Mobile devices and mobile apps, the hybrid cloud and the personal cloud, Big Data, the Internet of Everything and software-defined anything, web-scale IT, smart machines and 3-D printers: these are just a few of the strategic technology trends on the horizon. Technical service and support organizations either have been, are being, or will be tasked with supporting these new technologies, and this will require innovation, flexibility, and new support paradigms. If you aren’t already thinking about these issues, this is no time to put your head in the sand.

Five Issues You Can’t Afford to Ignore in 2014

The articles in this feature focus on just a handful of the trends that will affect (or continue affecting) the technical service and support industry in 2014. Charles Araujo explains how customer expectations have changed and why we need to change our approach to managing the customer experience. Heidi Cook dissects the mobility challenge from the perspective of a major healthcare provider. Brian Madocks shares his vision of a future where the enterprise help desk is a hybrid virtual and physical help center. Eveline Oehrlich and David K. Johnson explain why virtualized applications and the service desk are a match made in heaven. And finally, Alan Berkson tells us why we can’t dabble in multichannel support, we must commit!

What are some of the challenge, opportunities, and trends on your radar? Tell us at www.HDIconnect.com!
In 1955, something happened in California that would change how we approach the world of IT some sixty years later. That year, Walt Disney unleashed his spectacular vision on the world in the form of Disneyland. It was unlike anything the world had seen before. Disneyland had a visceral effect on people. We were able to escape the reality of day-to-day life and enter a special world in which everything was good and we could imagine the world as it should and could be. It was, as Walt said, “the happiest place on earth.”

The opening of Disneyland was a watershed moment for the entertainment and theme-park industries, but it also set into motion an idea that would eventually permeate every facet of life in the western world—an idea that is now having a significant impact on us as IT professionals. Ignore it at your peril, because it will come to define everything about how we work going forward: People don’t buy a product. They buy an experience.

Before Walt opened the doors to the Magic Kingdom, there was no real concept of the engineered customer experience; people simply bought products. Likewise, while a more robust sense of service began to develop during the 1940s and ‘50s, that was more a factor of culture than intent. But Disneyland wasn’t just a product with great service. From top to bottom, it was designed to create exactly the experience that Walt himself envisioned that you have. That vision was so powerful, in fact, that it’s still almost exactly what we experience today when we visit the Disney parks.

Walt was right. People loved the idea of purchasing an experience. They loved buying the feeling they got when they crossed the threshold and stepped onto Main Street. People loved it so much, in fact, that they began to seek similar experiences. Today, whether it’s the Harley Davidson store, a themed restaurant, or the Apple Store, people want experiences, and they’re rewarding those organizations that can deliver them. And thanks to Apple, Google, and many other consumer technology companies, people are now looking for the same type of experience from their IT organizations. Welcome to your future.

Our World Has Changed

In The Quantum Age of IT: Why Everything You Know About IT Is About to Change (2012), I describe three market forces that I believe have changed the world of IT for good. One of these is what we now call the “consumerization of IT.” This is the idea that as consumer technologies have become more pervasive, they’ve changed our customers’ perceptions about how they should be able to interact with both their technology and their service providers.

In the world of IT, that’s us.

Our customers’ view of us and how we should interact with them has evolved, and it’s forever changed our relationship with them. The challenge is that, in many cases, we haven’t realized it. It’s why so many organizations are scratching their heads trying to figure out why their customers seem to be less and less satisfied with their services each year, even though they feel as though the quality of their services is getting better. Perceptions have changed. Relationships have changed. The rules are different.

The problem is that organizations still believe they’re delivering a service (i.e., a product), but their customers are actually buying experiences.
The Customer Equation

One of the Four Pillars of IT Transformations is something we call the customer equation. It’s a simple construct, and it goes like this:

If you want to have a positive, trusting, and productive relationship with your customer, you need to be focused on two things: delivering customer value and delivering a positive customer experience.

Having a happy customer means solving for both parts of this equation. Are you delivering the value that you promised? Are they getting something from their IT investment that’s meaningful to their business? That’s the first half of the equation. And in many cases, it’s the only part IT organizations ever focus on.

The challenge is that, as IT professionals and as service providers, we’re no longer judged solely by the value of our services (and I’m not sure we ever were). We’re also not judged by some discreet element of a service transaction. We’re judged by the totality of our customer’s interaction with us—and, increasingly, the shared experience with other customers. Our customers have come to expect a total customer experience. And they’re going to get it, one way or the other. So you’d better understand what it looks like.

The Four Moments of Truth in the Customer Experience

The good news is that you implicitly understand what the customer experience is all about. Why? Because when you put on your “consumer hat,” you most likely have the same expectations; for example, a restaurant can have great food, but if the service and ambiance are lacking, you probably won’t return. We’ve all come to expect a complete customer experience. And they’re going to get it, one way or the other. So you’d better understand what it looks like.

In What’s the Future of Business (2013), Brian Solis identifies what he calls the Four Moments of Truth that define the complete customer experience. It’s important to understand each of these Moments of Truth as you contemplate your role in IT service delivery.

- **The Zero Moment of Truth (Discovery):** Coined by Google, the very first moment of truth is when a customer has an unmet need and is seeking a solution. They begin to search for potential options and alternatives.

- **The First Moment of Truth (Exploration):** Coined by Proctor & Gamble, the second step of the experience is the one in which the customer actually interacts with you and/or your product or service. What is their first impression? Does the product speak to their needs?

- **The Second Moment of Truth (Consumption):** Also coined by Proctor & Gamble, the third step of the experience is after the customer has elected to purchase your product or service and is now using it and experiencing it. This moment lasts as long as the customer is engaged with the product.

- **The Ultimate Moment of Truth (Shared Engagement):** Coined by Solis, the final (or “ultimate”) moment of truth is when customers share their experience with others who are often experiencing their own Zero Moments. This influence loop generates a powerful force of either growth or destruction, depending on how positive or negative the customer’s experience has been.

These Moments of Truth were obviously developed from a marketing perspective and were designed to explain the process by which people make purchasing decisions. So you may be thinking, What does this have to do with IT? But the truth is that in this new era of IT, our customers have choices, and they’re making purchasing decisions every time they choose to deal with us. When you look at our industry, at the business of providing IT services, you’ll see that virtually all of our efforts are invested in the Second Moment of Truth, the experience customers have with our product or service. But their experience with us starts long before that moment.

The first point at which the customer begins to form opinions about any organization is when they don’t even know it exists, when they’re only focused on the problem they’re facing, not the solution (the Zero Moment of Truth). IT’s customers are in the same situation. They have problems, and they want to know who else has faced the same problems. They’re looking for paths that might lead them to solutions. Are you even involved in that conversation? That’s where the customer experience begins, and IT must learn to engage at that stage.

Once customers are ready to engage with us, even if they didn’t have a choice in the matter, we face the second stage of the customer experience: the First Moment of Truth. During that very first interaction, when a customer is simply trying to find a solution, when they’re exploring your products or services and trying to understand how you can help them, what kind of an impression are you making at that moment? Have you ever tried to request or acquire one of your own products or services? Was the process simple? Intuitive? Personal? Human? As IT professionals, we need to treat this second stage of the customer experience as if our careers depended on it—because it does. If customers find it difficult to do business with us, they’ll simply go elsewhere. So, how are you designing the process by which your customers can explore your products or services and then actually acquire them? (If you think it’s as simple as implementing a self-service service catalog, you’re in for a very rude awakening in the not-too-distant future.)

The third stage of the customer experience (the Second Moment of Truth) is where we spend most of our time: the actual consumption and use of the product or service we’re delivering and the customer’s experience with that process. The challenge we often have in IT is that we believe the different elements of the actual service delivery can be isolated and are experienced or evaluated independently. They can’t and aren’t. You can ask me how my experience was when I called the service desk, and if the agent was friendly and solved my problem, I may tell you that
my experience was good. But that doesn't mean that I'm happy. If I have to call every week because the service isn't reliable, or because an application was designed poorly and is making me work twice as hard as I should have to, or if everything runs slowly, or if...you get the idea. My real experience with the consumption and use of a product or service is the totality of those isolated events. I don't separate the pieces in my head, and neither do you. None of us do. Yet what do we do in IT? We ask our customers about just one small slice of their experience with a service or product's delivery, and then we wonder why those responses don't seem to line up with the complaints we hear.

This leads us to the Ultimate Moment of Truth: the shared experience. Solis's point was simply that we are becoming increasingly comfortable with sharing our experiences with others and basing decisions on those shared experiences. When was the last time you chose a new restaurant without first checking out the reviews on Yelp, UrbanSpoon, or TripAdvisor? This type of social community exists within and between our organizations as well, in person and online. What are you doing to create open opportunities for these shared experiences, so that you can learn from them and engage in the conversation? We must recognize that these conversations and shared experiences will have a massive effect on our customers' experience with us. You can't fight it, but you can create an open platform for these conversations; you can listen, you can engage, and you can make those shared experiences more positive.

Your Future IS the Experience

As IT professionals, this conversation about the customer experience and Moments of Truth may feel odd and uncomfortable. You’re in IT, not marketing, right? The truth is, as we move into the new era of IT, it will be all about the experience. You simply cannot afford to ignore this reality: Every moment of every day, before you ever even interact with them, you’re a part of your customer's experience with the IT organization. You need to realize it, remember it, and then ask yourself, What can I be doing right now to improve the customer experience at each Moment of Truth?

Health Check: The Challenge of Mobility

By Heidi Cook

Thousands of people pass through Floyd Medical Center facilities every year: patients, families, staff, and physicians, all of whom either want or need to access their data and applications whether they're on the hospital grounds or at one of the surrounding campuses. The growing mobility trend presents many challenges for IT management and staff in the healthcare field, and government regulations (plus the hefty fines that result from violating those regulations) ensure that patient privacy is at the top of everyone's minds when developing mobile solutions.

Whether it's a doctor who wants to review a patient's record on her iPad or a patient who wants to check Facebook while waiting for his lab results to come back, the FMC network is accessed thousands of times each day. The challenge is segmenting that user
population so that access is granted to those who need it, when they need it. BYOD, mobile device management (MDM), and network access control are just a few of the initiatives FMC will be launching in FY2014 to manage and regulate this access. Network access control, through products such as Cisco ISE, will allow IT to monitor and segment traffic as soon as users access the FMC network. Alerts, based on defined policies, will be used to revoke or redefine access as needed, and users will be required to agree to FMC's terms and conditions before connecting to any access points. Welcome screens will also be tailored to users based on their location in the hospital, providing information our customers need as soon as they log in to their devices. This customization will provide patients, visitors, staff, and physicians with a unique experience that will enhance their perception of the value they receive from being treated at or working for FMC.

Once a user is on the network, the applications they’re using on their devices must also be monitored and controlled. Mobile device management solutions, such as Airwatch, will give FMC the technical means to monitor device access, with policies tailored to FMC’s specific needs and the realities of the hospital environment. For example, FMC will be able to establish groups that grant or restrict access to certain applications based on a user’s job title in the Active Directory, allowing doctors and nurses to have different access than, say, a custodian; the same solution will give FMC the ability to immediately restrict access when employees leave FMC. MDM solutions will also permit FMC to “containerize” applications within the device, granting or revoking access rights and privileges as needed. Additional security measures, such as disabling the screenshot function on a device when accessing applications that contain personal health information, will ensure that patient records aren’t compromised. Finally, network traffic will be segmented based on need. For example, video-streaming applications, such as Netflix, won’t have as high a priority (i.e., share of bandwidth) as clinical applications that are directly related to patient care.

Security is always of the utmost importance, but it has to be balanced with usability. New policies are always thoroughly tested before being put into production to ensure that the right people continue to receive access to the information they need. However, further complicating matters is the growing demand from FMC employees for BYOD privileges. BYOD initiatives do save organizations tens of thousands of dollars in equipment purchases, but they also bring with them a host of security issues that must be thought through before rolling out such programs. One such issue involves using personal devices to access records and private data on the internal network. As part of our MDM policy, FMC will require employees to agree to terms and conditions that include the ability to remotely wipe devices in the event of a potential data breach, such as a lost or stolen phone. These terms will also establish boundaries and guidelines for balancing management of corporate data with access to personal data. FMC IT staff will do their best to be minimally invasive when managing personal device, and if an event occurs that requires wiping of a device, they will do what they can to leave the user’s personal data intact.

As more and more users access the FMC network, each campus must expand its wireless capabilities to ensure that critical access points can absorb the demand. Each access point (AP) can only support so many devices, so as more users try to access the network, more APs will be required. FMC IT staff are constantly surveying and testing for dead zones, and we’ve installed monitoring equipment that will notify management of signal degradation in the hospital and at satellite locations. Back-end infrastructure, such as data pipes, must also be equipped to handle growing demand for bandwidth. Infrastructure growth is a rolling target that FMC management strives to maintain so that all of our users receive consistent, reliable service, wherever they go.

All of the tools, technologies, and policies above must work together to create an ideal environment. If one piece of the puzzle is out of alignment, then a patient might not get the care he or she expects from FMC. The ultimate goal is a fully-connected environment that combines the strengths of mobility with security settings that allow users to go exactly where they need to go, and no further. In the future, FMC plans to implement unified communications, which roll voice, video, and messaging together into a single solution that provides a seamless user experience. Video conferencing will help FMC save both time and money when it comes to off-site meetings and professional development, while soft phones, or phones that are operated from a user’s computer, will allow users to make calls from anywhere in the world without physically being at their desks. Finally, instant messaging will give users the ability to share their desktops and documents with coworkers and receive quick answers that speed up the decision-making processes without the need for an in-person meeting. The possibilities are truly endless, and FMC is committed to giving its users the best, most secure care and service possible.

Whether your business is communications, manufacturing, retail, or fast food, there are lessons to be learned from healthcare’s approach to the mobility challenge. In healthcare, our users make life-and-death decisions every day, but even in industries where life and death aren’t on the line, businesses still want to see that support is adapting and evolving, making decisions and providing services that improve the bottom line. Mobility is truly one of the first critical steps on the path to success in the new world of IT, and if your organization hasn’t already taken that step, it should in 2014.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Heidi Cook is a certified Project Management Professional who has been with Floyd Medical Center since February 2013. Heidi came to the healthcare industry from the telecommunications industry, where she spent more than nine years. Heidi received her BS in information technology and marketing from Virginia Tech. In her spare time, she enjoys riding and training horses for rodeos and other competitions.
Imagine a future in which the enterprise help desk is not a desk or a physical department, but a hybrid virtual and physical help center with a very different composition of resources available to support business users. Imagine IT support teams closely aligned with the various business units, teams that include business-savvy IT consultants who advise lines of business on the best technology solutions for their specific needs. Imagine these help centers as highly attuned and responsive to individual business user needs, and highly commended and valued by the business. Can you see it?

In this future state, IT and the support organization are front and center, playing a critical role in continuous enterprise productivity enhancement. And, in fact, this vision is a reality for some organizations today. Strategic CIOs, with support and buy-in from their executive teams, are creating this type of environment, and continually evolving their support organizations to provide the right support in the right way at the right time.

In these new models, there are:

- Desktop support resources and more traditional help desk resources physically colocated with key business users, within a specific department or building, in one form or another—even specialists who know the business and can provide more proactive support and consultation. In a July 2012 research note (“Reinvent Your IT Frontline Capabilities”), Gartner stated that “some CIOs and infrastructure and operations leaders are reshaping their traditional, reactive, and technology-oriented IT Service Desks (ITSDs) into proactive business productivity teams.”1 It’s worth noting that in some industries, such as securities and investments, this idea of resources sitting within the department has been in use for many years, and they should be used as a reference point for this new help center model in other industries.

- Virtual support resources available to provide anytime, anywhere support for highly mobile or remote users.

- A mix of service delivery tools and capabilities, including desktop support, white-glove user support, text, chat, social, and others yet to come.

- Support personnel with varying degrees of expertise spanning traditional hardware and new form factors coming to market, traditional applications and new specialized apps (including proprietary apps specific to the company and key lines of business), and platforms. The future enterprise will have all of these elements within its environment, on a rapid and continuous refresh cycle, and a corresponding need to support the workforce using these tools.

- Support personnel and leadership with a unique set of skills and personality traits, including technical skills as well emotional intelligence and customer service skills.

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1 Other reports in this series include “Best Practices for Conducting the Business Productivity Team Proof of Concept” (September 2012) and “Four Keys to a Successful Business Productivity Team Implementation” (April 2013). Visit www.gartner.com to learn more.
• Resources that may come from a combination of internal staff, contractors, and third-party sources, in a flexible staffing model that enables agility, timely capacity adjustments, and rapid response to existing and emerging needs.

Future support organizations will have to be agile and nimble, open to change, and ready to deliver innovations to the business. In an April 2013 Gartner research note (“Bring Your Own Device: The Facts and the Future”), David Willis suggests that IT groups “look for opportunities throughout the entire workforce where mobility could drive substantial innovation.” The business-responsive help center of the future will be a source of information—a window into the business—for the broader IT organization to see opportunities for innovation.

**Staffing the Future Help Center**

To implement the help center concept described above, organizations will need to be creative in staffing, training, coaching, evaluating, and developing their personnel. One overarching conclusion noted in HDI’s June 2013 research report, *The Technical Support Center of the Future*, was that “the ability of IT support teams to provide an outstanding level of customer service will be important to helping organizations and their employees understand how to appropriately leverage both known and emerging technologies in the business. IT support teams will also be instrumental in helping organizations find new ways to use technology to streamline operations, reduce costs, and better meet the needs of end users.”

The report also noted that “in order to continue delivering value to the organization and moving in new directions as business needs dictate, technical support professionals will need to wear many hats. Therefore, perhaps the biggest changes on the horizon for the technical support industry will be less need for those who are highly skilled in just one or two technical areas and greater
demand for IT services professionals with strong interpersonal
skills who can quickly learn how to assist users with a wide range
of technologies and adapt to new ways of working.”

The Many Hats IT Support Professionals
Will Wear in the Future

- Customer advocate: 76%
- Customer productivity enabler: 69%
- Liaison to cloud/managed services providers: 54%
- Liaison to mobile device vendors: 54%
- Business relationship manager (business collaborator): 53%
- Change advocate: 52%
- Technology innovator: 45%
- Other: 3%

Source: Robert Half Technology and HDI, The Technical Support Center of the Future (June 2013)

Steps to Evolve Your Help Desk
into a Help Center of the Future

- Begin to redefine your support organization’s mission
  and objectives to include these broader challenges
  and aspirations.
- Assess the current state of your support model
  and personnel.
- Outline the services you believe the business may need in
  the future, and gather direct input and feedback from your
  user community to validate.
- Collaborate with business users to get closer to the
  business and learn more about what business users
  really need (i.e., allow the support organization to be a
  true enabler for the business).

- Think in terms of providing more than just basic
  technical support, and, again, gather feedback from
  your user community on the types of support they
  would deem valuable.
- Identify third-party resources to fill long- and short-term
  gaps in your support offerings, and provide a source of
  flex-capacity. This will allow you to bring in additional
  services when needed, making the IT department much
  more agile and responsive.
- Stay educated. Services and device providers such as
  Microsoft, IBM, Deloitte, Dell, Cisco, and others offer
  various options for facilitating business-user envisioning
  sessions at state-of-the-art facilities.
- Organize sessions and pilots to allow support personnel
  and business-user groups to see new platforms,
  applications, devices, and operating systems. Let them
  see and talk about how they can use the new features,
  capabilities and tools.

This is an exciting time and inflection point in the evolution of
the enterprise support organization—a time when visionary
leaders can move to center stage and transform their support
organizations into vital centers of critical support for the business.
The organizations that successfully evolve their service models
and offerings will have a dramatic impact on the businesses they
support, and they’ll establish themselves as invaluable service
providers to the business.

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device, where they execute locally. The best usage scenario for this technology is that it simplifies the deployment and management of desktop applications to users with traditional PCs or laptops. The three leading application virtualization solutions are Citrix's XenApp, Microsoft's App-V, and VMware's ThinApp. Application virtualization often goes hand in hand with client virtualization, which encompasses technologies like thin clients, virtual desktop initiatives (VDI), and workspace virtualization. All of these are in a growth phase, but many organizations see application virtualization, specifically, as the future of software delivery for an increasingly diverse workforce.

So why is this important to the service desk or service support team? The adoption of application virtualization has several key benefits for your service desk:

- One of the most attractive benefits of application virtualization is that it lowers support costs. Let's think through this together: On-site visits greatly increase support costs. Forrester estimates that an on-site support visit can cost eight times as much as a phone-based support call. Application virtualization technologies make deskside visits a thing of the past because all of the computing is now happening in the data center. This means that IT staffers can fix desktop or application problems simply by logging into the server.

- Application virtualization isolates an application's resources, eliminating the risk of conflict with other applications. Supporting such applications becomes much easier as the support staff doesn't have to troubleshoot much on the PC and they leave no footprint—the application is streamed from a server.

Is your company seeing the continual growth of application virtualization? According to our research, 49 percent of IT decision makers rank implementing and expanding the use of client virtualization, thin client, and application-streaming technologies as either a critical or major user-computing priority. The primary drivers are mobility, manageability, lowering costs, flexible remote access, disaster recovery, security, compliance, and better support for BYOD programs. Last year, many enterprise IT decision makers reported that they were planning to “implement” or “expand” their current implementation for each of the following technologies: VDI (28%), desktops-as-a-service (15%), and application virtualization (29%). These technologies and trends are poised to continue developing in 2014. Hopefully, your company has adopted application virtualization or is planning to grow its adoption. If so, that’s great news for your service desk and desktop team.

As a quick refresher, application virtualization technology isolates applications from the underlying operating system and from other applications to ease compatibility and simplify management challenges. It enables applications to be streamed from a centralized location into an isolated environment on the target
• Bandwidth issues or performance issues can typically be managed more easily. If implemented correctly, application virtualization works well when there is acceptable bandwidth (for streaming) and a fixed number of known applications are in use.

• Application virtualization dramatically improves security, as this can be managed at the source rather than at the client level.

• Application virtualization can significantly reduce the costs of ongoing support and patch management.

What does this mean for your organization? If you’re not yet involved in your company’s decision-making process, then get up and move! In today’s “age of the customer,” your organization should be investing in business technologies that allow your company to become customer-obsessed, to drive growth and differentiate itself from its competition. To make this vision a reality, your organization must plan for and adopt new technologies that will have an impact on how users are supported and empowered to run their business processes and services. These issues are the cornerstone of differentiation.

Successful service desk teams should adopt, socialize, and leverage simplification and cost-reduction measures in their end-user support strategies. This will enable them to simultaneously accommodate the needs of their workforces and master freedom and security. These industry leaders will do so by adopting client virtualization, formalizing BYOD programs, and becoming brokers of cloud-based services. The result: less time wasted on the inefficiencies of legacy applications and circumventing IT’s policies and controls.

There was a time when it was enough to have a toll-free phone number as a single channel for customer service. Those days are long gone. The world is multichannel, and organizations need to embrace multichannel support. In fact, the multichannel part is a given; let’s just call it support.

But if that’s all there was to it, this would be a very short article.

Today, organizations are facing a proliferation of communications channels, and this is changing the way they communicate within their organizations and, more importantly, with their customers. We’re living in an era of what I call pervasive communications, where conversations are truly global, no longer constrained by national or natural borders. As I wrote back in 2011:

The challenge now is that pervasive communication has become chaotic—the sprawl of communication mediums offers competing, yet similar functions. Conversations now leap among platforms and channels with an unprecedented fluidity—a Twitter update engenders an SMS text which leads to a phone conversation that informs a blog post that points to a website viewed on a

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mobile device which generates a sale in a brick-and-mortar venue—yes, chaotic, hyperconnected, ubiquitous and nonlinear.¹

There is constant innovation in communications and communications channels. We have traditional channels like phone, email, and fax, which are often implemented with on-premises, hardware-based technology. Then there are newer channels like websites, Twitter, and Facebook. And what about mobile? SMS? VoIP? Video conferencing? Chat? The list goes on and on, and it's growing rapidly.

As organizations, we have to think about multichannel as a strategy. Not so our customers. They live in a world of pervasive communications. They're inherently multichannel. They use the tools at hand with equal alacrity. The challenge with a multichannel support strategy is not just covering your preferred channels, but covering the channels preferred by your customers.

While much of what I’ll cover here can be applied to overall customer service within an organization, my intention is to help you leverage and enhance your customer service as you add channels to your multichannel support strategy. I will focus on two areas: a general cycle for support maturation that is applicable to new channels, and some advice and thoughts on how to be successful in approaching and adopting new support channels.

The Great Pyramid of Support Maturity

Getting a handle on support requires a macro and a micro strategy. Vikram Bhaskaran, director of marketing at Freshdesk, has built what he calls the Great Pyramid of Support, a hierarchy of how support evolves both within an organization and often within specific channels:

- **Chaos to control**: When you enter a new channel, it's usually chaos. There’s a learning curve for communicating within a channel and delivering support. So very often the first activity is going from chaos to control: delivering a consistent and effective customer experience in the channel.

- **Reactive to proactive**: The newest channels for support have changed the paradigm. For a long time, customer support was a one-to-one interaction. With social media, conversations have moved from one-to-one—email, phone, chat—to many-to-many. On social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, your customers are sharing their desires and problems with the world. Customer service is no longer about reacting, just waiting for the phone to ring. Your customers are taking to social, whether you want to be there or not.

One Community, Everywhere

Getting back to our central premise, it’s not about the channels in your service, it’s about the service in your channels. Customers want a unified experience everywhere they go (or, if not unified, at least satisfactory). The interaction customers have in a channel may be the first (and only) interaction they have with your organization. As you look to extend your support to new channels, here are some thoughts to keep in mind:

- **To be (there) or not to be (there)**: So, what channels should you be on for support? The easy answer is, Be where your customers are. If only it were that simple.

Here’s a question many support managers and leadership often ask: Is it better to be in a channel and do it poorly, than to not be there at all?

The bottom line? You can be sure that even if you aren’t there, your competitors will be. Consider this: If you knew 80, 60, or even 20 percent of your customer base was gathering in Central Park to talk about you, what would you do? Ideally, you’d get yourself to the park as quickly as possible, even if it was just to hear what they were talking about.

- **No support is worse than bad support:** The response most businesses give when asked why they’re not exploring newer channels is, *What if we do a bad job? It’s Ostrich Syndrome: when in doubt, hide your head in the sand, and hope the problem goes away. However, customers have moved on to these new channels, and they’re not going away. So, by not getting there, you’re actually just avoiding them.

If you actually did do a terrible job, and you knew it, there’s at least a chance of improvement. You could try and explain your position, and you might eventually get a few customers back on your side. But by just not going, you’re missing out on even that opportunity.

- **Show them you care:** When it comes to support, the opposite of love isn’t hate, it’s indifference. Organizations are afraid of social media because they’re scared they’ll get caught in a flame war with dissatisfied customers. But when customers find themselves talking to a wall, they believe you just don’t care.

Multichannel customer experience can be the biggest opportunity or the greatest point of failure. You control the outcome, depending on how much effort you put into it. By not taking a multichannel approach, you’re just closing out any possibility in that channel.

- **Mobile is the ultimate disruptor:** Mobile users have perhaps the greatest range of channels to choose from: voice, SMS, MMS, web, etc. And in developing countries, many (most?) people have a smartphone before they get any other computing/communications device. It’s critical that businesses are able to connect with customers regardless of where they are or what device they’re using.

- **Support in the cloud:** Today’s businesses are pushing the envelope in communications technology, leveraging clouds and platforms to replace older hardware-based communications channels. Support organizations need to keep up with the pace. They can use the same cloud and platform technologies to not only connect with more customers but also provide a more unified experience.

- **Managing expectations:** With new channels, the temptation is to overdeliver. This is a great goal, but it’s often not sustainable or scalable. While customers will always want as rapid resolution as possible, setting and meeting expectations in terms of response and resolution go a long way towards improving the overall customer experience.

While the advice here is pretty straightforward, most of the challenges facing support organizations and, in particular, contact centers as they embrace multichannel support:

To keep pace, contact centers need to move away from their brittle hardware-centric infrastructures and into the cloud and make that new cloud-based infrastructure addressable via standard software interfaces. This shift from closet to cloud allows infinite flexibility and agility, and lets you to keep pace with the increasing change in the customer interface and employ a more holistic approach to communications. From email to text messaging, web apps to picture messages, etc.—today’s users don’t see distinct communication channels, they simply see communication. The number of communications channels will continue to increase and relying on a hardware vendor to keep up-to-date is a growing risk for these companies.

**It’s Your Service, Whatever the Channel**

Change is never easy, and one of the biggest challenges with multichannel support is simply the pace of change. It will require vision, creativity, and strong leadership to see it through. It will require some experimentation and failure. And it will require staying true to your customers in terms of who you are as an organization. After all, you’re not changing your support culture, just extending it to new channels.

In the end, customer service is an aligned goal, for the customer and the organization. Any way you can increase the connection and decrease the friction in this interaction is a step in the right direction.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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