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## **New Technologies Require New Levels of Support Services**

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*IT managers are tasked with supporting mission-critical business processes in the face of rapidly changing environments while simultaneously reducing the cost of IT for the entire enterprise. In addition, the introduction of new technologies — such as business analytics, SaaS, and virtualization — will only increase the complexity of the enterprise IT environment. To face these challenges, IT managers often look to their support services providers for assistance in reducing costs while maintaining and expanding the services provided to internal customers.*

The following questions were posed by EMC to Elaina Stergiades, research manager for IDC's Software and Hardware Support Services program, on behalf of EMC's customers.

**Q. As enterprises increasingly expand their IT landscapes to include cloud infrastructure and virtualized environments, how do their support services requirements evolve?**

A. New technologies such as cloud and virtualization are introducing significant change and uncertainty into IT infrastructure. This means the relationship between support providers and customers becomes a critical part of maximizing IT system and application performance. New technology typically requires a different level of technical skill and knowledge, and IT organizations often rely on support providers that possess the correct level of training and certification. Also, introducing new technology almost always requires the integration of legacy systems with the new hardware and/or software, which can be challenging.

As IT organizations integrate traditional IT operations with these new technologies, support providers must be able to address both components with a mix of deliverables. IDC research shows that as enterprises deploy virtualized environments, their support requirements often increase. That is, the increased complexity typically requires additional support deliverables from external support providers. Our surveys also show that IT staff rate cloud solutions as slightly more difficult to support than on-premise solutions, largely due to the integration required between cloud technologies and existing legacy systems.

So while IT professionals are developing the skills needed for these new technologies, they are looking for additional assistance in the proactive support space — i.e., remote and automated support that can help IT staff cope with all of this change and uncertainty.

**Q. How are these automated and remote support technologies changing the support services dynamic between IT personnel and support providers?**

A. Automated and remote support can provide significant benefits to IT organizations. However, IDC research shows that the connectivity and access needed for remote and automated support to work properly often remains a critical hurdle for IT organizations. Some are reluctant to allow that kind of connectivity without robust security for authentication, encryption, and access privileges built into the connectivity technologies and process.

The incentive, however, is that the best providers offer robust remote service capabilities in terms of advanced tools and utilities. Automated systems can alert support providers to potential issues before these issues affect mission-critical IT infrastructure or critical business processes. These tools can readily isolate problems, detect potential issues, initiate diagnosis and resolution, or even sometimes resolve the problem before it impacts any systems within the customer's IT environment.

Specifically on the hardware side, with the exception of parts replacement, most leading providers can perform support activities remotely that were traditionally performed onsite. This can deliver a much faster resolution time for customers that can't risk having business processes grind to a halt. We do caution users, however, to ensure that all the data and information gathered is for support purposes only — as well as to verify that advanced security measures are incorporated into remote and automated support solutions.

In addition, top-tier support providers are accelerating investment in automated and proactive support services to focus on optimizing and streamlining IT operations. While most support technologies currently focus on issue detection and resolution, IDC expects that these tools will grow to include significant advancements by further analyzing customer support and utilization data. Support providers can leverage those learnings to provide advice and make recommendations that can help improve IT service delivery.

IDC research consistently shows that automated and remote support tools potentially reduce overall system downtime, especially when deployed across the IT organization for mission-critical applications. Most support providers are including these advanced tools and utilities as part of support packages today, along with expanded electronic and online support deliverables to enable a more comprehensive support experience.

**Q. What role does electronic and online support play in the overall support experience? What do customers demand in online support engagements?**

A. The use of online and electronic support has increased significantly in recent years. This increase is due to a number of factors, such as shifting demographics, accelerated adoption of mobile devices for support delivery and consumption, availability of technology, increased investment by support providers, and changing customer expectations. We see customers increasingly performing detailed self-diagnosis and resolution, in some cases going far down the diagnosis path before reaching out for direct support. For most IT organizations, it can often be a lot faster and easier to solve problems independently, leveraging the resources available from their support provider — especially if the problem arises suddenly and affects critical IT systems.

However, to take advantage of the potential benefits of online and electronic support, customers must have access to the right information at the right time through the appropriate channels. To help customers manage their IT environments, technology vendors must deliver the relevant information in the correct context and appropriate language and make it easy to find and consume. Electronic and online support should include advanced search capabilities

for knowledge base articles, access to online forums that can facilitate peer-to-peer support, and step-through diagnosis and resolution tools to aid in problem resolution.

IDC sees IT organizations today looking for support through a mix of traditional and new channels to access information, at the appropriate time, that is relevant to the current problem. Enterprises want to be able to reach out to a support provider through the telephone, through email, through chat, and even through interactive communities that include technology vendors and partners. But the common thread is an Internet-connected, back-office tracking and delivery system. All channels must be connected to provide a seamless experience for customers on the front end to avoid restating problem information details during every interaction with support staff.

**Q. Given this adoption in electronic and online support, how do cloud infrastructures and business-critical "as a service" applications change the need for personalized support resources?**

A. Although most IT organizations are using electronic and online support to address day-to-day issues, introducing extensive cloud infrastructure and "as a service"-type applications usually increases the need for specific and tailored support deliverables. When CIOs and IT managers are faced with the complexity of existing IT infrastructures and the difficulty of new technology deployment, they often look to outside support providers for assistance.

Because of the nature of these types of technologies, IDC is seeing support packages that go beyond the traditional support relationship and beyond the level of support that may be required for older, legacy applications. The level of integration required to ensure top performance means that a cursory knowledge of the product as it relates to the customer's IT environment is no longer adequate. IT organizations increasingly need support specialists who have an intimate knowledge of the IT environment inside the customer's landscape. The specialist combines this knowledge with detailed expertise of the new technology to truly tailor the features of support to how cloud infrastructure and other service applications are deployed inside the customer's environment.

Additionally, as more types of new solutions are integrated into legacy landscapes, deeper knowledge is required to solve problems because the complexity introduced can be staggering. IT organizations tend to want a single point of contact for support services, which usually begins with a designated support engineer or technical account manager who can often address support problems right away. A service account manager might also become involved, depending on the problem, to provide more overarching account coordination. Finally, ensuring that the support staff has the correct level of training and certification can help fill skill gaps that are increasingly common with new technology adoption.

**Q. Given the rapid pace of change in enterprise IT, and the increasing adoption of new technologies, how will these support deliverables need to evolve over time to meet changing customer support requirements?**

A. As enterprise IT environments increase in size and complexity, CIOs and IT managers will look to support providers for additional capabilities to help streamline IT service delivery. IDC expects that support will continue the evolution from fast reactive support to true proactive support, preventing issues from affecting critical business processes.

For electronic and online support, we anticipate additional growth in search capabilities and context-driven help functionality to make sure IT personnel can find the relevant information quickly and efficiently. In addition, support providers will increasingly deploy social tools that can enable peer-to-peer networking beyond forums and online chats that exist today.

To enable true proactive support that can anticipate and avoid problems, technology vendors will focus on initiatives harnessing the power of "big data" internally to solve complex support issues for a diverse customer base. IDC expects that predictive analytics will become critical for support providers as they update internal technology and processes to provide preventive support across the IT landscape.

Overall, this evolution will be a balance between the people, processes, and technology required to deliver a comprehensive support experience across the IT environment. As IT personnel rely on electronic and online support for day-to-day problems, they will require advanced support from technology vendors to address complex issues they can't solve themselves and a higher level of proactive guidance to help optimize their environment. Automated, proactive support that can prevent issues from affecting critical systems is a primary component of that mix. Support providers with this comprehensive approach will be well positioned to serve customers in this highly competitive market.

#### ABOUT THIS ANALYST

*Elaina Stergiades is the research manager for IDC's Software and Hardware Support Services program. In this position, she provides insight into and analysis of industry trends and market strategies for software vendors supporting applications, development environments, and systems software. Elaina is also responsible for research, writing, and program development related to the software support services market.*

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