

Customer Self-service Portals



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Executive Summary

The number of Internet users has grown to 700 million and still expanding at a phenomenal rate. The demand of Self-service portals is also increasing. More and more users want interactive self-service websites to reduce the time and effort of consuming a service.

This White Paper highlights the emergence of Customer Self-service portals, its benefits and more.

Introduction

With rapidly growing demands of an increasing customer base, the customer-servicing costs have become unaffordable. Dependence on human interface and contact centers is reducing due to deteriorated services and high costs. The late 90s experienced changing trend in the way customers wanted to be served.

Growing complexity in businesses led to a massive increase in the number of processes, applications and user database to be maintained. Data being stored at multiple locations consumed more time to integrate. With number of users increasing and complexity of processes growing, companies outsourced their customer services to multiple call centers. The costs and the dependence on human interface, thus, added tremendous burden on company funds whereas quality of customer servicing continued to drop. Users expected faster services and access through multiple channels like the Internet and mobile phones.

According to a Gartner study, the customer servicing costs of answering e-mail can vary widely, from \$2.50 per transaction to as high as \$40 per transaction. The chat sessions run about \$7 per transaction and the phone support costs average to about \$5.50 per call.

Business Challenges

Companies, consistently, face the challenge to provide satisfactory customer service for their products and services. The competitive environment has further pushed customer's expectations up and company profit margins down. Customers expect technical support, catalogs, account information and access to personalized data and

applications through customized platforms. The major concerns for companies are:

- **High customer services costs**

Majority of the customer services are still provided through call centers requiring costly human interface. With products and customers increasing rapidly, the customer service costs have also been growing, rapidly.

- **Scattered customer data**

Customer orders, products purchased, customer history is stored in different systems. Since the systems are a combination of CRM, ERP and proprietary systems, integration requires longer call time and increased cost. The customer service representatives have to go through information stored in several systems to answer a single customer query.

- **Growing complexity of processes**

With diversification of company services, there is an increase in applications, data, functionalities and users. Integration takes a longer processing cycle with data being stored at different locations. Several sources have to be referred to answer a single user-query.

- **Inconsistent Information**

Disparate and inconsistent customer information on entitlements, preferences and contact information can lead to customer dissatisfaction and lower customer lifetime value.

- **Low Customer Satisfaction**

With users, services and complexity growing, the response time taken to answer user-queries increases. The delay could further increase, if any of the applications is slow at integrating data from multiple resources. The risk of erroneous data being processed is high due to high pressure on customer service personnel.

- **Increased Competition**

Many companies have adopted self-service portals to deliver instant information to users on multiple channels. Information is made available on mobiles, PDAs, laptops and other medium. Better services mean enhanced customer acquisition and retention for competitors.

The Changing trend

Highly acclaimed community portal, Yahoo, introduced the user-centric personalized portal My Yahoo! in 1996. Users needed to create a profile to access a gamut of information through a personal web space. The users experienced up-to-date view of information streamed on the basis of their preferences.

Portals were preferred over other content websites to provide consolidated, customized and updated information. The trend moved towards one-click information on weather, cities, movies, music, communities, latest news, stock update and much more with customized and personalized user web space. Users started expecting the possibility of paying bills, checking bank accounts, transferring funds, city information and tracking insurance claims through a secure online platform. Users, no longer, wished to be caught in the slow and lengthy request-processing loop offered by call centers.

Self-service portals, thus, evolved a user-centric web-based platform approach. It enables an anywhere anytime model with data integration from multiple sources facilitated through an open architecture. Users can access instant information through a personal web space where they can even specify their preferences to view specific data categories. With Service Oriented Architecture enabled, the information can be accessed through PCs, mobile phones, PDAs and other channels. With online self-service model, companies significantly saved on customer services.

The overall costs incurred with toll-free phone support, emails and chat sessions amount to much more than self-service portal. Intelligent data analysis is provided by sophisticated aggregation and integration functions of portals. The advanced analysis capability enables easy identification of potential customers by capturing user-browsing behavior. 'Customer lifetime value' can be enhanced with personalized and instant interface. It also optimizes the business environment for remote and local collaboration of data, software and applications. Portals are designed to manage large data requirements like integration, storage and data processing.

Customer Self-service Portal (CSS)

Infogain's Customer Self-service Portal is targeted to meet the specific requirements of the B2C domain. It provides an end-to-end solution for E-commerce activities enabled through a single sign-on personalized platform for users with data and applications accessible on-demand. The end-users are provided with extensive information streamed through a wide network of sources. The information is then processed and collated into precisely the data requested by the end-users.

The most common customer service functions facilitated by CSS are:

- **Account Management**

Enables personalized access to information about assets purchased, warranty & entitlement information and other such account specific details.

- **Incident Management**

Provides the facility for customers to report problems, issues and questions regarding products. Also, can track the progress of incidents and services requested.

- **Knowledge Management**

Allows a customer to find answers to problems/queries through FAQs and knowledge management tools.

- **Performance Reporting**

Access to online reports required as per contractual obligations.

Technical Architecture of CSS

Infogain's technical architecture for the CSS is based on an interoperable, scalable, secure, extensible, workflow based solution that extends existing enterprise architecture, workflow framework and application interfaces.

Implementation Methodology

Infogain's implementation methodology is based on mature development processes and best practices that have been developed and refined, over the years. It has helped the company execute medium to large-scale projects on Web and Client Server technology.

Infogain follows a phased implementation approach with a defined set of activities and deliverables for each phase. The iterative/ incremental development approach clearly addresses the project risks during the early stages of project initiation.

CSS Benefits

CSS is beneficial for both Customers and Company.

Company Benefits

- Optimized Total Customer Experience
- Enhanced Customer Lifetime Value
- Reduced costs on customer servicing, software, hardware and human interface
- Identification of potential customers through clickstream analysis
- Service oriented architecture to enable scalability and zeroed maintenance costs
- Integrated web services for data integration across wider data network
- Improved Return on Investment with high customer value, satisfaction and retention

Customer Benefits

- Improved customer services
- Consistent, instant and anytime support
- Rapid problem resolution
- Personalized interface and content based information suited to individual preferences
- Secure access with the convenient single sign-on capability

About Infogain

Infogain, The Customer Knowledge Company, develops and delivers Customer Asset Strategies to increase tactical and strategic decision-making capabilities across the enterprise. As a leading provider of CRM, ERP, integration, and business intelligence services to the Global 2000, Infogain turns customer data into strategic knowledge that positively affects the entire enterprise. Established in 1990 with international offices, Infogain has a long-standing commitment to global delivery and is uniquely qualified to deliver end-to-end solutions through valuable strategy consulting services and highly skilled engineering execution. Strategic and technology partners include Amdocs/Clarify, BEA, BroadVision, IBM, Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories, Netezza, PeopleSoft, Siebel, and Tibco. For additional information on Infogain's full range of services, please visit our website at www.infogain.com or mail us info@infogain.com

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Related Information

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[White Paper: Evolution of Portals](#)

[White Paper: Comparing Portal Development Tools](#)

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