

Tired of Wasting your Limited Budget on Hiring More Call Center Personnel?

5 Steps to Determine if your Organization Needs a SAP Service Management Portal

In our modern age, it seems that you can do everything and anything online. You can schedule an oil change for your vehicle all the way to registering yourself for an appointment at the doctor. It seems that the only option now is to move everything online or risk being labeled a dinosaur. While that sounds reasonable, are you looking at it objectively? First, you need to determine the problem, then what is that problem costing you, and finally how much time and money can you afford to invest to correct the problem. Now you may be lucky, and the only issue you are experiencing is that your customers want to do business with you online. Most organizations aren't this clear cut.

Step 1: The problem: Your call center is hemorrhaging cash

No one expects the call center to become a source of revenue, but it is expected to keep up with the demands of your customers without exponentially growing the workforce. There are a lot of possible causes for your call center becoming less and less effective. Your first job is to get a feel for where your issues truly are. This can usually become pretty apparent when you start to look at your SAP data.

Too many new product introductions

This is a good problem to have. If you are introducing new products, it likely means that business is good. The problem is that with every new product come new issues. Whether it is a new customer base, or simply new design or engineering issues, the result is always the same. Your call center experiences increased call volume.

Increased product sales

This is another great problem to have. However, more sales means more customers. Typically, new customers are more likely to have issues or questions because the product is new to them.

Product Quality Issues

Every company struggles with in one area or another. Quality is never ending battle. In the call center, it's vital to capture these issues and turn them over to the quality group to eliminate them as quickly as possible. Otherwise, you'll end up fighting the same battle over and over again with every new product sold.

Downstream processes are causing delays

This is typically the most painful, and often most difficult to diagnose unless you have a good dashboard to help you locate the bottlenecks. The downstream processes can be anything from shipping, sales order creation, missing parts in the repair, or just not enough technicians to handle the volume.

Step 2: Determine what it is costing you

Once you determine what the issues are, you need to evaluate what they cost you on a day to day basis. Often you can find a process issue, or maybe even engineering or design issues causing the increased call volume. If this is the case, the best you can do as a call center is to insure that you are capturing the issues and passing that data along to the appropriate departments. Many issues are just a result of doing business, so the only thing you can look to do is to make your call center more efficient, either with more people or with better tools. Regardless, you still a need to analyze why your customers are calling you, and what each call costs you.

Capture and analyze the reason for each call

This is a pretty obvious step, and it is expected that every organization does this step. However, it's always best to never take the obvious things for granted. Some organizations only document calls if they require a follow-up action. Yet they have no idea how many calls are taken for a status check or an FAQ type issue. While it's understandable that there can be too much data captured in some situations, if you're a call center, you MUST know how your time is spent.

How much time is spent for each reason

Again, obvious, but once you pull the data for the reason for each call, you need determine how much time is spent for each different reason. You need to be able to determine how many calls for a status check on an in-house repair, a new issue or just a simple question that could be covered in an FAQ.

Determine your opportunity cost

Now you see how your time is spent, and you can slice and dice the data any number of ways. The piece that is left off of this analysis is what could your call center employees be doing instead of taking these calls? In many small to midsized organizations the call center is far more than a person taking calls and transcribing what the customer says. Most of these call center employees do advanced trouble shooting, major project work or may double as a customer service representative as well. This cost can be a lot harder to quantify, but extremely important to realize.

Let's say your call center employees spend 10% of their time determining the status of an in-house repair. For one employee, this rates to 4 hours a week. If each employee had 4 additional hours to solve customer issues, how much better would your customer experience become?

Step 3: Determine your options

Now you know where your call center time is spent. This is really where the hard work begins. You need to determine which types of calls you can reduce or shorten.

Provide utilities

One simple solution is to build or purchase some transactions or shortcuts to give your call center employees some help to cut down the time spent on each call. The status of an in-house repair is again a perfect example. You could provide a transaction to make it a faster task to determine what the status is for a particular notification or sales order.

Reduce the call volume

Obviously, this is the best solution. No calls are still better than shorter calls. But how can you accomplish this? This is where we go back to the call reason. If it's a process issue, fix the process. A perfect example is that returns sit in receiving too long because they are improperly labeled. The best thing to do is fix that labeling issue. Obviously, that's not a quick fix.

This also goes back to passing the information collected to the appropriate departments. This could be engineering, quality, or shipping. Like everything in business, it doesn't matter who is at fault, it's all about fixing the issues to give your customers the best possible experience, so they keep coming back.

Provide your customers a DIY portal

The next best thing is to let your customers enter in their own issues (notifications), check their own status, etc. This option has a lot of pros and cons. The biggest pro is that it eliminates the simple calls from your queue and gives your call center employee some of their day back.

The biggest con is the investment to implement. If your processes aren't up to speed, it will be immediately visible to your customer. What you provide to your customer in a portal has to be right or they might never come back.

Step 4: Can you afford to tackle another gigantic project?

Whether you decide to extend ERP Service Management or move into the realm of CRM service, the problem still comes down to resources. You've analyzed where you can improve, but now you need to answer the critical questions. First and foremost, what can you save by implementing the project? Only when you have this number can you determine your "budget" for a new project.

Portal is still a buzz word, so that alone makes it a sexy option. This makes portal a great way to go and is completely within the realm of the call center. This can be better because it limits the involvement from other departments and can be an easier sell due to this fact. Now there still a lot questions you need to answer before you can commit to a service portal for your customers. Remember, at the end of the day, it's all about coming out ahead. That means you need to spend less than the problem is costing you. If you can't justify the cost, you need to let the project die before it begins.

Are your processes good enough to show your customers?

This is perhaps one of the most important questions you have to answer. Every manager of a call center wants to answer yes, but this is no time to put your blinders on. You have to honestly answer this question. Remember, if your processes aren't good enough, aren't clean enough, your customers will

instantly see it when you give them a portal. Keep in mind, when you talk to someone on the phone, they spin the situation, give the customer some assurances, or even juggle some things to make the customer happy. Your portal will not be able to do that. Your portal will show customers the cold hard facts, end of story. Make sure you are comfortable with the facts the customers will see.

What pieces of functionality are your customers screaming for?

Now, this piece is pretty easy to do, if you stick to the facts. You did the homework in step 2, now stick to those facts. The temptation is always to get clever, get creative, and add more stuff that is nice to have. If you want to be successful, stick to what you need and add more in the future. Projects are often victims of scope creep. Set the stage early, fix your problems, and then enhance the portal.

Another key question in this same area is do your competitors already offer this functionality? Keeping up with your competition can be a factor in your decision, but don't let it dictate what you need to do. Remember, you made it this far by being a leader, not following your competition.

Will your customers use it?

Again, this seems like such an obvious question, but knowing your customer base is key. Keep in mind; you are now dealing with the end users, not necessarily the person that bought the product initially. So, are your end user internet people? The odds are typically in your favor, but in some industries you may be dealing with a customer base that is far more comfortable talking to a person than a computer. Just know this answer before you commit to an expensive project.

Are you ready for a 1000 man hours of development effort?

Whenever you talk about something that goes directly to the customer, you are talking about a big project. You need ABAP developers, web developers, business analysts, even some beta customers to help you out. This is a lot of effort, and a lot of manpower. Can you spare the expertise to define what you want in the portal? Then can you allocate the development resources to make it a reality? What about browser support?

Do you have the expertise in-house? Do you have enough resources to create this sort of application with all of the other competing priorities in your business? What is your timeline? Remember, business changes quickly, so the longer it takes to implement your portal, the more likely it is that you are already outdated.

Step 5: Look for an outside options

Now depending on your resource situation, you might have no choice to but to look for outside help. Even if you have the talent and resources, it's still in your best interest to see all your options. There is always the chance that an application exists that could get you straight to the testing phase, rather than the long development phase. And, let someone else handle the issues and maintenance portion of the project.

How do you know if the vendor can deliver?

If you go with an outside vendor to do your development, make sure they are reputable. There are a lot of developers out there, and there is a wide range of talent. Be sure the firm you select has a proven track record of completely projects on time, and preferable on or under budget.

The alternative is to find an out of the box solution. Test drive it, and roll. Again, you still need to feel comfortable with the application and the firm supporting it. Be sure to cover yourself and like any good negotiation, get everything in writing.

What about SAP CRM?

Now this is a very valid question. SAP CRM has a lot of great functionality; however; CRM still does not give you an out of the box call center portal. They are working with a partner to provide the functionality as well as mobile apps. In addition, CRM Service has a lot of new functionality that will not equate to ERP service management. This can be very powerful or it could be a very large black hole for your time and resources. In our experience, if you are not currently using CRM Service, you are better served sticking with ERP and enhance it to fit your needs even better.

What to do next

If you are interested in exploring ways to improve SAP Service Management call center, JaveLLin Solutions has developed a 30-minute interactive session which we conduct over the phone with you and top staff/team members.

What we accomplish in this fast-paced, zero-nonsense session is:

- Help determine your biggest issue in the call center
- Narrow down what functionality you really need in a portal
- Define next steps to tackle your biggest call center issues.

The presentation is conducted by Mike Piehl, Platinum Level Service Management expert, who has implemented SAP SM in over 10 different clients and industries.

Please be assured that this consultation will not be a thinly disguised sales presentation; it will consist of the best intelligence Mike Piehl can supply in a 30 minute time span. There is no charge for the call, but please be advised that the call must be strictly limited to 30 minutes.

To secure a time for this consultation, please email renovation@javellinsolutions.com. We will provide you with a diagnostic questionnaire that will need to be answered to maximize our time together. The consult will typically take place within 1-2 weeks of receiving your questionnaire.

Where can you find an out of the box Portal for SAP Service Management?

As you know, creating a Service Management Portal for your customer takes a lot of resources and a lot of expertise. Most companies either lack the time or the expertise to put this together themselves. If this describes your organization, take a closer look at [Rapier: Service Management Customer Portal](#) by

JaveLLin Solutions. We've loaded up all our SM knowledge into this ABAP Web Dynpro application to provide your customers the features they need a fully customizable application.

[Rapier: Service Management Customer Portal](#) is SAP certified. It can work for you directly out of the box. It will give you an out of the box web application that you can give to your call center to help eliminate many simple calls. If you like what you see, please contact us for your free consultation and demo.

JaveLLin Solutions, LLC offers 100% No-Risk Guarantee on every application we offer.

We offer our entire product line with a 90 day money back guarantee. In addition, we offer a trial period for you to evaluate the application within your own system and using your own data. Our goal is give you what you need. If we can't do that to your satisfaction, then we'll give 100% of your money back.