



Specialist in providing IT and CRM services and solutions

Web-based help centre services

Merlin Information Systems Group
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Merlin operates an IT support services business, based in Buckingham, England, specialising in the provision of e-CRM, help centre, technical and systems monitoring services to medium-sized and large businesses around the world. It was founded ten years ago by four of its present directors. Its annual turnover is approximately £4 million. The group now employs some 100 highly skilled and dedicated staff, led by an experienced management team, who pride themselves in delivering high quality services and support to clients. Those clients include such major companies as Gillette, Emerson, BT and DHL.

Over the last two years a primary focus of the development of Merlin's business has been the development of the HelpMagic brand and technology. The aim was to develop an integrated solution that would allow a user to communicate through a web site with a customer services or help centre agent. Using technologies from a number of strategic partners, HelpMagic has been able to develop a fully integrated telephone and internet customer services communication solution. The HelpMagic solution offers customer support capabilities including voice over IP (VOIP), text chat, automated e-mail response, call back and a powerful on-line knowledge base. Incoming user communications can be directed to the right agent using skill based routing, enabling accurate and timely response to user requests.

The help desk portal concept

The IT help desk function is a problem for many large companies. For some, it can be a considerable source of user dissatisfaction, often causing the IT department as a whole to lose credibility and reducing confidence in their ability to deliver on business critical projects. For others it can be a meaningful cost which they would like to reduce. A few companies do not provide one, leaving users to fend for themselves, often resulting in the loss of productivity of key people.

Merlin's concept is to provide users with a dedicated portal which, through the use of the HelpMagic technology, will provide a range of content and resources to enable them to quickly and easily find a solution to a problem without always having to speak to a help centre agent.

The telephone is the most expensive method of providing support, excluding desk-side support. The chart (based on IT industry standards, source: CRM 20:20 contactbabel) summarises the cost of the various forms of interaction.

By using a portal concept, a significant proportion of user queries can be moved away from the telephone to a more mixed media approach and to lower cost communication channels.

Additionally, research has shown that a much higher level of customer satisfaction can be achieved by giving users the choice of communication channel that suits them.

Interaction Type	Average cost per interaction
Automated E-mail	£0.25
Web self-service	£0.50
IVR	£1.10
Assisted e-mail	£2.50
Unassisted e-mail	£9.00
Telephone	£9.50

Self-help combined with access to help centre agents through the portal, provides the best balance when providing support.

What does the support portal provide?

The support portal is accessed over the web or intranet, and provides various methods of answering questions and issues users may have relating to standard desktop hardware and software issues, although it need not only apply to IT related services.

The service includes a powerful knowledge base that will answer many user questions. This knowledge base is also updated daily with new questions and answers so that the knowledge is continually built upon. It is not just generic; it can be focused on issues and software particular to the company concerned and can include specific business applications. Additionally, users can check the top 'frequently asked questions' that are dynamically updated based on the basis of questions asked most; log a support call and then view any updates on line. If a query is not so urgent, a user can simply send an email. If a problem is urgent, a user can speak to a help centre agent directly by requesting an online chat session or requesting a telephone call back directly from the portal, or simply dialling the central help desk telephone number provided.

Statistical support

Merlin has successfully delivered the service to a number of organisations over the past six months and has seen some dramatic results. Below is a breakdown of the results from a portal service delivered to the European operations of a major S&P500 group between January and May 2002.

Service Benchmark		Actual % of total contacts
Voice	Calls presented by phone	18%
Chat	Number of Chat sessions used	1%
Email	Issues raised via email from portal	50%
Log online	Logged on-line directly by customer	10%
Self-help	Answers to issues using knowledgebase	21%

Voice, which is the most expensive channel to provide support, represented only 18% of communications into the help centre with email being the most popular. If email is aggregated with calls logged directly into the help desk system, it shows that 60% of calls were logged through non-agent interactive communications channels. The knowledge-base resources resolved 21% of user queries without any contact with a help desk agent.

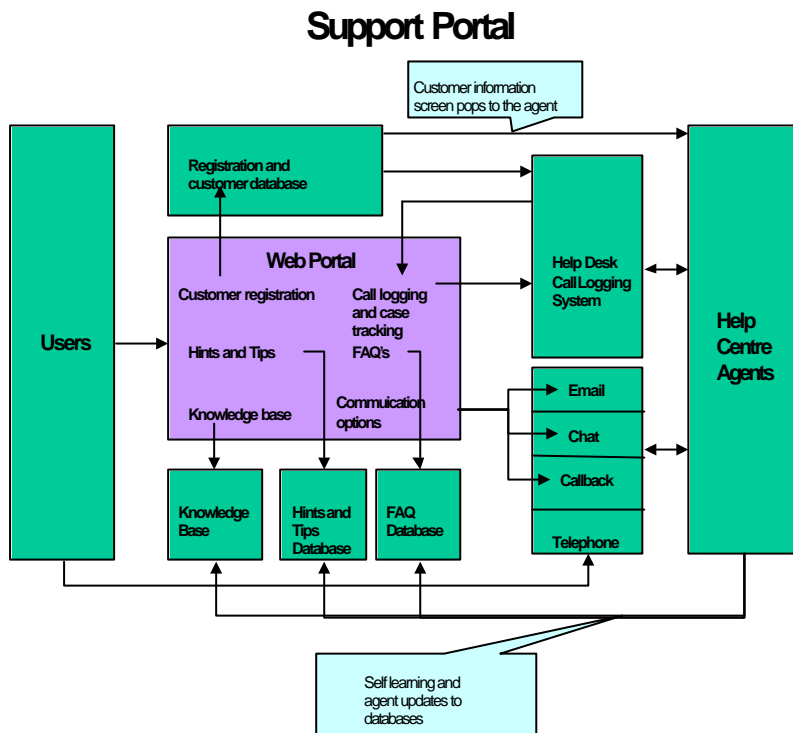
Applying the industry standard costs by channel, a saving of around 56% can be made over the cost of delivering the same service using a more traditional telephone only based service.

However, not only does the portal reduce cost, but the same organisation saw customer satisfaction rise substantially as a result. With a sample user base of 2000 and 80% accuracy (using Gartner statistical analysis methods) the users rated the portal as follows:

Question		Response
1	How easy was the portal to use?	92% of users rated this 3 or above with 77% rating it 4 or above
2	How good was the Portal service?	88% of users rated the service 4 or above
3	Preferred method of communication?	1. E-mail 2. On-line call logging 3. Telephone 4. Call-back 5. Chat
	Rating used in question 1 and 2	Rating 5=Excellent, 3=Good, 0=Poor

Managed Service

Provision as a managed service takes away the high capital cost, high implementation and integration costs, long implementation timescales and high support costs of a premise based solution. Merlin's 'pay as you go' business model delivers fast ROI and immediate service impact. Merlin has developed close relationships with world leading software providers for computer telephony integration, knowledge management and help desk from Genesys, Serviceware and Infra, while utilising Helpmagic's web based ASP customer service solutions.



Merlin can provide the outsourced help centre agents.

The portal opens up many further opportunities for automating business processes that today are done manually. For example, password resets, procurement, mobile user backups, software downloads to name a few.

Modular Approach

The portal technology is completely modular allowing the customer to pick and choose which, or all, of the elements they wish to implement. For example, a customer may have an existing help desk call logging system; this can be integrated into the portal for call logging and case tracking. The customer can use Merlin's agents or their own agents, or if required, a mixture of both for maybe out of hours or language capabilities. The customer can choose all or just a few of the communication options that best suit their business environment. And finally, the portal itself is designed with the customers corporate branding making it transparent to the user that Merlin manages the portal. By providing this flexibility, Merlin can deliver the right balance to meet the specific needs of its customers.

Summary

Implementing a central support portal will bring many positive advantages including:

- A central point of entry for all support
- A single point of contact for all users
- Consistency in service, procedures, processes and disciplines
- Sensible and achievable service levels for all types of call
- Comprehensive range of self-help facilities to enable users to help themselves
- Wider choice of communication channels to get help
- Improved customer satisfaction and improved user productivity
- Significantly reduced support costs through more cost effective methods of support
- Better management information and analysis capabilities
- Greater opportunity to streamline business processes in the future to improve the support experience.



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