# Sharp Streamlines Customer and IT Service Desk with Supportworks from Hornbill

SHARP In the competitive world of consumer electronics, where products are very similar and margins are slim, after sales service is one of the few differentiators. Determined to retain its competitive advantage, Sharp Electronics needed to invest in its customer service infrastructure to deliver a better quality of service to its customers. The Customer Information Centre (CIC) at Sharp in Manchester were using an ageing system which was expensive to maintain and lacked integration with other desktop applications and newer technologies like email and Web.
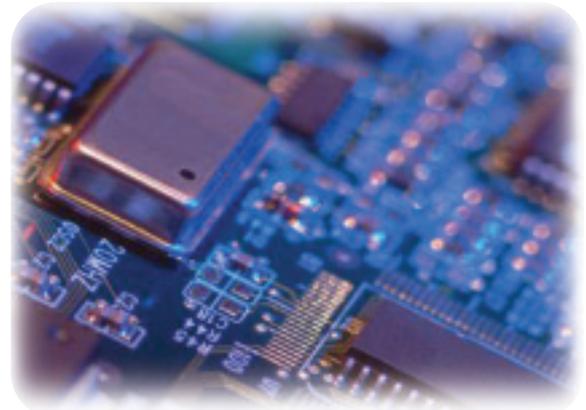
The company receives thousands of calls each month and with no links to other systems, information had to be input for each and every call. Requests received via email had to be answered individually, even though many of the questions were repeated. Customers were not directed to a Frequently Asked Questions section where they could have found the information they were looking for. Enquiries received by post were even more labour intensive to deal with because replies drafted on the existing system had to be copied and pasted into Word by a separate clerk typist, which added delays to the call resolution time.

Paul Copley, Team Head at Sharp's Customer Information Centre explains, "We had to copy information from one system into another to service a request from a customer. Because of the inefficiencies, the systems were not used correctly and it was difficult to enforce discipline. We were losing valuable information about our customers and we were less effective at servicing their requests."

Automation and Integration is the Key
When tasked with finding a replacement system Copley decided that automation and integration were the key requirements. For the new system to deliver maximum efficiency, it would need to provide a single interface for customer support staff, which integrated seamlessly with several other systems.

Out-of-the-box Functionality Wins
After initial assessments of 20 systems, and arriving at a short-list of three vendors, Supportworks from Hornbill was selected because most of the functionality required was available out-of-the-box. According to Copley "Hornbill's 'can do' attitude" convinced the project team that they could achieve the automation and integration required to realise the objectives.

Extended Scope
As the capabilities of Supportworks ESP (Enterprise Support Platform) were demonstrated, the scope of the project was extended to include a system for Sharp's IT helpdesk. Supportworks can be used for separate helpdesk configurations which co-exist on the same application server, so that different business units can use the same platform with entirely separate views and true segregation of data.

Having decided to replace the existing Sunrise product within IT to leverage some of the more sophisticated functionality offered by Supportworks, Sharp amalgamated both solutions into one system. This would give attractive economies of scale and the incremental costs were relatively low.

The joint implementation of both systems took approximately four months to complete including integration with the many external applications and databases used by Sharp.

Business Benefits:

- Links to all customer and product databases have cut response times by 50%.

- Several thousand enquiries per year filtered and dealt with automatically

- 250% rise in sales requests handled by email

- Paper-based filing virtually eliminated cutting two days off call resolution times for postal enquiries

- Two staff redeployed with no impact on call handling

- Supportworks used for several different service desk configurations giving economies of scale and just one system to maintain

HORNBILL

Service Transformed

Sharp set ambitious targets to increase the efficiency of its Customer Information Centre and twelve months on, benefits far exceeded expectations.

Call Volumes

Customer enquiries from the website are now directed through the Supportworks SelfService portal via the Knowledge Base, reducing the number of enquiries handled by support staff. Email communication is also vetted by the Knowledge Base and where appropriate the customer receives an automated reply. Overall, queries received by the helpdesk have reduced by around 33% year-on-year, this amounts to several thousand over the last year.

There has been an increase of almost 250% in the number of sales enquiries that are processed via email and all of this information is recorded within Supportworks and is available to sales staff.

Increased Call Handling Efficiency

Calls received by support staff are processed in half the time it previously took. Customer postcodes are validated through integration with QAS and address details are automatically populated. Integration with the Sharp product database and Service Centre database ensures that new products and spares, and the location of the nearest Service Centre are immediately visible to support staff whilst dealing with customers.

Reduced Administration Overhead

The need for paper-based filing has been virtually eliminated. Letters are logged and scanned into Supportworks. There is a 'multi-clip' facility that allows standard letter templates to be stored, enabling support staff to select a relevant template and create a customer letter at the click of a button. The document is automatically stored against the support request, providing a full audit trail. Furthermore, all standard forms, such as warranty approvals and parts requests that previously had to be posted to the Service Centres are now processed electronically.

Investment Justified

Copley commented, "After only six months, analysis of the call statistics provided the justification to redeploy two members of staff to other areas of the business without any impact on call handling or efficiency. Sharp has seen a real and tangible return on investment since deploying Supportworks. We have seen customer satisfaction levels raised, and we now plan to roll out the system to our flagship Aquos product sales helpline."

Working Smarter Not Harder

Sharp's Customer Information Centre is now the first department to spot any issues through analysis of system reports. So when a problem with a specific product is recognised, technical staff are able to react immediately, resolving the problem before it affects other customers.

When asked to sum up his experience with Supportworks, Copley said, "In a fiercely competitive environment where margins are tight and customer service is often the only differentiating factor, Sharp Electronics had to work smarter if it was to improve service without increasing costs. Supportworks has helped us to transform our e-service and the speed of response to our customers. It underpins our customer service approach and gives us the ability to provide excellent service regardless of the communication media. We anticipate extending our usage of the system in the future and have already rolled Supportworks out to our Parts Centre and Reprographics Systems department."

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