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## Knowledge Automation: Delivering On The Promise Of Knowledge Management

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IT organizations have been tasked with the growing challenge of enhancing customer satisfaction and productivity. That is, raising the bar on service and support and automating these functions as forethought rather than afterthought.

Knowledge automation is a great place to start. By building knowledge, user acceptance of new applications will be better. Productivity and usefulness of the information will be higher. And overall, user satisfaction will be greater -- all if people can get fast access to the exact information they need, exactly when they need it most.

For many IT organizations, knowledge management is an attractive concept for streamlining service and support. Why not empower customers and employees to solve their own problems by giving them access to corporate knowledge stores? Unfortunately, traditional knowledge management applications have failed to live up to this potential. Early systems attempted to make every bit of corporate knowledge accessible through a single service and support knowledgebase, resulting in information overload.

In fact, analyst firm [Gartner](#) estimates that 90 percent of businesses believe their competitiveness is negatively impacted by information overload. The vast majority of companies surveyed indicated a problem in at least one of four areas: "siloes" information, too much information, un-indexed information and ineffective/inefficient searching procedures.<sup>1</sup> Gartner further estimates that 80 percent of a company's digital resources are not accessible to the enterprise as a whole because they are stored as personal files on individual computing systems.<sup>2</sup> This problem can be especially acute in maintaining high levels of technical support for a company's employees, where access to a timely, relevant and up-to-date knowledgebase for answers to user problems is essential.

Not making things any easier, some knowledge management systems did not integrate easily with other enterprise applications such as internal support and customer service systems. By focusing on system requirements instead of the user's knowledge needs, and force-fitting service and support to the existing knowledge management system, a failure to deliver what the user was looking for often became the end result. This caused companies to sacrifice the speed and accuracy of the information accessible, while saddling them with more time-consuming content authoring and maintenance.

One of the biggest fundamental flaws encountered when applying traditional knowledge

management systems as a means to improve service and support is the intensity of backend activities, such as gathering information, funneling it into a knowledgebase, and keeping it refreshed. This is a laborious process that explains why the field is often called “knowledge engineering.” It’s also why the answers generated from “how to” questions are often outdated and irrelevant to the person seeking the information.

### **SOLVING SPECIFIC PROBLEMS**

Knowledge Automation technology changes the game. Specifically designed for service and support environments, knowledge automation answers the question, “How can the fastest, most accurate and personally relevant answer be delivered to solve my precise problem?” Knowledge automation does exactly this, by leveraging automated personalization capabilities based on the user’s context, (i.e., by automatically determining contributing factors such as PC environment or website location) in order to present the most relevant information ranked by effectiveness weighting.

Large consumer companies with millions of customers -- like broadband service providers -- are keenly aware that higher customer satisfaction equates to lower customer churn. They have realized that it is much more expensive to acquire new customers and they know that service and support is a clear way to differentiate the product, increase revenues and reduce customer churn. By simply building in a knowledge center that can scale to assist the providers’ booming subscriber bases, companies can cost effectively service their customers even while they grow customer satisfaction. Today, service providers are able to deliver intelligent knowledge with great success, even when addressing such a diverse audience and heterogeneous computing environment because of automation technologies.

It’s the same in the enterprise, where companies want to keep their employees productive by providing them access to knowledgebases to enable effective self-service -- but struggle to keep the knowledge relevant and meaningful.

In these instances, knowledge automation raises the bar on knowledge management, as it helps to ensure the quality of the information by automatically delivering personalized answers to requested questions. It goes beyond simply static answers to include active content in the form of “one-click fixes.” This means that instead of forcing users to manually execute complex tasks, they are presented with automated “how-to” choices and “one-click fix” solutions that can solve their problem with a click of the mouse. Other knowledge automation benefits include streamlined delivery of knowledge to users and analysts, and the ability to delegate knowledgebase management to other groups within the enterprise.

### **TARGETTING SERVICE AND SUPPORT**

Unlike traditional approaches to knowledge management, knowledge automation specifically targets the service and support environment. When a new issue arises, analysts or customer service representatives have the capability to quickly create a new piece of content to address questions as they arise. Doing this arms the authors with the information they need to quickly publish the content, by automatically including all relevant information gathered in the support incident.

Example: The help desk is experiencing flood calls Monday morning after the launch of a new update to the sales force automation application. The problem: Sales reps no longer know how to add a new contact to the system given the new customization released last week. After an analyst solves the problem manually a few times he can quickly submit a request to an author to create a new piece of content for the self-service portal. Result: Call avoidance. As future sales reps encounter this problem and seek out support via the portal, this new piece of content will be presented to the people who need it.

When an author is creating a new solution for the support environment, the ability to access enterprise knowledge whether it is in a structured or unstructured format should be evaluated. With easy access to relevant information and enterprise data, the publishing of effective support content is accelerated. . After all, if an analyst can more easily find information for a user in an assisted-service scenario, call time is decreased and customer satisfaction or user productivity increases. With knowledge automation, help desk analysts and customer service representatives can use technology to understand more information about the user's knowledge needs and also use the same technology to search for the right information for the person who needs it.

Effectiveness measurement is a critical component of any successful knowledge initiative. Look for a solution that automates the process of determining the costs savings associated with content by automatically tracking usage. Systems that provide automated reporting can indicate what content is being used in self service and assisted, displaying the effectiveness rating for each individual piece of content. Understanding what content is being used effectively provides a clear picture of the cost savings associated with the use of self-service content. Some of the automated metric reports may include a summary content usage, most popular searches, and content with strong effectiveness ratings.

Knowledge automation moves beyond the limitations of traditional knowledge management because it streamlines and automates the authoring and workflow process, helping to make service and support organizations more efficient. With knowledge automation, technology is applied to these critical processes to adapt to the way that people actually work -- resulting in faster, more effective answers for end users and relevant data for analysts or customer service representatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Gartner, "Gartner Says 90 Percent of Businesses Suffer from Information Overload," May, 2002

<sup>2</sup> Gartner, "The Knowledge Worker Investment Paradox," July, 2002