Immediate answers 24/7
- Consistent advice and consultation across all channels of engagement
- Intelligent trend information and tips on how those trends directly impact savings
- Historical insight into all interactions with the business
- Visibility into relevant offers, based on consumers' personal interests
- A timeline and status update on service request resolution

### **In-tune with the Facebook generation**

Building on the benefits and features discussed above, self-service technology also makes it possible to add the kind of interactive features that social networking sites like Facebook and Bebo already offer. For instance, instant messaging tools, access to forums and access to analytical gadgets. This can be extended to the enterprise by enabling customers to suggest ideas for product improvements or get immediate expert guidance on complex problems.

Additionally, by making customers feel part of a community – with access to discussion forums, online customer reviews and ratings – before making a final decision, they are more likely to purchase a new product or subscribe to a new service. Other functionality, such as a dashboard to compare products and services, can also add value to the customer experience by allowing customers to find the most appropriate service that meets their individual needs and budget.

Ultimately, all of these tools are geared towards helping customers save time and money. For businesses, the reward is stronger loyalty and higher wallet share.

### **Walking the walk**

There are many practical examples of how Web 2.0 thinking – using data in new ways and collaborating more efficiently - could occur. In the telecommunications industry, for instance, customers can have real-time visibility of billing summaries and account trends, such as their ten most expensive calls. With this insight, customers can make immediate changes to their service plan or upgrade to ensure they have the best offer in place.

Providing customers with the ability to analyze personal spending trends or phone use and then adding the functionality to

amend, change or buy new services will help customers develop a more personal relationship with the business.

Another example is in the utilities industry. At a time when energy costs are soaring, customers of utility companies can view online trends of high energy use, with tips on how to reduce energy consumption and make savings.

For businesses, e-statements and online account management have their own benefits: lower administration costs and a reduction in the business' carbon footprint. Portugal Telecom, for example, saves 150 tons of paper per year by supplying customers with e-statements rather than printed statements – equating to about 3,000 saved trees.

However, while this new revolution in customer communication is one all organizations would like to achieve, one of the biggest challenges they must tackle is how to maintain the context of customer interactions across different channels and business units.

Self-service technologies are capable of achieving this (and more) by residing across call center operations, web channels, marketing and other departments. This ensures that customers are provided with the consistent, multi-channel customer service they expect and demand.

Customer issues can be tracked, whether they are raised online, on the phone or via email, through to completion and a satisfactory resolution. This level of case management is facilitated by context based interactions across the business – ensuring rapid problem resolution.

Real value, though, is gained by using real-time and historical customer information to provide visibility and

access to tailored offers, helping customers save money. With this level of account insight, companies can address two of the key challenges facing them today: improving customer loyalty and brand perception.

Now 15 years old, the Internet is moving away from being a static place, where information is simply viewed, to a place where all participants share and contribute information. Companies must realize this, and respond accordingly.

### **An opportunity to engage**

With enterprises spending upwards of 6.5 percent of their annual budgets on reaching their target audience, now is not the time to be late to the self-service game. Organizations must make the most of this rare opportunity to engage with the public on a personal level and in an environment in which they feel comfortable – next-generation self-service enables just that.

### **Delivering value to the business**

With a complete self-service ecosystem inclusive of E-Support, E-Commerce and E-Billing, customers running Oracle's Self-Service applications can benefit from:

- **Enhanced customer loyalty** through the consistently-delivered and highly-personalized customer service across all channels of engagement.
- **Additional revenue streams** through product and service recommendations that appeal to a customer's lifestyle, behavior and personal interests.
- **Lower administrative and support costs** for contact centers, by deflecting high-volume, low-value calls to online portals.
- **Competitive differentiation** by embracing the online world, allowing customers to participate in an engaging, collaborative and unique online community.
- **Product innovation and improvement** by driving live and

direct customer feedback into the design process.

### **Unravelling the complexity**

Historically, companies have viewed self-service as costly and disruptive to the business, fraught with complex back-end integration issues involving disparate systems from across the business. This simply is not the case.

Technology is capable of working with existing CRM systems, applications and IT investments, using information relating to the customer – wherever it resides – to provide a more intuitive, consistent and personalized online customer experience.

Adding social networking tools to self-service, incorporating forums, reviews, tags, blogs, wikis, videos and online support can also be achieved with minimal cost and disruption to the business. Self-service technology is the key to delivering the next wave of business value from CRM. Those that take a back seat will rapidly be surpassed by competitors with tightly-knit communities around their business and products.

### **About Oracle Self-Service**

Companies looking to maximize cross-sell and up-sell opportunities will benefit from Oracle's unique ability to expose relational customer data buried across all aspects of the business. With pre-built web services, companies can use customer data, contained in multiple systems, to ensure that the right offer is made to the right customer at the right time, across all channels of engagement.

Oracle is the market leader in Customer Relationship Management and Customer Self-Service. With over 200 million cross industry self-service users and delivering 3-5x the adoption rates of competing solutions, Oracle's complete E-Commerce, E-Support and E-Billing platform delivers:

**Relational E-Commerce:** This allows companies to maximize up-sell and cross-sell opportunities by building an integrated E-Commerce capability, using information stored across disparate silos of information and CRM applications.

**A true in-context multi-channel experience:** This enables for a more consistent, superior customer experience, by maintaining the context, in real-time, of each interaction across all customer touch points, whether telephone, email, web or face-to-face.

**Fully and pre-integrated technology:** This provides a lower total cost of ownership (TCO) for consistent, in-context engagements, by tying across and interoperating with existing investments in E-Commerce, E-Support, Call Center and Order Management systems.

The commercial benefits include enhanced customer loyalty, new and profitable revenue streams, lower support costs and the ability to solicit immediate feedback for product and service improvement.

For more information on Oracle's next generation of self-service technologies visit: [www.oracle.com/applications/crm](http://www.oracle.com/applications/crm) or our [CRM Blog](#) at: <http://blogs.oracle.com/crm> or call 1-800-ORACLE1 to speak to an Oracle representative.

Because these days, it's not so much about customers noticing you - it's about *you noticing them.*