



Consortium for
Service Innovation™

VERISIGN SECURITY SERVICES

KCSSM at Work: Improving the Customer Experience

VERISIGN SECURITY SERVICES

- Trusted provider of Internet infrastructure services
- Secures transactions, protects data, and delivers information globally
- 99.999% availability serving 400,000 customers and up to 30 billion interactions per day

THE CHALLENGES

- Rapid customer growth
- Mission-critical services require immediate, accurate support
- Repetitive issues clogged support queues

WHAT THEY DID

- Gathered the Voice of the Customer
- Documented business impact of high-volume customer issues
- Delivered proactive knowledge to avoid calls
- Partnered with Development to eliminate problems

THE RESULTS

- Reduced cost: fewer customers have issues, and those that do can resolve them without a support rep
- More satisfied reps: fewer repetitive calls and less time calling others for updates; the good feeling that their input is being acted on to help customers
- Increased margin: better customer experiences drive incremental revenue

ENABLING A NEW ERA OF THE INTERNET

VeriSign is a global provider of Internet infrastructure services. It enables what it calls the “Any Era:” the emerging network of computers, services, phones and handheld devices, all of which need to connect and interact securely and reliably. VeriSign secures billions of transactions each day.

VeriSign’s customer support organization faces unique challenges. First, they have a mandate to scale their business in a way that creates both profit and customer loyalty. They can’t increase headcount as quickly as they grow the installed base—they have to become ever more efficient while continuing to satisfy customers. Also, because VeriSign provides critical infrastructure for the Internet economy, Support must resolve issues quickly and flawlessly.

In August 2001, VeriSign launched its first Knowledge-Centered Support (KCS) initiative in order to solve problems once and reuse solutions many times. KCS helped VeriSign by allowing each support rep to have access to the collective experience of the entire organization. Repetitive issues are resolved faster and more consistently.

Still, repetitive issues took too much time and too many resources. VeriSign decided to expand its KCS initiative to eliminate high-impact issues altogether.

TAKING KCS FROM “SOLVE” TO “EVOLVE”

KCS implementations initially focus on what the Consortium for Service Innovation calls the “Solve Loop:” making sure that support reps capture, reuse, and improve support knowledge in the course of solving customer problems. By effectively implementing the Solve Loop, VeriSign had created a knowl-

KEY BENEFITS

Decreased customer support issues 88%

Reduced cost within and beyond the support organization

Enabled rapid, profitable growth in installed base and revenue

edgebase that contained up-to-date information about a broad range of customer issues.

But KCS is more than what happens in the Solve Loop. Patterns of solutions and their reuse can drive insights about the customer experience. For example, if a particular knowledgebase solution is used to resolve thousands of customer issues a week, that’s good—but wouldn’t it be better to figure out how to eliminate the problem altogether? These activities comprise part of what the KCS operational model describes as the Evolve Loop.

VeriSign’s next step in its KCS initiative was to implement the Evolve Loop by using knowledge reuse and the personal experiences of support reps to understand and act on the voice of the customer.

REALLY LISTENING TO CUSTOMERS: FLURRIES OR SNOWFALL?

“Because we measure everything in support, we have a tendency to assume the numbers tell the whole story,” says Sallee Peterson, Senior VP of Global Customer Support at VeriSign. “We need to stop focusing on snow flurries, and start measuring snowfall. In other words, don’t chase every little issue: what can we do that will help customers the most?”

As part of KCS, VeriSign tracks knowledge reuse, so they know the solutions that are used most frequently



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by support reps and self-service customers. But they also tapped an often-ignored source of customer insight—the support reps themselves.

Director of Authentication and Security Services Roger Chang explains: *“When reps complain, what do managers do? They say, ‘go back to work!’ But what the reps were complaining about was precisely what we needed to fix. And, by listening carefully to them, we were able to capture the exact words customers were using, which made it easy for the rest of the organization to see what they really needed to work on.”*

The result of the careful analysis and listening to the voice of the customer was a prioritized list of actions that would have the highest impact on customer success and the business.

TARGETING HIGH-VALUE CONTENT

Sometimes, getting calls out of the queue is just as simple as putting the right information in customers’ hands. For example, when VeriSign rolled out a set of new capabilities, customers had to change how they installed their security certificates. Understandably, this resulted in a spike in call volumes.

By paying attention to knowledge reuse and what reps were saying, the team learned about this right away. They quickly crafted an “Evolve Loop” knowledgebase solution that described the new procedures and placed it prominently on the website where customers couldn’t miss it. Within hours, this solution had been downloaded 3000 times, and the call volume had tapered off. By making the voice of the customer a rapid, sense-and-respond system,

mature KCS users like VeriSign can help customers avoid problems, not just react to them.

MAKING THE BUSINESS CASE FOR PRODUCT IMPROVEMENTS

Often, the best or only way to help customers avoid problems is to partner with Development to change the product itself.

Development organizations are deluged with urgent requests from marketing, sales, strategic customers, and professional services. Support issues often aren’t treated with the same level of priority. That’s why VeriSign did their homework first.

“The key was to make the connection to revenue—that really got their attention,” observed Chang. *“We did an analysis of how much time it took to fulfill a common customer request. When customers contacted us, we had to get sales, technical support, and the authentication team involved. It took three to seven days to get the customer to the point where they could spend more money with us. We had compelling quotes from customers saying how frustrating this was. And, adding up the time taken by all the groups, we calculated this was costing VeriSign hundreds of thousands of dollars.”*

“We presented all this information: revenue impact, loyalty impact, and cost impact. With our data, the whole organization saw how important it was to collaborate to make the process work better for customers.”

The first few changes took quite some time to implement. But Support was careful to ask for only the most important items on their list, and was meticulous about documenting their business impact. Over time, the development organization has come

to see that Support has an important seat at the table for determining product direction.

ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS

VeriSign has some pointers for other companies interested in emulating their success:

- **Think like a business owner, not like a cost center.**
For example, Peterson transferred headcount to Engineering in exchange for their committing to address specific issues that drive support calls. It’s a win-win: Support still comes out ahead, because fewer customers call, and Engineering has the resources they need to make the product better without sacrificing their other priorities. Most of all, customers win with a better ownership experience.
- **Pick the things that will make the most impact to the company as a whole.**
It’s natural to focus on issues that drive contact volumes, but the rest of the company may be more focused on revenue. Prioritize accordingly.
- **Employees have the key to customer loyalty.**
Support reps want customers to be happy and successful, and they’re in constant communication with customers, so they’re the best people to ask how to make things better.



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KNOWLEDGE-CENTERED SUPPORT AT WORK

VeriSign's success with KCS started in the Solve Loop as they captured, structured, reused, and improved knowledge in the course of delivering support. But they've gone even further by implementing KCS Evolve Loop practices. For organizations that practice ITIL this is a great example of how KCS enables ITIL's problem and service management processes:

- KCS helps us analyze the barriers to customer success by tracking knowledge reuse and keeping the lines of communication open with customer-facing staff.
- KCS helps us develop and target value-added content outside of the Solve Loop.
- KCS helps us partner with Development to implement the highest priority product improvements.

VERISIGN'S FOUR PILLARS OF SUPPORT

VERISIGN PILLAR	KCS...
ZERO DEMAND Create products and self-service experiences that are so intuitive, customers don't have to call for help.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates timely, findable, usable content for customer self-service • Provides data to identify the impact of pervasive customer issues, targeting investment in product improvements
ZERO DEFECTION Create loyalty by delighting customers and eliminating dissatisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables better products, better self-service, and improved customer support
MAXIMUM REVENUE Create value so customers buy more and refer their colleagues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fills demand for support via self-service that would otherwise go unfilled • Drives high-impact product enhancements • Enables selling of tiered support packages
WORLD-CLASS SUPPORT Build organizational and individual skills and capabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arms each support rep with the collective experience of the entire organization

To learn more about KCS
and its relevance to your support team, visit

CONSORTIUM FOR SERVICE INNOVATION

www.serviceinnovation.org info@serviceinnovation.org
650.596.0772

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