

Case Study

InstantService Lowers Costs and Raises Customer Satisfaction for a Leading Call Center

The Situation

At Sento Corporation, customer service is close to a religion, which isn't surprising considering that Sento is a major provider of outsourced technical support solutions for other companies. The company employs 750 to 1,000 agents around the world to answer customer questions about the hardware, software, and network products sold by Sento clients.

Sento agents work out of call centers located in Utah, Wyoming, and South Africa. The company is especially proud of its South African facility, which has created 180 jobs for an underdeveloped country, while reducing Sento's own labor costs. But, an overseas call center wouldn't be possible without the economies offered by the Internet - which makes InstantService a perfect fit with Sento.

"Sento has been very focused on developing its web strategy," says Vice President of Operations Ronnie Johansen. "The customer benefits and cost savings are significant." In fact, about two years ago, clients began asking Sento to introduce e-mail-based customer support. They were finding that too many of their customers had only one phone line, which forced them to log off the Internet before making a technical support call to a product manufacturer. Sento already had a tool that offered some Web support, but the company wanted more features and fewer customer set-up requirements. Sento also wanted a Web-based solution that included text chat for real-time conversations without the high cost of phone service.

The Solution

Curtis Clothier, Sento's Web Strategies Manager, says the company evaluated InstantService, along with five or six of its competitors, to find the one product that could offer the following requirements:

- Both chat and e-mail features for flexible support options
- Customer convenience and ease-of-use, including the ability to chat in real time without having to download installation files
- Implementation that didn't involve additional infrastructure, thereby keeping down start-up and ongoing maintenance costs
- An application service provider (ASP) model to minimize the risks and avoid software licensing fees

Johansen says that a well-priced ASP model was especially critical. "In our business," he explains, "we have to continue to make our clients and their customers happy. Customer satisfaction is huge, and it's just too costly for us to host, maintain, and update Web-based support with internal resources."

Clothier and Johansen both say that the InstantService pricing model was the most attractive among the products they evaluated, including some big-name alternatives. But Clothier was sold on a more subjective level. "We sent e-mails to the companies whose products we wanted to pursue. Most took several days to reply or never got back to us at all, but InstantService responded the same day. I knew it was a sign of the level of service we would get from them if we were to use their product."



Customer Overview

Sento Corporation is a leading provider of outsourced customer support solutions for a range of businesses, including several Fortune 500 companies.

Business Challenge

To reduce costs and increase customer satisfaction, Sento wanted a mechanism for delivering customer support over the Web, including through text chat.

Solution

Sento deployed InstantService's chat technology - initially for a leading anti-virus software developer whose support site for retail products receives 8,000 to 13,000 customer visits a day; followed by deployments for several other clients.

Results

For Sento:

- *Reduced labor costs due to 85 percent of chat and e-mail contacts being handled by overseas agents and because all agents can now respond to multiple customers simultaneously*
- *Higher agent morale due to efficiency gains and the appeal of text chat as a service option*
- *More flexible support options*

For Sento clients who use InstantService

- *50 percent to 80 percent reduction in support costs*
- *24 x 7 live-agent support via the web*
- *Higher volumes of customers supported with consistently higher satisfaction scores.*
- *Dramatic reduction in abandonment rates by customers unwilling to wait for an available phone agent*

The Pilot Project

Sento decided to test InstantService on the customers of a Fortune 500 client who is always willing to try new things. A leading provider of anti-virus software, the client had at first only requested e-mail as a supplement to phone service. "But we convinced them to use chat, too," Johansen says, "because we knew it would help drive customers from the phone to the Web for their support needs." Web-based support, he explains, offers Sento and its clients several major advantages:

- Increases customer satisfaction through faster response times; round-the-clock service; and enhanced support through delivery of Web-based documents, diagrams, and one-click links to helpful Web sites
- Gives customers who are already logged on to the Internet the convenience of remaining there for their support questions
- Allows Sento to reduce their client costs by using agents all over the world and enabling agents to respond to multiple customers simultaneously

As a pilot project, Sento trained five of their agents to provide online support to the customers of the chosen Fortune 500 client. Clothier says the agents received an hour's training in the use of text chat and InstantService. "I never got a call from them after that - it's truly that easy to use."

Clothier was equally pleased with the administrative end of things. "Implementation was nothing," he explains, "and I had never even seen the administrative interface before. I just entered user names and passwords for the agents, adapted the chat interface template to the look of our client, populated the customized text and URLs for the libraries, and I was done - all within an hour."

The Results

According to Clothier, the response from the client during the trial period was excellent. Sento also went from not being able to service a portion of the customers (those who couldn't wait out the hold times) to being able to service all of them. Clothier actually defines "all of them" as a higher volume of customer contacts, because the chat option has encouraged more customers to seek support. This, in turn, has resulted in increased sales and a higher customer retention rate.

Following the success of the pilot project, the client immediately adopted InstantService for all its agents and can now afford to have Sento provide 24 x 7 online support. "Of the available support options," Clothier explains, "InstantService chat is the #1 preferred method for live-agent interaction options (chat, e-mail, phone)." Of the 1,000 to 2,000 customers who ask for a live agent each day, 60 percent choose chat, 20 percent e-mail, and 20 percent phone.

But, as Johansen points out, there's more to success than customer contact statistics. "Every business I know," he says, "has three goals: increased revenues, decreased costs, happy customers. Because of InstantService, we have reduced our clients' costs by 50 percent to 80 percent, while customer satisfaction scores have increased."

Sento thinks as highly of the InstantService staff as it does of the product. For Johansen, "They were a fabulous co-development partner, always meeting my business needs." For Clothier, InstantService more than met the expectation established that day he sent his initial inquiry for product information. "Their support has been excellent," he says. "We had no idea just what a good partner we were getting."

The Future

Looking ahead, Sento has been talking to InstantService developers about additional features that might enhance the product for any business that uses it. But mainly, Sento plans to continue to take advantage of InstantService's unlimited scalability. "Whenever we get a new client and need 20 more agents," Clothier says, "we can get them overseas, working out of their homes, wherever we can find them. All they need now is Internet connectivity."

That's no small advantage if you believe Johansen's vision of the future: "To afford customer support at all, every business is going to have to migrate to the Web," he says. "For every U.S. agent, there will have to be three to five overseas, and the ratio of in-home workers will have to increase." So, perhaps it's no wonder that Sento considers its investment in InstantService an investment in its long-term success.

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600 University Street Suite 401
Seattle, WA 98101
(206) 956-8000 office
(206) 956-0383 fax

info@instantservice.com
www.instantservice.com