

Usability in Enterprise Customer Service Applications

The Impact to Productivity, Customer
Satisfaction, and Profitability

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ORACLE
PEOPLESOFT ENTERPRISE

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Usability in Enterprise Customer Service Applications: The Impact to Productivity, Customer Satisfaction, and Profitability

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Increasing attention is being focused on usability problems in enterprise applications—more specifically, on the profound impact a poorly designed user experience can have on an organization’s productivity, efficiency, and profitability. According to a July 2004 Forrester Research report, “... problems with the art of usability have resulted in a cost over the lifetime of the application many times the cost of the application itself.”¹

Problems associated with poor usability include poor productivity due to confusing design, higher costs due to extended employee training requirements, a greater need for technical support, and poor adoption by users. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) enterprise applications have been under particular scrutiny for their usability and adoption issues. According to the Forrester report, lack of user adoption is cited as the primary cause of 70 percent of failed CRM projects.²

While all enterprise applications should be highly usable, nowhere is this more important than in customer service, where speed, efficiency, and effectiveness are critical. When customers need assistance, an organization’s ability to get to the heart of the matter and provide resolution has a profound impact on customer satisfaction. It also has an important impact on the company’s bottom line, because the faster a support call is closed, the more money is saved.

Industry analysts support the financial impact argument. According to Forrester Research, “With the average agent cost per minute hovering around \$0.30 in North America and large contact centers like those at wireless carriers receiving more than 7 million calls a month, even cutting 2 to 3 seconds per call would save more than \$1 million per year in productivity.”³ In addition, Gartner Group recently reported, “On average, every one percent increase in first-contact resolution results in a 7.8-cent drop in the cost-per-handled contact.”⁴

¹ Forrester Research, Put Enterprise Applications to the Usability Test, July 2, 2004.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Gartner Group, CRM Value Assessment and Delivery, August 2004.

This executive overview examines the current state of usability in enterprise customer service applications, and the benefits to an organization when those applications are highly usable. It explores how application providers, such as Oracle, are addressing usability issues. It also provides guidelines for evaluating usability, including user feedback, input, and testing; enterprise-wide business process support; guided interactions; and the ability to leverage legacy information. Finally, this paper reviews the specific usability improvements contained in Oracle's PeopleSoft Enterprise Service Solution 8.9 and how they can increase profits in your contact center and positively impact customer satisfaction levels, employee adoption, and productivity.

THE CURRENT STATE OF USABILITY IN CUSTOMER SERVICE APPLICATIONS

Today, most enterprise customer service applications are woefully deficient in usability features—a problem that, in the opinion of Forrester Research, can be traced directly to research and development. “Historically, software applications were designed inside out by engineers, with little understanding of the intended users and environments for the software.”⁵ As a result, the ease with which users interact with these applications has been treated as an afterthought.

Another common cause for usability problems is the one-size-fits-all philosophy that vendors often employ. Rather than displaying functionality that is relevant to a customer's specific business processes and needs, vendors instead clutter the application with an amalgamation of every feature ever dreamt up by a user or engineer. The result of this “overfeaturing” is that any given user will only utilize a small percentage of the functionality and everything else just becomes part of the usability nightmare.

Following is a list of the most common usability issues encountered by the typical customer service organization.

The Unwieldy User Interface

One of the most common usability issues is the multitude of nonintuitive application screens that are cumbersome to navigate and require too much effort to understand and use correctly. This problem is often compounded by a lack of system integration that forces agents to toggle between numerous systems in order to access all of the customer information needed to complete a transaction. Agent productivity is not only impacted by navigation time, but also by the potential for duplication of data entry.

Compounding the excessive clicking and scrolling, is the fact that these applications are completely unguided in their navigation. That is, they offer no logical flow or task-driven process to guide the agent to a successful outcome.

This poor user experience can result in a number of negative side effects. A customer service agent—under constant pressure to get off the phone quickly—may enter incomplete or inaccurate data regarding the customer interaction. Or, the agent may not be able to resolve the customer’s problem, resulting in a negative customer experience. Ultimately, agent frustration may lead to an increase in turnover, exacerbating an already costly contact center problem. According to Forrester, “In call centers, where annual turnover can be as high as 50 percent, an additional four weeks of training costs upward of \$2.5 million per year for a 1,000-agent call center.”⁶ A good user interface, on the other hand, not only helps decrease costs, it also improves job satisfaction and employee retention.

Lack of Access to Complete Customer Information

Another significant usability problem is the customer service agent’s inability to access customer information throughout the organization to efficiently and successfully complete a service interaction. This lack of a 360-degree customer view is caused in part because customer service applications typically function as silos of information, having little to no integration with sales, operations, and other enterprise systems that contain relevant data necessary for effective service delivery. Another contributor to the problem is the fact that the communication channels used by customers to interact with an organization—including email systems, phone systems, and web self-service applications—are typically disconnected, creating additional silos.

This inability of agents to have the complete picture of a customer’s overall relationship with the organization often results in missed opportunities to either enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty or to generate additional revenues.

Examples include:

- A technical support representative works to solve an issue for a customer but is unaware of a critical service level agreement (SLA) that ensures resolution within a specific time frame— because the SLA information is contained in a separate contracts system.
- A customer service agent may promise to ship a replacement part to a customer within a certain time frame, only to find out that inventory is backordered and the delivery date can’t be met.
- A customer service agent tasked with up-selling and cross-selling may have incomplete information about marketing promotions that would enhance her ability to sell.
- A technical support agent on the phone with a customer does not understand why the customer is frustrated and angry. Reason? The agent was unaware of the customer’s previous failed attempt to resolve the problem via self service, and asked him to repeat the same steps to diagnose and resolve the problem that he had already attempted with an unsuccessful outcome.

Ineffective Use of Knowledge

Enterprise customer service applications for the contact center have traditionally been focused on call routing and incident tracking, not solving customer problems. While the knowledgebase has long been acknowledged as a critical element for problem resolution, the ability for a customer support representative to access it from across the enterprise to resolve a real-time customer issue has been an elusive goal.

Instead, enterprise knowledge is typically scattered and inaccessible, residing in multiple repositories and formats, and is often disconnected from the customer support application. Inaccurate knowledge retrieval technologies and complex and costly knowledge maintenance processes exacerbate the problem.

The consequence is poor user adoption. Customer support agents find it easier and more reliable to trust their own experience or that of a peer. Bypassing the knowledgebase then creates a negative impact on quality of service, because individual responses do not leverage the consistency and collective best practices inherent in the knowledgebase.

Inability or unwillingness to use knowledgebase tools also results in tier one support personnel routinely escalating issues that are beyond their immediate expertise to tier two personnel with more experience. This creates a sizable, two-fold problem: first, it lengthens the time to resolution—from hours to days in some circumstances; and second, it raises the cost of service delivery.

No Intelligent Guidance

With contact center staff turnover as high as 50 percent and an average tenure of six to 12 months, organizations are constantly challenged with ensuring consistent customer service delivery from varied agent experience levels. Millions of dollars are spent annually on training, yet the customer service applications do nothing to facilitate consistency and adherence to best practices guidelines.

Regardless of the task or opportunity, application navigation is free-form, offering no logical flow and no task or event-driven process to guide the agent. Without a mechanism to ensure a clear and consistent approach to service, organizations are often plagued with slow and erratic responses to customer inquiries and bad decisions based on incomplete data. The result is poor customer service experiences that negatively impact customer satisfaction and loyalty.

HOW DO ENTERPRISE SOFTWARE PROVIDERS IMPROVE USABILITY—AND WHAT'S THE PAYOFF?

The most important ways for enterprise software providers to resolve usability issues are also the most obvious: know the application's users, their various roles in the organization, and how they do their jobs on a day-to-day basis. Then, involve them in an iterative design process, beginning at the prototype stage and continuing through application rollout.

The goals for enterprise software providers should be to engage customers in an ongoing dialog about how well the applications are working from a usability standpoint, and to create a methodology that actively incorporates this feedback into new application releases. During this process, constant testing with the user base ensures that changes to the application match user requirements as accurately as possible.

These changes are most often reflected in a simpler, more intuitive user interface that minimizes screens, click counts, and keystrokes; improves navigation; simplifies tasks like searches and knowledgebase queries; and reduces task completion time. The payoff is increased adoption by users across a wide range of customer service functions—and a superior return on investment.

Another significant benefit to improving the user experience is increased productivity due to rapid and accurate capture, diagnosis, and resolution of problems through use of an intuitive knowledgebase. Consequently, the ability of tier one personnel to resolve issues they would typically escalate, results in considerable cost savings for the service organization. As first-call resolution rates increase, so do customer satisfaction, loyalty, and company profitability.

HOW TO IDENTIFY A HIGHLY USABLE CUSTOMER SERVICE APPLICATION

1. How was the application designed? Who was involved?

Above all, be sure to ask about end user involvement in the design—who, when, how many, and how often. Equally important is information about the methodology for incorporating feedback, including an iterative design process that incorporates extensive testing and refinement based on the results.

2. How easy is the application to learn and use?

Here, focus on things like screen layout and ease of navigation. Check for intuitiveness, as well as screens that are easy to read and understand, and that are integrated with process flows. How much training is required? Once trained, how easy is it for users to use advanced functionality? Finally, put the application to the test and measure the amount of time it takes to go through a sampling of typical support activities. For example, how many keystrokes does it take to complete a task, particularly the most common ones?

3. Does the application support enterprise-wide business processes?

Consistency is critical. The application should deliver a complete user experience from the business process perspective, enabling users to move seamlessly between operational applications. Additionally, make sure that the application can be tightly integrated with other CRM applications, merging marketing, sales, and support into a single solution that provides call center agents with comprehensive information. The solution should also offer real-time information access so that customer service agents can make the right decision at the right time. Also, enterprise information

about the customer should be presented in one place on the agent's desktop application for a complete 360-degree view of the customer—regardless of whether the data comes from a legacy back-office system, another communication channel, or a marketing database.

4. Can the application support your specific business processes?

Save yourself a major headache—make sure, up front, that the application's functionality can be easily configured to meet your specific organizational and departmental needs and easily modified to meet your evolving needs.

Configurability means the application is tailored to the way you do business, making it non-obtrusive and easy to use. In contrast, some applications force you to conform your business to their rigid processes. Determine which functionality and processes are configurable and which are customizable. Configurable means you can turn it on and off via the GUI. Customizable means that code must be written to make changes, which is much more time consuming and costly.

5. Does the application provide intelligent guidance?

Intelligent guidance is one of the key usability features that make adoption rates soar. A highly usable application should deliver actionable information and intelligent guidance at the time of each interaction. The application should be prescriptive—that is, it should prescribe specific actions or next steps, in real time, based on defined business rules.

For example, a customer support agent receiving a call could be guided to direct the customer to the self-service website based on the customer's service entitlements. Or, the agent could be guided to deliver a scripted response that offers an upgrade to a customer based on his or her particular profile attribute.

6. Has it been thoroughly tested? What were the results?

Ask for statistics that demonstrate a commitment to continuous enhancements in usability over the life of the application. Enterprise solution providers should be able to clearly demonstrate their usability improvements in quantifiable measurements like reductions in clicks and screens, and improvements in application performance. Key measurements can be grouped in three categories: efficiency—how long it takes to accomplish a major task; effectiveness—what the result is; and satisfaction—how the experience was.

ORACLE'S PEOPLESOFT ENTERPRISE SERVICE SOLUTION 8.9: SETTING THE USABILITY STANDARD

Our CRM vision and innovation have resulted in a tremendous amount of recognition from industry analysts and the media. Our industry firsts, accomplishments, and most recent awards include:

- The first enterprise applications vendor to deliver a complete CRM suite on a pure internet architecture.

- 2003 Gartner Magic Quadrant Reports for CRM. We were chosen as the clear visionary among enterprise application providers.
- 2003 Meta Group MetaSpectrum rankings for CRM. We were ranked as the leading player among enterprise application suite providers.
- 2003 Readers' Choice Award, InfoWorld magazine. Winner among all CRM vendors.
- 2003 CRM Leaders Award, CRM magazine. The "market leader of enterprise CRM."
- 2003 Product of the Year, Customer Interaction Solutions magazine.
- ICCM 2003, voted Best CRM Product by an independent panel of call center and CRM experts.
- 2004 CRM Excellence Award for its case study on Long & Foster.
- 2004 CRM Market Leader Award, CRM Magazine, for customer satisfaction and product innovation.
- The highest owner satisfaction of all the major enterprise application vendors, according to Forrester Research.

Figure 1: How Satisfied Are Enterprise Application Owners, September 2003.



The newest release of Oracle's PeopleSoft Enterprise Service Solution 8.9 continues in this tradition and sets an industry standard for usability in enterprise customer service applications. The 8.9 release reflects the result of our strong development focus on delivering the best Total Ownership Experience (TOE) in the industry. Our TOE initiative focuses on applying technology to improve all aspects of the enterprise application lifecycle, including implementation, usability, and maintenance. Our success in delivering TOE is reflected by a high rate of deployment and usage.

According to AMR Research, our CRM had the highest usage ranking in a survey of customer management users.⁵ This high ranking is due to a number of critical usability factors, detailed below.

User Involvement and Testing

As previously discussed, user acceptance is dependent on application navigation that is engineered to specific roles. As a result, we have put a major emphasis on usability engineering and testing, using customers, internal resources, and external usability labs.

More than 40 major CRM customers, including HP, Norstan, Belgacom, Merck, and France Telecom, provided detailed feedback and participated in extensive testing. Consequently, numerous usability features were introduced in the 8.9 release. The results included:

- 30 percent improvement in performance.
- 38 percent improvement in usability.
- 46 percent fewer clicks to complete tasks.

An Easy-to-Use Interface

We have invested a significant amount of time and worked extensively with contact center agents to enhance usability within individual applications and across products. With the elimination of clicks and scrolling, as well as a cleaner, more efficient screen layout, organizations are able to streamline service delivery, reduce training costs, and improve agent productivity. Specific improvements include a 54 percent increase in overall call center usability (faster average time to complete key tasks) and a 167 percent increase in usability for email support agents.

Access to Enterprise Customer Information

Our extensive integration capabilities improve usability by bringing together information from across the enterprise to create a 360-degree customer view, including:

- The ability to manage multiple customer communication channels—such as email, phone, and the web—through a single application. This decreases training time and improves usability, because agents must learn only one system.
- Elimination of information silos through cross-pillar integration that brings information together from all of the organization’s customer-facing functions, including sales, marketing, and service. This ensures that critical customer information, like SLAs, is readily accessible and that valuable revenue generation opportunities aren’t missed.

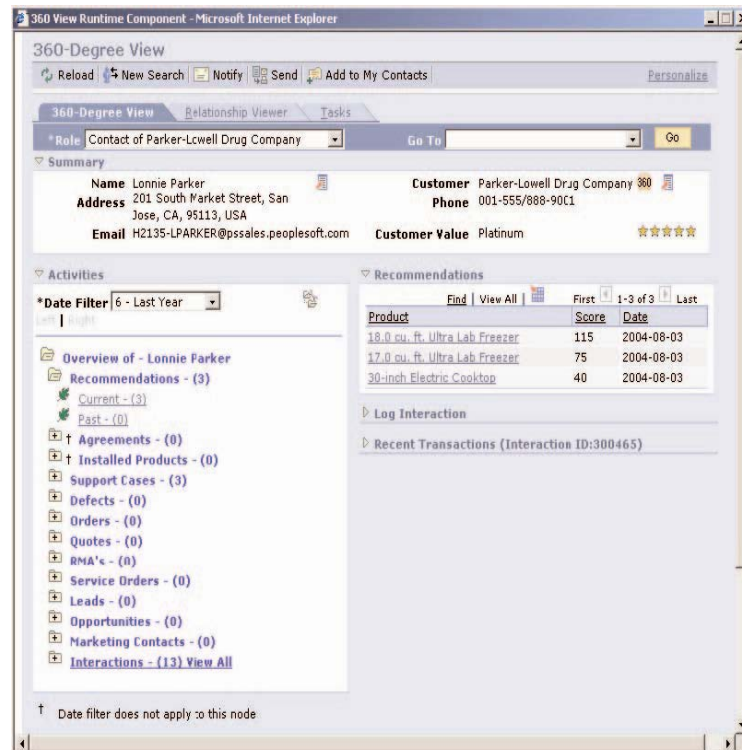
“Our agents are saving about 60 seconds per call by eliminating unnecessary questions and data entry. Since 1999, we’ve doubled the number of customer installations we support without increasing our call center headcount.”

Steve Finley, Senior Director for IT Customer Service ,Hughes Network Systems (HNS)

⁵ AMR Research, The Customer Management Applications Report, 2003-2008, 2004.

- Integration between front-office and back-office systems—including supply chain, human capital management, and financial management systems—that provides additional customer information to the agent for a complete picture of the customer. Having this information in one place expedites the service process while also maximizing the effectiveness of the interaction.
- Pre-integrated business processes that allow information and transactions to be more tightly linked across different parts of the organization.

Figure 2: 360-Degree Customer View



“Our business model is built around having an integrated system with customer purchases and open support cases combined into one cohesive view of the customer. Our salespeople can see the support history when they’re talking to the customer and really understand their issues. We want to know everything about our customers and be informed when we talk to them ...anyone who interacts with a customer should know the complete relationship, not just what they owe us or what their potential is for additional sales.”

Edwin Nichols, Director of Information Services,
DataDirect Technologies

Access to Knowledge for Problem Resolution

We provide a single repository for comprehensive enterprise knowledge that enables agents to quickly find and deliver relevant and accurate resolutions. Our solution uses a natural language processing (NLP) engine to maximize the accuracy of resolution search results and provides automatic suggestions for case resolutions based on prior effectiveness in solving similar cases. The NLP engine actually “learns” over time, so the accuracy of knowledge continues to improve with minimal human intervention.

The Solution Advisor also facilitates the capture of new solutions so all users can benefit from the latest knowledge. The knowledgebase is not only for the benefit of support agents—it’s also available to customers via web self service. Benefits

include faster problem resolution, higher first-call resolution rates, fewer calls into the contact center, and improved satisfaction of both customers and service agents.

Figure 3: Suggested solution for case based on relevance score.

The screenshot shows a CRM case management interface. At the top, it displays the case ID (220456), customer name (Jack Pepper), and summary (Dishwasher is not working). The status is 'Open - New Case'. Below this, there are tabs for 'Case', 'Solution', 'Summary', 'Notes', 'Case History', 'Related Cases', and 'Related Actions'. The 'Solution' tab is active, showing 'Attempted Solutions' (none) and 'Suggested Solutions'. A search result is shown with a score of 3 and ID 301045, describing a solution for a freezer or refrigerator not cold enough. The search text 'Dishwasher is not working' is entered in a search box. At the bottom, there is an 'Audit History' section showing the case was created and modified on 08/30/2004 by Spencer Underwood.

“All of our business rules are in one place in PeopleSoft, so we can act on customer information to make sure we’re resolving issues quickly and consistently. And seeing consumers and enterprise customers in the same view enables us to develop valuable new services that benefit our entire customer base.”

Bruce Lemieux, Assistant Vice President, IT Applications, Hughes Network Systems

Intelligent Guidance

Our built-in, prescriptive analytics capability is essential to maximizing usability and adoption by customer service agents in the contact center. Prescriptive Analytics provides the guidance and intelligent decision-making capabilities customer service agents need to be highly productive and effective from the first day on the job. Prescriptive Analytics drives up customer satisfaction by facilitating consistent high-quality service delivery and by delivering relevant recommendations and offers.

Flexibility and Configurability

One of the hallmarks of our Enterprise CRM is a commitment to configuration, not customization. Our customer service organizations can tailor processes to meet unique business requirements without time-consuming and costly system customization—service personnel can easily configure and maintain the system without having to enlist IT resources. For example, they can add required

information, hide certain fields, or disable features that are not required for certain job functions.

In addition, we provide out-of-the-box templates for specific industries and business models. These templates are also easily modifiable, and users can create new templates to support their unique business models without customizing any of the underlying code.

“We minimized customizations in order to quickly get our CRM, order fulfillment, financials, and sales business processes up without impacting the business. We selected PeopleSoft because of the richer integrations. Overall, it’s the most well-integrated package I’ve seen.”

**Edwin Nichols, Director of Information Services,
DataDirect Technologies**

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Oracle Corporation
Worldwide Headquarters
500 Oracle Parkway
Redwood Shores, CA 94065
U.S.A.

Worldwide Inquiries:

Phone: +1.650.506.7000

Fax: +1.650.506.7200

oracle.com

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