



DB KAY & ASSOCIATES – THE BUSINESS CASE FOR REAL TIME RESOLUTION

The Business Case for Real Time Resolution

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Executive Summary

The business case for implementing remote access support solutions is strong. Enterprises see hard dollar cost savings as they provide analysts with access to remote systems, speeding the problem resolution process. They also grow satisfaction with fast, accurate support and reduced customer frustration. Wise investments in remote support drive near-term return on investment (ROI) and sustainable business value.

But real time problem resolution is more than a wise investment: in some situations, it's a necessity.

As smart, mobile devices proliferate and become integral to the delivery of life-and-death services like medicine and homeland security, the nature of support changes. First contact resolution isn't just desirable; it's required. Hold queues and call-backs aren't acceptable. Problems must be fixed right now-in real time-or else. P1s are the norm.

Standard support models simply can't deliver. Mission critical, distributed, multiplatform systems require something new: **real time problem resolution**.

This paper outlines the key ROI drivers for remote support. It then examines the opportunity for new offerings enabled through real-time problem resolution, and lists key technology requirements for making it work. In the process, it contrasts the real-time approach with legacy technology and general-purpose subscription-based solutions.

Readers will learn

- Specific opportunities for cost savings from remote support
- How remote support increases customer delight and eliminates dissatisfaction
- Why real-time problem resolution is the next imperative for strategic technology providers
- How to evaluate technology for real-time problem resolution

The Business Need

Support organizations are under increasing pressure on all fronts, including:

- Increasing product complexity
- Higher user expectations
- More multi-vendor and multiplatform issues
- Increasing installed base and larger deployments
- Tightening budgets

Research by the Service and Support Professionals Association (SSPA) shows that over 84% of the cost of delivering support is driven by problem resolution¹, suggesting that opportunities for ROI will primarily come from in this area.

Further pressure is coming from increasingly skeptical technology buyers, who are no longer automatically renewing maintenance contracts at a fixed price. Unwilling to pay an increasingly high percentage of IT budgets for vendor support contracts, they are negotiating, unbundling, and in some cases simply passing. Without value-added services, the support organizations' revenue stream is in jeopardy.

One clear opportunity for automating problem resolution and enabling new kinds of value-added services is remote support, because it tackles some of the most time-consuming and difficult tasks in the problem resolution process.

¹ Support Industry Benchmark Study, Service and Support Professionals Association, 2003

The Business Case for Remote Support Solutions

Problem resolution requires **information** and **action**. Analysts need **information** about the system to effectively diagnose the problem and identify its root cause. They need to take **action** to fix it.

Unfortunately, on-site support is the exception – and an increasingly rare one with today’s mobile and distributed enterprises. That means that gathering information and taking action must be done through the user, who is generally an unwilling and unqualified “team member.”

The core business case for real-time remote access comes from disintermediating the tasks of information gathering and action taking. By resolving problems directly, organizations shorten time to resolution, solve more issues at first contact, and don’t frustrate users by roping them into a complex process.

Reducing Cost

Reducing support cost is simple, in theory. Support costs go down when

- Analysts spend less time working on each incident
- Customers log fewer incidents
- Fewer incidents must be escalated

Cost-effective and scalable remote support solutions deliver ROI by improving each of these cost drivers.

Table 1: The Effect of Remote Support on Key ROI Drivers	
<p>Higher analyst productivity (incidents closed per unit time)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More efficient information gathering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less time spent walking customers through diagnostic procedures • Less time waiting for customers to send logs or other information • Fewer stops and starts in the diagnostic process, resulting in less context-switching • More efficient action-taking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less time spent talking customers through remedial action • Less time spent waiting for customer verification
<p>Lower support demand (incidents logged per unit time)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More effective user “training” as a byproduct of resolving problems • Opportunities to guide users through self-service, driving self-service adoption and lowering incident volume
<p>Fewer escalations (percentage of incidents not escalated to Tier 2 or 3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More coherent, direct view of the system avoids misunderstandings and diagnostic problems that drive escalations • Fewer false starts based on incorrect information inadvertently provided by the customer

Table 2: Scaling Service Delivery: A Comparison of Business Models			
	Subscription	CPU Licensed	Server Licensed
Example Offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Citrix · WebEx 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · pcAnywhere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Tridia
Initial Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Low 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Medium to High: based on clients licensed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Medium
Cost to Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Very high · Per session or concurrent users · Recurring usage cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Very high · Per client · One-time license fee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Low · Per concurrent session · One-time license fee
Management Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Low (web-based) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · High (desktop clients) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Low (server-based)
Analysis	<p>Pro: Ideal when use is very occasional</p> <p>Con: Critical confidential information flows through third-party servers; cost skyrockets with greater use; ongoing payments; not cross-platform</p>	<p>Pro: Ideal for dedicated LAN connections to specific managed systems</p> <p>Con: Can't work across firewalls; some solutions (pcAnywhere) not cross platform; very high cost to license and administer clients</p>	<p>Pro: Highly scalable, manageable, cross-platform solution. One-time license fee.</p> <p>Con: Modest initial investment; requires available network</p>

A New Model for Support: Real Time Problem Resolution

Better remote support technology can refine existing support models. But new business imperatives require an altogether new model for support.

Technology being supplied to high-growth industries such as healthcare and homeland security has a combination of characteristics that is new to the support industry:

- Devices are distributed, mobile, and heterogeneous
- Users are professional, but not technically inclined
- Problems can have life-or-death consequences

In these cases, support is at least as important as any other piece of the whole product. As one data point, Gartner has published an in-depth guide to help buyers of clinical medical systems evaluate vendor service and support, noting that “service and support [have] become key differentiators in the selection process.”²

Most people view support as an insurance policy: if things go badly wrong, both support and insurance reduce risk. That doesn’t mean that filing an insurance claim – or submitting a support incident – is something one wants to do. It’s inconvenient and time consuming. The “insurance” model of support won’t work for real-time users.

When we build walkways in high places, we don’t wait for people to fall off and file insurance claims; we install handrails to keep people from falling. In the same way, customers of these distributed mission-critical solutions need the ability to get issues resolved before they become an issue. These support “handrails” are what the industry is calling real-time resolution: support that is fully integrated into mission critical processes.

Previews of real-time resolution have existed for many years, from the phone-home capabilities of non-stop systems to the automated downloading of software updates. But, as an industry, we are not set up to deliver real-time resolution in a comprehensive way to complex distributed systems. More than any other factor, this lack of real-time problem resolution is what is holding back new mission-critical offerings.

² Handler, Thomas A., M.D. Analyzing a Clinical Vendor’s Service and Support, Gartner DF-18-2258, 2002

Process Improvements: Before and After Real Time Resolution

In today’s support center, entitlement is generally a manual process that requires agents to access one or more systems to validate the customer’s support contract. Some support organizations estimate that nearly a third of their support incidents come from unentitled users: these “freeloaders” represent an enormous cost to the enterprise and delay handling of legitimate customer needs.

In contrast, real-time resolution integrates entitlement, remote access, and incident management. When a new incident enters the support center via any channel, a remote connection is immediately made. When the customer enters his or her PIN, that information (along with identifying information on the device itself) automatically confirms entitlement and immediately opens an incident with relevant information about the user and the device

Before	After
Entitlement is done manually through a contract module in CRM or another system, wasting agent time	Entitlement happens transparently as part of requesting help and accessing the remote system
Manual entitlement is error-prone, resulting in costly support being delivered to unentitled users	Automated entitlement efficiently restricts access to paying customers only
The entitlement process happens before a problem can enter the support center, frustrating users and delaying resolution	Entitlement happens in parallel with entering the queue and starting remote support
Customers must take time-consuming and confusing actions to start remote support	Customers need only enter a PIN when prompted to receive support

Requirements for Real Time Problem Resolutions

Real-time problem resolution is a new process. The Maytag repairman is no longer our role model: support organizations must move away from their traditional passive and reactive role of waiting by the phone and must instead proactively engage with customers to avoid and resolve issues. Key business practice changes include:

- **Immediate triage** of P1 issues within seconds of first contact and engagement of real-time techniques
- **Integration** of universal queue, CRM, and real time problem resolution technology
- Improved identification and tracking of **customer configuration information**
- An **emphasis on proactive support**, including configuration health checks, find once / fix many, and automated updates
- The **default use of remote access** to any device through any network connection

Because of the business models adopted by most remote support vendors, the last point is often the most difficult.

- Users of subscription solutions must **meter their usage carefully** to avoid exorbitant usage charges
- Users of client-licensed solutions must **choose in advance** where to install software, and can't effectively support customers **through a firewall**
- Neither class of users can support **multiple client devices**, including handhelds, notebooks from multiple vendors, PDAs, and custom specialized devices

Table 3: Key Technology Requirements for Real-Time Problem resolution	
Category	Requirements
Device support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Native agents for identified server, desktop, notebook, hand-held, and PDA devices • Adapter architecture that makes it easy to customize the agent for new or custom devices
Scalability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No license fee for distributing agents • No administrative burden for agent distribution-on demand or automated deployment • Reasonable fee growth with use
Security and Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outgoing communications only to a common server • Certified encryption through the entire communication (including on the server) • Integration with enterprise identity management • Audit trail and record for all actions
Functionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote viewing • Remote control • Distributed control (to collaborate with others) • Efficient file and file tree transfer / update
Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-click engagement from Universal Queue or CRM software • Write-back of resolution to CRM incident records
Architecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switching, not store-and-forward (low latency) • Server-based with very lightweight agents • High availability deployments supported

Growing Revenue: Loyalty and Real Time Resolution

A compelling body of research demonstrates that profitable revenue growth is a direct function of customer loyalty. Loyalty maven Frederick Reichheld uses data from a broad range of industries to convincingly argue that loyalty is the single best predictor of profitability³. And closer to home, researchers from the University of Arkansas have created a model that predicts financial performance in the PC industry based directly on measures of loyalty and satisfaction⁴.

Conventional wisdom is that saving money in support means lower satisfaction. Fewer staff mean longer call queues, offshoring can frustrate customers, and stricter entitlement means broken product isn't getting fixed. But effective real-time problem resolution drives just the opposite effect: customers love it when enterprises save money by solving problems faster and at first contact.

Satisfaction may not be a good predictor of loyalty, but dissatisfaction is an excellent predictor of a lack of loyalty. Astute support managers track dissatisfaction and manage it down however possible. Effective remote access is a wonderful tool for driving down key sources of dissatisfaction identified by the SSPA⁵.

Customer Complaint	Real Time Resolution Effect
Too long to resolve issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More efficient information gathering • More efficient action taking • Less time spent waiting for customer: more "one and done" • Fewer escalations
Lack of resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct access to systems eliminates the need to reproduce symptoms on a lab machine – or the inability to do so
Lack of knowledge of the service representative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The analyst need not "translate" between customer language and technical facts, reducing the impression that they aren't knowledgeable • The customer need not be involved in every aspect of problem solving
Too much time to reach rep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher analyst efficiency results in shorter wait times • As phone tag and back-and-forth is eliminated, there is less need to wait for an analyst

³ Reichheld, Frederick. The Loyalty Effect, Harvard Business School Press, 2001

⁴ Smith, Rodney E. and Wright, William F. Determinants of Customer Loyalty and Financial Performance, Journal of Management Accounting Research, Volume 16, 2004

⁵ Support Industry Benchmark Study, Service and Support Professionals Association, 2003

More than just eliminating dissatisfaction, real time resolution drives another great predictor of loyalty: customer delight. Real-time resolution changes the customer experience dramatically for the better:

- Instead of “homework” such as gathering log files, installing patches, or tinkering with configurations, the customer lets the analyst do the work
- Instead of waiting for callbacks, the customer gets resolution in real time
- Instead of being a conscripted participant in the process, the customer gets to be...the customer

Imagine how popular an auto mechanic would be if he made his customers hold his tools for him, or a dry cleaner who expected customers to hang up their own shirts. Companies that deliver service for the customer in real time, rather than through the customer at some time in the future, are setting a new standard for our industry as well.

Conclusions

Remote support technology has the potential for delivering return on investment (ROI) in three ways:

- For enterprises that **don't currently use remote support**, a new remote support program will reduce the time it takes for analysts to diagnose and take corrective action. This provides measurable cost savings that provide near-term payback on the technology and process investments
- For enterprises that **currently use a subscription or client-licensed solution**, moving to a server-based model allows the organization to further improve overall efficiency by employing remote support as standard part of the call handling process while at the same time reducing their remote support TCO
- For enterprises **supporting mission-critical distributed applications** to demanding users, we recommend considering a solution that enables real time resolution. This means it must work on a broad array of handheld, mobile, and conventional devices; it must scale to all devices cost-effectively, and must ensure security and support compliance with regulatory frameworks like HIPAA and international privacy laws.

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About DB Kay & Associates

DB Kay & Associates is a consultancy that focuses on high-leverage initiatives for service and support, including knowledge management, self-service, collaboration, and remote access.

DB Kay provides

- assessments
- training
- technology selection
- adoption consulting services

for market-leading support organizations and the vendors who serve them.

David Kay, principal of DB Kay & Associates, has been a leader in applying technology to knowledge-intensive business processes like customer support since 1984. He has been certified by the Help Desk Institute (HDI) as a trainer for Knowledge-Centered Support, and is a frequent speaker and contributor for the Service and Support Professionals Association (SSPA.) Kay holds a patent covering the use of next-generation technology in customer support, and has been recognized as a Customer Service Innovator by the Consortium for Service Innovation.