

THE POWER OF CHOICE

OPTIMIZING
MULTI-
CHANNEL
SUPPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Today's consumers have access to a myriad of channels to connect with the companies they patronize. If we have a question about our latest phone bill or want to switch electricity providers, we can initiate a conversation with these companies in numerous ways. As consumers demand new and increasingly flexible ways to access support, companies are responding by increasing customer service channels, including call centers, email, Live Chat, self-service portals and even social media.

In the business IT space, a similar trend is emerging, although the rate of change has been much slower. The traditional support framework, structured around a single call center with some ancillary self-service resources, is becoming obsolete. Users are beginning to expect a wider range of options for gaining support for their workplace technologies.

This white paper explores how leading companies are embracing multi-channel IT support by providing users with access to a number of different support channels and by strategically guiding user traffic to optimize that support framework, an approach that is becoming the gold standard in the provision of end-user support.

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EMERGENCE OF MULTIPLE CHANNELS

Most people today are accustomed to many choices when it comes to accessing support for their consumer goods and services. They can seek support by contacting a call center, emailing, using Live Chat, using self-service portals and even through social media. The increasing number of support channels is a trend that is also reflected in the business support space, albeit at a slower rate.

Traditionally, an employee of a business would access support by calling a single, central IT call center. Although self-support tools have been part of the support framework, their usage has traditionally been low and associated with poor user experiences. This has meant that self-service portals have long been underutilized by end users.

Recently, however, we have seen a significant shift away from this traditional model of support. Sophisticated companies, following the trend in the consumer space, have embraced multi-channel support and have started to introduce options like Live Chat and walk-up support kiosks into their existing frameworks. In addition, companies have been revamping their self-service portals with an emphasis on the end-user experience. Whereas self-service portals used to be characterized by poor navigation and technology-heavy jargon, they now are becoming known for their intuitive interfaces and user-friendly tools. By improving the end-user experience, these companies have seen an increase in support traffic through this channel.

Connection points between support channels (Figure 1)



STRATEGY GUIDES THE CHANNEL MIX

The most sophisticated organizations, however, are not merely adding new support channels to the mix and allowing users to simply flow into whichever channel appeals most. Instead, these companies are approaching their support mix with a strategy to maximize user satisfaction while simultaneously reducing the cost to serve. What does this process involve?

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First, companies must understand their current support framework. This typically involves investigating four distinct domains. The goal is to:

- 1. Understand current usage of support channels.** How do users currently seek help? Are certain channels chronically underutilized?
- 2. Understand the user experience associated with each of these channels.** How satisfied are users with each support channel? Does a strong difference in service experience by channel impact usage levels?
- 3. Know why your users are seeking support.** What are the most common reasons for seeking support? How does user satisfaction vary by issue type? Is your support team providing a better user experience for certain issue types than others?
- 4. Understand how issue type influences channel usage.** Do the patterns of channel usage depend on the issue for which users are requesting help?

Once a company can answer each of the questions, they are well-positioned to start implementing initiatives that redirect support traffic into their preferred configuration.

THE USER-EXPERIENCE INDEX

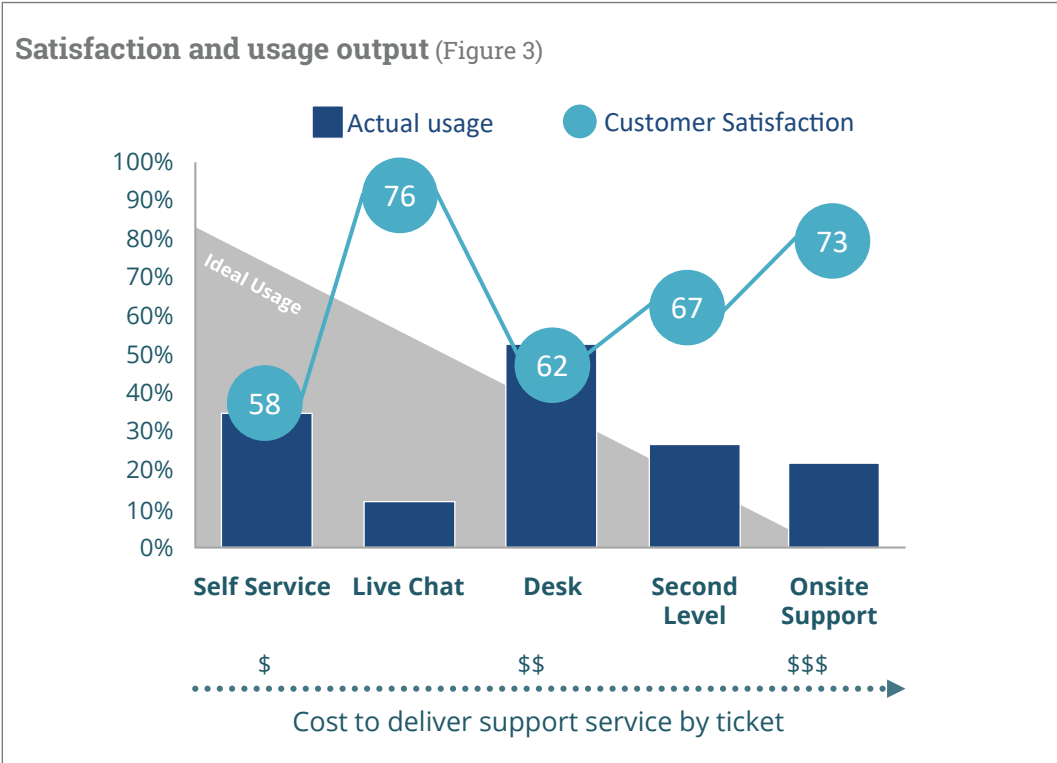
A number of organizations are working to better understand the way their current support framework operates and how they can optimize it. ISG's User-Experience index (UEi) is a vehicle for helping clients to measure usage and satisfaction by support channel and by call type. Our research highlights the barriers and levers to shifting traffic in a ways that optimize the support service.

The ISG UEi is an online survey that captures usage and satisfaction with services delivered. As can be seen in Figure 2, the UEi divides IT services into support, services and workplace tools to address support in a holistic way and include the increasing number of available support channels.

The UEi captures satisfaction by service (Figure 2)		
Channel	Services	Workplace Tools
• Live chat	• Procurement	• Productivity tools
• Support kiosk	• Onboarding	• Collaboration tools
• Self-service portal	• Acquiring user IDs	
• Service desk		
• Onsite support		

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The output of the UEi illustrates the usage and satisfaction in each support channel in conjunction with indicative cost. Figure 3 shows blue bars that represent the actual usage pattern of the support channels over the past six months within this specific client, and yellow circles that represent the satisfaction associated with each channel. The gray wedge represents the ideal support model: usage should be highest in the lowest-cost support channel.



Analysis of a company’s UEi data provides insight into support channel preferences, drivers and barriers of choice and satisfaction. Support channel usage is analyzed by call type (incident, request and information) to further refine the support model.

Case study

An organization was experiencing high traffic through its call center and low usage of its self-service portal, combined with low satisfaction associated with both channels. Employees claimed that the self-service portal was hard to navigate and required too many steps to submit a support request while the wait times for the call center were too long.

When this company analyzed its channel usage by call type, it found it was receiving an unusually high number of calls to the service desk for password resets. The usage of the portal for this support request was low and associated with very low satisfaction. The qualitative feedback revealed the process for resetting a password via the portal was so onerous that users were bypassing the portal in favor of the call center, even though the wait time was much longer than for the self-serve option.

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By improving the functionality and usability of the password reset process, this organization was able to shift traffic away from the service desk to the self-service portal. User satisfaction associated with password resets increased because the self-service process was fast and did not require waiting for service desk personnel to answer the phone. Finally, the company was able to reduce the cost to serve these call types by driving users toward self-service.

CONCLUSION

Multi-channel support frameworks offer considerable benefits both to companies and end users. End users value the increased flexibility that comes with multiple support channels and often naturally gravitate toward the channel that best meets their needs.

Sophisticated companies, therefore, have the opportunity to design their support framework in ways that maximize the end-user experience and reduce the cost to serve. To do this requires four steps. First, companies must understand the current usage and satisfaction associated with each support channel. Second, they must determine the patterns of usage that are optimal for their specific environment. Third, they must implement actions to encourage this usage pattern. And finally, they must re-measure to ensure the implemented actions are having the intended effect.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

THE POWER OF CHOICE: OPTIMIZING MULTI-CHANNEL SUPPORT

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Lisa is part of an ISG team that provides business-to-business satisfaction measurement and benchmarking. She has led more than 200 research programs for companies across a range of industries, including Financial Services, Manufacturing, Retail, Logistics and Hospitality. A hallmark of Lisa's approach is that the insights she produces drive real and measurable change for her clients, rejuvenating and remediating supplier relationships in some of the world's largest organizations. Lisa developed the proprietary framework which forms the foundation of the ISG Business Relationship monitor and has successfully implemented this framework in organizations spanning Asia-Pacific, North America and Europe. Lisa has a strong analytical capacity, which enables her to distil complex reports into succinct, actionable insight, backed by statistical rigor. She believes strongly in the power of statistical tools to deliver business insight and considers the presentation of findings as a dialogue and an opportunity to highlight the responsibility of both the supplier and the client in the success of engagements.



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