

REDEFINING PARTNERSHIP :

support is, as support does

We've all been there. You're working with a new software application or on a "partial assembly required" project, and you're stuck. You're close, but you need some help. Still, you resist calling the help desk number because even if you get to a real person, the process is just going to be too painful. A good partner provides clients with support how and when they need it.

Help desks and support centers get a bad rap. Still, it's a rap many of them bring on themselves when they allow callers to leave with an unsatisfactory experience.

It's different in our industry though, right? After all, we're dealing in important, sensitive, and often time-critical environments.

Unfortunately, we hear all too often about companies, even in our industry, who don't provide the level of support their clients expect and deserve.

We at TCDI believe there are three main tenets to providing support at a level that meets our definition of partnership:

Accessible

Being available when the client needs you is one of the most basic premises of support. In our business that means 24x7x365. The timeframes, user locations, and even personal work habits of our clients dictate that data access and thus support should be on the clients' terms, not ours.

A while back, one of our clients decided to test us on this. We had just completed a very large project to migrate their document review system from a third-party data facility to our data center. The contract outlined various service levels including response times for our Support Center. These contractual response times were easy to agree to since they were the standard service levels we offer all our clients.

Shortly after we went live with their system, a couple of guys from the client's project

team were out celebrating and, at 3:00 a.m., decided they would call our Support Center to test how quickly we returned calls. When our on-call support staff member answered the phone, they were so surprised, they hung up. They fessed up to the call about a week later and let us know they were impressed that a "real person" answered their call at that time of the morning.

Knowledgeable

Okay, so someone actually answers the phone. That's an important start, but there's more to support.

Every support team member who answers your call should have the knowledge to actually help you with your issue.

Our support team members are all TCDI employees; we don't outsource any aspect of this important service. This means our team is briefed as a project moves to a new phase and knows the timing of critical dates such as productions. We know the nuances and settings that distinguish our clients' systems from one another and we also understand the ClarVergence platform well and are good resources for our client users.

I had a situation where a client called in needing some help executing a database search. I could tell by the way he explained the problem that he misunderstood how to use the search operators. I was quickly able to help create the search he needed but took a few extra minutes to explain the use of the different search operators. I then showed him where to go in our online help if he

needed a reminder of how those operators worked. When we can answer our clients' questions and teach them the skill behind it, we help to develop stronger, more efficient users.

Proactive

Being proactive is one of the most valuable but often unsung attributes of strong support. We work to take action often before the client knows it is needed.

Our support team members have access to several applications that monitor client systems in order to identify real-time connectivity and performance issues. That lets us take action before the client calls.

Not too long ago, we had a situation where a client needed to print and produce documents at a trial site on the West Coast. This remote batch print capability is a standard part of our case management solutions that uses secure print spoolers,

which we can monitor in our Support Center. Before their production began, we noticed that one of the spoolers was indicating the printer was out of paper and the other spooler required a reboot to restore a network connection. Before the client even uncovered these issues, we called the trial site to notify them and walk them through the resolutions. They were quite surprised and pleased we had taken proactive steps to solve their problems before they even knew they existed.

Summary

It seems that for many providers, user support is an add-on or a necessary evil. We see it as another way we can partner to ensure project success and a smooth, positive experience for our clients.

We believe strongly in these tenets and work hard to enhance our ability to be accessible, knowledgeable, and proactive. ■



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Patrick has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Public and Mass Communication Studies from West Virginia University. He started his career with TCDI in 2004 and has significant experience in Project Management and Technical Support. Prior to joining TCDI Patrick worked with, and managed, teams in Network Engineering.