



The Next Big Thing in Support: Oracle is Proving Itself in More than Just Software

By Shawn Santos, Senior Program Manager, SSPA

For customers, the upside of a value-added support experience is clear: avoiding most of what's frustrating about using technology products. From the technology company perspective, it may seem extravagant to provide support that doesn't fit into its traditional break/fix mold. However, several pioneering companies are beginning to realize the benefits of an important new strategy for their customer support operations.

A New Strategy for Support?

To cynics, this may seem like an oxymoron. After all, technology services have not changed significantly in the last 40 years. Today, they are largely marketed, sold and delivered the same way they were in the 1960s—which desperately lags behind the explosion in technological innovation and complexity in the products they support.

In addition to ensuring a positive customer experience, the focus of the majority of today's support operations is on fixing, updating and maintaining products. However, there are several support organizations focused on the "the next big thing" in technology services. It's what the SSPA calls "value-added support". Forward-looking companies such as Oracle—profiled in this article—are converging on two important support objectives: 1) accelerating their customers' time-to-value and, 2) increasing the value that their customers receive from their products.

Not only are these two goals important benefits to the customer, but they significantly benefit the company as well. For the customer, the benefits of value-added support mean a *faster* and *greater* return on product investment than what was initially expected. Accordingly, the customer consumes the product faster, and with greater satisfaction, and is therefore likely to increase both the *volume* and *frequency* of future purchases. Clearly, this is good news for the company.

A Better Big Business

With 275,000 customers, 65,000 employees and over \$14 billion in

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revenue, Oracle has a commanding presence in the enterprise software marketplace. What's more, is that from a services- and customer- perspective, Oracle seems to be operating as an enlightened enterprise, investing \$2 billion in next generation software and services R&D.

The scale at which Oracle Support Services operates is nearly as impressive as the accolades it has received for its industry-best support practices. In the last twelve months, Oracle Support generated more than \$8 billion in revenue, employed more than 7,500 support professionals, and expanded its 24x7 mission critical support to cover 27 local languages via 18 global support hubs.

Oracle's accolades for service excellence include the prestigious J.D. Power and Associates Certified Technology Service and Support award for outstanding customer service, the TSANet Multi-Vendor Support Champion Award, SSPA STAR Awards each year since 2002, as well as SSPA's Life Time Achievement Award, to name a few.

Customer Commitment

It's clear that Oracle has been headed down the right path with its support practices, and despite its recognition for service and operational excellence, Oracle keeps pushing ahead. Oracle Support continues to raise the bar on service excellence by committing to its superior ownership experience program: a corporate-wide initiative within Oracle to maximize the value of customer enterprise software investments.

Oracle delivers a superior ownership experience by satisfying customer expectations collected through multiple feedback channels across the ownership lifecycle. Oracle has over 950 customers participating in customer advisory boards, 500 industry and product strategy council members, and 425 user groups. They value customer input and feedback, and partner with their customers to drive greater value and customer-driven innovation back into Oracle products and services.

Oracle delivers on its customer commitment to a Superior Ownership Experience with valued-added services. They drive customer value with two complementary value added services – Engineered Services and Advanced Customer Services.

Hooked on Customer Value

Engineered Services: Accelerating Time-to-Value

Oracle accelerates customer time-to-value with Engineered Services. While simple in concept, their end-to-end lifecycle approach brings new meaning to true value-added services. Oracle delivers greater customer value at each phase of their continuous process improvement lifecycle—a 4-phase lifecycle that takes support processes beyond Support into Development:

- **Manual**—Optimize manual support processes
- **Automate**—Automate manual support processes to save time and money
- **Integrate**—Integrate automated processes to obtain new value
- **Embed**—Embed automated processes back into products to provide a superior ownership experience

What's unique about Oracle's Engineered Services? They are designed specifically for preventative support. They leverage inputs from reactive support to identify preventative support opportunities and deliver preventative solutions with service automation and embedded supportability. Support processes are now integral development processes. And customer support at Oracle is no longer just a support responsibility but is now a development responsibility as well.

A Best Practice Approach to a Value-Added Service: Configuration Support Manager

Automated Configuration Management

Configuration management was a big challenge for Oracle customers. Customers had a hard time managing and maintaining their Oracle environments amidst their complex, distributed IT infrastructure. This became evident to Oracle in light of a large number of service requests related to configuration problems. With growing software complexity and regulatory compliance demands, customers looked to Oracle to help them manage their Oracle environments.

Oracle simplified configuration management by automating the manual support processes of configuration management. Oracle automated both configuration discovery and management with Oracle Configuration Manager and Configuration Support Manager. Oracle Configuration Manager automates discovery and collection of all hardware and software configuration in the Oracle environment, including all patch history and updates and stores them in the Oracle customer configuration repository. Configuration Support Manager catalogs customer environments and enables customers to identify support needs by projects, and attach configurations and projects to service requests. These automated service capabilities have accelerated their customers' time-to-value.

Customer reported improvements when using Configuration Support Manager include-30% reduction in service request log time, 20% faster response time-to-service requests, and 40% faster problem resolution.

Integrated Health Checks and Security Alerts

Oracle further accelerated customer time-to-value with proactive automated support. Oracle integrated Health Checks and Security Alerts with Configuration Support Manager. Health Checks and Security Alerts are service capabilities that identify risks to a customer's IT environment and provide advice on corrective actions to avoid outages or loss of

service. They dynamically run against Configuration Support Manager and use customer configurations from Oracle Configuration Manager to provide personalized proactive recommendations and risk assessments, further minimizing customer risk and optimizing their systems' performance for higher availability.

Embedded Supportability

In addition to automating and integrating support processes for greater value, Oracle has embedded service capabilities back into Oracle products for increased supportability and preventative support. Oracle Configuration Manager has been embedded into new—and previous—versions of products for automated configuration discovery. Best practice support health checks and diagnostics have been embedded into Oracle Enterprise Manager and Configuration Support Manager which act as an integrated component of Oracle's Enterprise Management Framework.

Oracle's end-to-end lifecycle approach to Engineered Services, delivered via service automation-proactive automated support and embedded supportability accelerates the time for customers to realize value from their Oracle technology investments, in turn, giving customers a faster return on investment.

Advanced Customer Services: Increasing Product Value

Customer needs and expectations are evolving more rapidly than ever. Spurred largely by increasing technical complexity, 2007 benchmark data from the SSPA shows that interaction volumes are on the rise while overall service levels are declining.

Keeping pace with customer needs is a daunting task, and a standard multi-channel support strategy simply isn't going to provide customers with increased product value, let alone be responsible for markedly higher satisfaction.

Oracle understands the value and need for personalized services. Oracle complements their Engineered Services with Advanced Customers Services (ACS), a global team of Oracle domain experts to help customers unlock more product value from their software investment.

ACS is structured as a flexible engagement business model that aligns to the business requirements of Oracle's customers. It consists of 4 engagement models; all designed to help ACS customers receive more value and benefit from Oracle's products.

Advanced Customer Services engagement models:

Solution Support Center

Solution Support Center is ACS's top-tier package, designed to provide

customers with the highest level of attention from Oracle support experts with the added value of a focused service delivery engineering team who have in-depth knowledge and understanding of the customer's specific environment, issues, and business needs.

Solution Support Center adds value by saving the customer's time and improving their operations through in-context presentations of Oracle software features, as well as giving customers better visibility of new patches and updates. In addition to proactive system monitoring, in cases of severe performance slow down or other critical issues, service delivery engineers are immediately activated to stabilize performance.

Business Critical Assistance

Business Critical Assistance is designed to focus on problem avoidance by working proactively with customers to maximize the performance of their Oracle software environment.

This support model provides value to the customer by speeding the adoption, knowledge, and use of Oracle product features, which, in addition to generating more product value for the customer, improves the overall reliability of Oracle software platforms. In addition, new product releases are more easily adopted and Oracle sees a reduction in the number of critical situations, leading to a reduction in the number of service requests.

Priority Service

Priority Service is designed to give customers a priority, personalized response to ensure that their systems are always available, their Oracle implementations and upgrades run smoothly, and that they meet their business challenges.

A key benefit to this service is accelerated issue management and priority handling for high availability, and faster recovery from critical issues through a focused approach to problem resolution and escalation management. Priority Service is personalized through the customer's local service manager in addition to a customized portal to provide vital signs, metrics and other health-status data.

Assisted Service

Assisted Service is a model designed to give Oracle customers customized software support in addition to proactive guidance on enhancements and processes to improve the supportability of the Oracle environment in the near-future. Assisted Service minimizes unplanned downtime through proactive, customized product support management, and serves to increase system reliability, availability, performance, and security.

Oracle's Engineered Services and Advanced Customer Services: Examples of Value-Added Support?

Yes. Oracle's Engineered Services and Advanced Customer Services embrace the following essential value-added support attributes as defined by the SSPA:

- 1 Subscription-based renewable annuity
- 2 Remote, rather than on-site, delivery
- 3 Proactive, not reactive
- 4 Use of integrated technologies to facilitate the identification, packaging and dissemination of knowledge
- 5 Emphasis on one-to-many instead of one-to-one transactions
- 6 Low incremental cost to serve new customers

The Big Pay Back

Although I can't illuminate Oracle's specific internal support metrics for you, I can say that Oracle's ACS customers are more satisfied than other Oracle customers, and the vast majority of that population has indicated that they will continue using ACS services.

In addition, Oracle has shown that ACS customers are more likely to uptake advanced technologies, upgrade to new product versions and utilize more product features—key benefits demonstrated in any value-added support model.

In terms of the bottom-line, Oracle's growth can be characterized as "up and to the right".

In Conclusion

Technology support is departing from the mold it has occupied for the last forty years. At the SSPA, we believe that over the next ten years, the goals of support executives will change from the current strategy of cutting costs, to actively driving product sales through value-added support. In addition, support executives will be measured by how well they have been able to influence the development organization to enable support and the organization's value-added support strategy.

We believe there is a unique and untapped lever to accelerate the sales and product margins of your product business, and that support can take a leading, strategic role in advancing that core business inside of your company.

About Shawn Santos.....

As Senior Program Manager with the **SSPA**, Shawn Santos focuses on developing and managing SSPA member programs, researching industry trends, and producing insightful content for the technology service and

support industry. Prior to SSPA, Shawn managed the inception, development and roll-out of service marketing programs for the test and measurement service and support division of **Agilent Technologies**. In addition, Shawn pioneered the development of new products and businesses at **Enologix** and **Global Vintage**—wine industry leaders in information systems, software, research and consulting. Shawn holds a B. S. in Molecular Biology from the University of California at Santa Cruz.



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