

# A Service Approach to the Customer Experience

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One of the challenges facing companies today is the proactive management of knowledge and customer relationship technology solutions. What often is missing is a way to capture and integrate the information created by these systems in support of cross-organizational goals. A service layer that oversees and bridges separate but related knowledge management systems is a cost-effective way to maximize the benefit of each component system. It also can vastly improve the experience of customers accessing information from either systems or agents.

This article outlines a business process management model that uses a service layer—guided and maintained by real people—to integrate knowledge across diverse systems, give employees the tools to respond to customer needs and deliver a sustainable means of continuous improvement over time as customer needs and behaviors change.

## Building the Service-layer Team

The first step in implementing a service-layer model is to identify a team that understands how and what content is used by different groups across the organization. The team must clearly understand the broad goals of the business as well as the departmental functions that impact those goals.

It is not enough to include only technicians or customer-service department personnel. An effective team will represent all the parts of the organization where content functions intersect. With clearly defined directives and a broad organizational view, the team must be empowered to evaluate and implement business process changes:

**Step one: Analysis.** The service layer team begins by fully analyzing the support environment from the customer perspective as well as capabilities of existing technology infrastructures. This includes analyzing both customer-facing channels and the internal systems that inform employees involved in customer service, sales and marketing.

As part of this process, a company will need to assess the existing knowledge base

and content, and identify how it currently manages the components of these systems. Is the content user-friendly and easily accessible? Are there duplications or gaps in the presentation of content across systems? How flexible is the current system in terms of changing content based on usage?

With this baseline, an organization can use data generated from the different content-delivery systems in service of streamlining the effort it takes to provide superior customer support and service.

**Step two: Solutions versus tools.** Of course, there is always a technology component in the integration of content-delivery systems. Once your data analysis needs are identified, you can build appropriate paths across the technology-delivery systems. This is the difference between tools (technology) and solutions (technology plus integration plus processes).

Determining “how, which paths and where” requires a combination of clearly identified business objectives, content analysis, identification of available statistical and performance data, and analysis of content creation and management processes. This facilitates identification and prioritization of information gaps.

Once this information baseline is established, your team can create a unified content strategy that reaches across multi-channel internal and external facing systems, allowing the organization to respond rapidly to content change needs.

## A Case Study Example

Illustrating the benefits of a service approach to business process management, the following case study involves the merger of two large telecommunications companies. Their immediate challenge was to create a knowledge environment resulting in a unified customer experience that met high expectations—and that enabled employees to provide excellent customer support.

Their objectives? To create a unified front-end into two critical databases used by sales and customer-care organizations; reor-

ganize and update content; develop processes that provide frontline customer-service agents with the best information to successfully assist customers; and refine and create content related to the merger itself.

Using a service-layer approach enabled the team to meet its first objectives in 17 weeks, reorganizing or repurposing more than 1,400 articles and developing or refining 445 customer processes across 12 channels. The team built and refined content referenced frequently across channels, allowing employees access to information about such diverse systems as billing, call quality and upgrade protocols. Important content was grouped together through link lists, making it more user-friendly and more accessible.

## The Active Service Layer

The initial work of the service-layer team was to evaluate, understand and organize integration and change in content and related processes. But the strength of this model lies in its ongoing nature. Tracking and maintaining content and delivery systems enables organizations to make conscious decisions about content delivery. Organizations that use a cross-departmental approach, versus silos of information, can centralize content changes. They can improve training by understanding how materials are used by employees and enhancing content accordingly. By capitalizing on the data already produced by existing systems, businesses can coordinate their customer-facing efforts in the way they deem most appropriate, since they own the decisions that drive the service layer.

All of these activities map back to the customer experience. When employees can support customers with the right information at the time the customer needs it, and when customers can access the right content at the right time through a variety of channels, customer loyalty is strengthened and solidified.

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