

# VMware

## Consona Knowledge Management

### Tweeting solutions before the customer even knows there's a problem



The world's fifth largest software infrastructure company is serious about customer service and relies on Consona Knowledge Management to help keep customers happy. Their innovative use of social media enhances support by adding proactive and interactive customer contact opportunities.

Changing corporate culture to focus on customer service and support is practically a routine activity in large service-oriented organizations these days. You might even say that providing an excellent customer experience is a minimum requirement for successful operations in the 21st century. What raises an organization above the crowd, however, is out-of-the-box thinking that harnesses available resources and technologies to raise the service to a whole new level. And that's just what VMware is doing to provide outstanding support for their 150,000 customers, 22,000 partners, 35,000 certified professionals, and the whole community of users of their software infrastructure products and services.

### Making Knowledge the Center of Attention

Like many successful knowledge management users, VMware has "knowledge champions" that take ownership of the knowledgebase and the user experience to maintain standards, ensure accuracy and availability, and generally ensure that the system is providing real value to users – both tech support and end-user customers.

One of the most intriguing aspects of VMware's customer support structure is that their knowledge champions are actual tech support representatives, brought into the champion position on six month rotations. "As you can imagine, it is challenging for a support manager to take their top resources off the phones," says Lynn Llewellyn, Senior Program Manager – Knowledge Practices, "but they recognize the value of what we're doing."



#### ROI at a Glance:

- Call deflection: Calls as a percentage of knowledgebase visits steadily declining to below 6%.
- Knowledgebase visits nearly tripled in one year from 660,000 (4Q08) to 1.9 million (4Q09).
- Expected to reach 10 million visitors in 2010.
- Problem avoidance – proactive notification of a potential issue generated 90,000 knowledgebase views and less than a 100 (mostly preventative) inquiries into support.
- Continuous improvement of the customer experience.

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— Lynn Llewellyn, Senior Program Manager – Knowledge Practices, VMware

These temporary knowledge champions bring the ultimate user perspective to the job. Who better to direct the character and usability of knowledgebase content than the people who actually use it to accomplish their jobs every day? As the champions rotate back to tech support, they bring with them an increased appreciation of how the knowledgebase supports their needs and how to keep it in tip-top condition. “As these former champions add to the knowledgebase through their everyday activities,” Llewellyn says, “they fully understand how their knowledge article might impact the many customers who will be using it.”

And it doesn't stop there. When a new article is created, documenting an issue or a solution, messages are sent out on Twitter and blogs to proactively notify users and help forewarn them of problems so that they can be avoided. “Last year we identified an issue that could have potentially affected a lot of customers,” Llewellyn says. “Once the knowledgebase article was complete, we immediately broadcast a ‘heads-up’ to our Twitter followers. Then we started discussing it on our blogs. As a result, there were 90,000 views on the knowledgebase and only 100 support calls, all of which were handled on the first call-in. There was no panic. Customers were able to say ‘help me bypass this problem’ rather than ‘this is happening, help me fix it.’”

The alert system is also used for positive items such as new product announcements. In time for the last VMworld conference, for example, support staff created 80 knowledge articles and dozens of videos to provide details of the announcements made at the conference. Users were thrilled to have that information immediately available, especially those that were unable to attend the conference. VMware also monitors the discussions to try to identify any emerging issues before they become widespread.

## Publish or Perish

The company publishes a KB Digest that lists new content in the knowledgebase – a subscription service outlining what's going on at VMware and in the user community. Users can also subscribe via an RSS feed to individual knowledge articles and be automatically notified when there are any changes. “It's all about communication,” Llewellyn says. “There's a whole new level of customer intimacy with this kind of regular communication.”

Customers are also encouraged to rate knowledgebase content. Using feedback, they can tell the support group what worked and what didn't. “We get 600 to 800 comments every month,” Llewellyn says. “They help us improve the content. We review these comments as they come in – every day – and make changes as needed. There's a similar process for comments from tech support.”

VMware is actively adding videos to knowledgebase articles when they can be used to further clarify the information. KBTV, a recently developed channel on YouTube for video content has received over 20,000 views in its first few months. Flash task-based wizards add clarity to high volume / low intensity issues. A community ‘discuss this’ two-way forum is in development for interactive dialogs between users and support. Cloud tag searching shows customers what's hot. These are just some of the tools that VMware are looking into to increase the contact opportunities and keep customers ‘in the loop’ and ‘in the know.’ It's a strategy that is continuing to evolve as social media becomes more a part of everyday business life.

It's good to have a knowledgebase – you can even say that it's an essential part of supporting a technical or complex product set. But it's even better to proactively reach out to the customer base, using all available means to increase the interaction and enhance the customer experience, leveraging the knowledgebase for high customer value and intimacy.

## About VMware:

- HQ Palo Alto, CA
- 7,000+ employees
- World's 5th largest software infrastructure company
- More than 150,000 customers, 22,000 partners, 35,000 certified professionals

## And Savings, too

VMware employees handled over 360,000 service requests in 2009, through phone calls, online self-help, web chats, and field support. A primary measure of knowledgebase effectiveness is call deflection – the system’s ability to resolve the issue and prevent the user from having to call in for help. VMware watches these statistics closely, and has seen a steady decline in the number of service requests as a percentage of visits to the knowledgebase from more than 12 percent in the last quarter of 2008 to less than six percent in the same quarter of 2009. Meanwhile, knowledgebase visits have increased from 660,000 to nearly 2 million in the same period, indicating that customers are becoming ever more reliant on the knowledgebase for answers.

As for lessons learned, sometimes less can be more. “When we first launched our knowledge management program, we had too many measures of success,” Llewellyn explains. “Over the years we have refined the metrics to reflect only value-based activities.

Another lesson is that the best ideas come from users. “Some of our finest improvements resulted directly from user-community feedback.” Examples include the ability to quick link a service request to a knowledgebase article, and feedback and rating enhancements.

Future enhancement goals include extending the social media presence, expanding multimedia projects such as KBTV, creating forums for internal knowledge sharing, enhancing internal global search capabilities, harvesting more content from user communities, and a broadening of the content contributor pool. These goals all contribute to the ultimate objective of improving the self-service experience for customers and employee productivity in support.

## Behind the Scenes

With so many innovative programs in the works, the last thing VMware wants to deal with is the day-to-day management of applications and hardware, so the company is utilizing Consona’s managed services team to keep the system running smoothly. This allows VMware’s IT staff to concentrate on core competencies while resting assured that a mission-critical application is being managed proactively.

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## About Consona CRM

With a comprehensive set of solutions spanning self-service, customer management, chat, communities and proactive, just-in-time marketing and support—all fueled by a patented, best-of-breed knowledge management platform and backed by advanced analytics—Consona’s *KCS Verified* tools are the choice for integrated, multi-channel customer service and support.

The only CRM vendor focused entirely on service and support, Consona helps the Global 2000 control costs while providing a superior customer experience.

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