

Self-Service Isn't Self-Serving!



Background

The Internet has transformed the way we shop - to the point where we take it for granted that a couple of clicks on a site such as Amazon will deliver a product to our doorstep the following day. It is easy to forget that the e-commerce world has had to learn a number of painful lessons along the way. For example, breaking the vital bond of trust with the consumer because of issues such as cyber crime, below-standard products or poor customer service. Now, thanks to advancements in secure payment technology, customer benefits (free postage, next day delivery etc.) and simpler user interfaces, online retail is a rapidly growing market - from 3.6% of total retail sales in September 2007 to 18.1% in September 2019 .

Clearly, self-service is the name of the game. So, why are IT Service Providers lagging behind?

The most recent Service Desk Benchmarking Report produced by the Service Desk Institute (SDI) revealed that 58% of organisations offered self-service options in 2017 - 2% more than in 2015. However, those options only accounted for 21% of calls that year - only 1% more than in 2015.

In other words, while there is a high, and growing, proportion of IT Service Providers offering self-service, the actual take-up of this service remains low.

This should come as a surprise given that self-service can deliver enormous benefits to the user, business and service provider, such as improved customer experience, responsiveness, availability of support and reduced costs. However, the SDI's findings align with my own experience - particularly with internal service providers.

So, why is the take-up of self-service so low? And what can service providers do to combat the issue of the wary customer?

Let's get to the heart of the matter: self-service capability is typically implemented as part of an ITSM tools implementation, sometimes as a by-product. ITSM tool implementations are notorious for focusing too much on the technical aspects at the expense of other critical success factors and user functionality.

Such projects often fail to recognise that self-service will only become a customer's channel of choice when they successfully change customer behaviour. This is notoriously difficult because of the issues surrounding trust outlined in the first paragraph. Habits are hard to break, and so customer behavioural change only comes when there is a compelling reason to do so - i.e. 'what's in it for me?'

For this change of habit to occur, the first step for any IT Service Desk provider is to recognise that the implementation of self-service should be treated as an organisational change project.

Source: Office of National Statistics

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/retailindustry/timeseries/j4mc/drsi>



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For a self-service offering to be compelling, the following critical success factors (CSF) should be addressed:

Content

- Self-service needs to contain a sufficient amount of useful content, i.e. service items, knowledge articles and other information to make it worthwhile proposition for a potential customer.
- Service items need to be relevant. Customers become very frustrated when presented with services that they are not entitled to request, or come across irrelevant content.
- Content needs to be reviewed to ensure it is still relevant.
- Content should be professionally, clearly and concisely written in a style suitable for the intended audience.
- Content should be easily locatable.

User interface

- Self-service should be accessible and designed to work on all devices: desktops, laptops, tablets and mobiles.
- Self-service should be clutter-free, simple and intuitive to use.
- Customers should be able to request service items and access solutions using a minimal number of clicks, Amazon-style. Every click counts!
- Self-service should have a simple search interface that is smart enough to accommodate spelling mistakes and auto-suggest relevant content.
- Self-service should ensure that relevant self-help solutions are presented automatically to users as they start typing.
- Catalogues should enable associated service items to be linked, and multiple service items to be requested as one transaction.
- Catalogues should be sufficiently intelligent to support role-based views and support dynamic forms to optimise the user experience.
- Catalogues should offer support in multiple languages where applicable.
- Self-service should allow the customer to view the status of requested items and receive updates.
- Self-service should enable users to assess the effectiveness of self-help solutions.
- Self-service should be supported by automated workflow technology that enables the easy automation of approvals and tasks. Where cost-effective, the fulfilment of requested service items should be fully automated.

Confidence

- Clear expectations need to be set and managed for the services provided via self-service.
- Customers should be regularly informed of the status of tickets raised through self-service, and this should be done using clear and concise writing. This could be achieved using simple automatic acknowledgment notifications.
- Customers should feel confident that, at the very least, they will not receive an inferior level of service by requesting items online. This point may come as a surprise, but in practice this is what happens in many organisations. Customers are currently aware that they are likely to receive a superior level of service if they use other mediums of communication, such as by telephone or a walk-by.
- Customers should feel confident that knowledge articles are accurate, up to date, and effective. I.e. they have been reviewed and approved ahead of publication.

Awareness

- Customers should be made continually aware of the catalogue's existence and how to use it.
- Customers should be kept informed when service items are added, amended or deleted.
- Customers should be informed of the benefits of using the catalogue over more traditional channels. The need to adopt a marketing mindset with the implementation of self-service is key.

In summary, while self-service can enable many benefits, that alone is not sufficient justification for an organisation to implement one. It is vital that IT Service Providers have a clear vision for implementing such a service, see how it supports their overall strategy, and ensure there is a supporting strategy in place to achieve success.

Can your self-service offering be more effective? **Contact me, Eddie Potts, at e.potts@pinkelephant.co.uk.**