MARKET SIGNALS™

WHITE PAPER

Modern IT Support for the Modern Enterprise:

Upgrade Your IT Support through Enhanced IT Services and Digitalized IT Service Delivery

Rimini Street®

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Market forces have created a need to change the way businesses operate and interact, internally as well as externally, with customers and vendors. Modern business will look very different from historic business models as new technology enables business transformation.

On an operational level, next-generation IT services are needed to fix, maintain, and manage more complex IT environments comprised of multiple vendors as well as a hybrid mix of cloud and non-cloud products and services. Modern IT support must address changes in the way businesses operate, and in the way that users consume IT services. IT must also be strategic — to drive efficiencies and savings that can be reinvested in the business, and to empower companies to regain control of their roadmaps.

Digitalization, manifested by cloud, the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and other technologies, is concurrently influencing IT service delivery. Providers must find a way to leverage the benefits of digital technology and respond to the complexity, urgency, and fear of missing out without losing the human touch. Both servicing and supporting technology must evolve into modern IT support for the modern enterprise. Service organizations that plan and staff accordingly will be able to provide the upgraded IT support — through enhanced IT services and digitalized IT service delivery — that their clients require.

PART I: ENHANCED IT SERVICES

Five Building Blocks that Enhance IT Services

What specific characteristics are foundational to modern IT support? Five core building blocks can enhance IT services. Modern IT support must be integrated, intelligent, collaborative, and personalized. It must enable users to resolve issues quickly across their IT landscape while relying on a global pool of experienced talent. If you're looking to upgrade your IT support through enhanced IT services, consider support models that include these critical building blocks (Figure 1).

Building Blocks of Modern IT Support

BUILDING BLOCK	DESCRIPTION
Integrated	A new way for a business to deal with its technology service providers
Intelligent	AI-powered and data-driven
Collaborative	Customers/users share experiences and help each other
Personalized	The right people servicing customers at the right time
Global, experienced talent	Available anywhere at any time

Source: Rimini Street, October 2020.

Figure 1

Integrated Services Help Improve Service Quality and Delivery Speed

As modern IT environments become more complex, enterprises are at risk of the complexity overwhelming their existing support organization's ability to deliver high-quality, timely IT services. For modern IT support to be successful at handling the complexity of multi-vendor, multi-platform, hybrid IT environments, it must be simple.

An integrated support and managed services model for systems operations and management provides simplicity. As companies move some applications to the cloud and retain others in a non-cloud environment, they are seeing a need for one organization to be responsible and have the operations skills and staff to run and maintain solutions across their IT portfolios. To simplify IT services, software support silos must be dissolved.

In the integrated support model, services are consolidated into fewer levels or tiers, and they may be provided by fewer or a single services organization. This bundling of IT services (sometimes called unified support) is independent of technology consumption model and, supports a company's IT priorities.

Integration of IT services is a key strategy for helping IT keep pace with the business. Multiple service levels that span vendors and partners can mean longer service times when today's demand is for speed. IT service providers must be able to limit the disruption that can occur when multiple vendors and partners are involved in fixing, operating, and maintaining a solution.

Seamless handoffs between partners are critical. And IT service providers need to minimize accountability issues (aka finger-pointing) that can occur with multiple providers, particularly when multiple vendors and products have created a hybrid IT model.

With an integrated service model, a single support organization oversees or delivers support. Support may be outsourced as application management services (AMS) to gain rapid access to skills needed to service a multi-vendor portfolio while avoiding the common pitfall of overpaying that comes with traditional outsourced models. The scope of services can include break/fix, operations, and solution management.

With consolidated oversight and delivery, the traditional Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) support Levels 1-4 are flattened. Fewer service levels mean fewer escalations, a reduced IT backlog, and consistent case ownership and management.

This also improves IT service delivery by allowing IT to resolve issues faster for line-of-business application users. Reducing the number of service handoffs also reduces the disruption caused by handoffs across vendors and providers. This can, in turn, improve the quality of support services.

At a global construction and civil engineering company, moving to an integrated support model where services were converged improved the average time to close security access requests by 77% year over year (YoY). The company also saw a 68% YoY improvement in the average time to close data fixes.[1] How? Seamless handovers that shorten the time to deliver solutions.

Integrated services can take many forms where a single partner provides multiple services or provides services for multiple solutions (Figure 2). Integrated services improve service quality and timeliness.

INTEGRATED SERVICES EXAMPLES

- Application management services and support services
- SAP and Oracle application support
- SaaS and licensed product support management and delivery
- Open-source technology and application/database support
- Application and infrastructure support for a business capability from start to finish
- Break/fix, operations, and application management

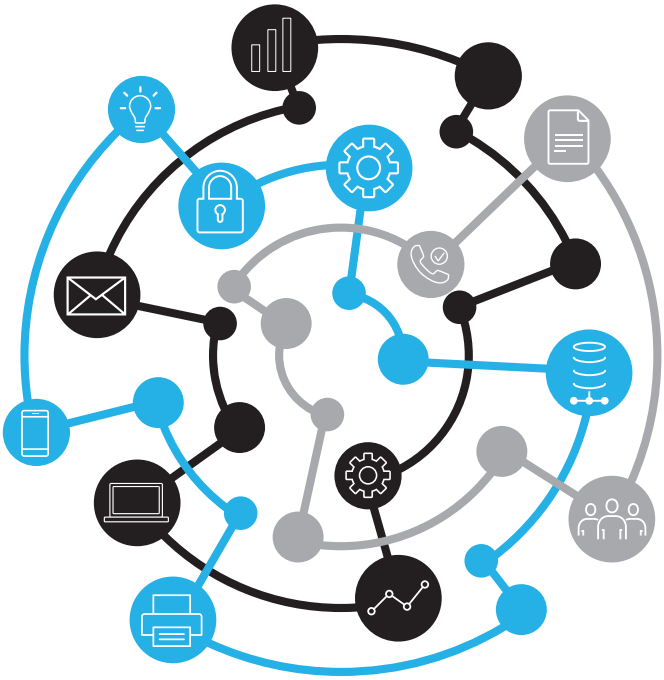


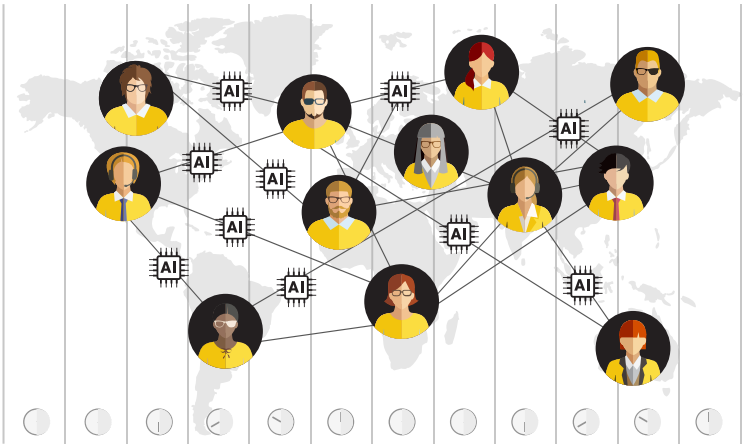
Figure 2

Intelligence-Enabled Services Scale Quickly for Faster and Better Outcomes

Personalization in consumer services is spilling over into IT services as users demand improvement in their customer experiences. At the same time, IT support teams must be able to head issues off before they become problems and learn from previous issues in order to apply knowledge quickly. These demands must be met in a way that can scale as the hybrid IT portfolio expands and contracts.

An intelligent support model is one way to capitalize on existing knowledge while at the same time varying support based on the specific service situation. With intelligent support, some IT services are automated while others are recalibrated to be predictive. Customers are not only serviced when something has already gone wrong. Intelligent services often factor in past support experiences or predict future support needs.

Through automation, an intelligent support model harnesses technology such as AI and machine learning (ML) to surface insights and correlations that help IT resolve complex issues and deliver higher-quality services more rapidly. An intelligent support model is more responsive, anticipating issues and service needs before they turn into problems. The automation, repeatability, and predictive aspects of intelligent services make them highly scalable (Figure 3). They also give customers more control over helping themselves.



INTELLIGENCE-ENABLED SERVICES

To help scale quickly for faster and better outcomes

- AI-powered
- Anticipate issues and service needs
- Web-based
- Integrate ITIL support Levels 2-4

Figure 3

An example of intelligent support in action is from Rimini Street, which provides a unified, personalized, human-centric support experience, backed by an AI-powered service platform that delivers swifter routing and human response. Here, AI is used to speedily assign cases and/or move them to the right engineers. It improves support resilience by handling resource availability in order to deliver uninterrupted support from hundreds of specialized engineers at scale across thousands of clients with complex, mission-critical software.

Another intelligent support example takes menu-based automated responses to the next level. Online support tools (chatbots) use AI to mimic human interactions as they drive users to knowledge-based answers. When human IT support experts are supercharged with AI, it facilitates more rapid resolution of complex issues and delivery of higher quality services.

Collaboration Yields Faster and Better Service

The world has become more social, and people want to share. Customers like to hear from other customers and even help one another. That means having forums where they can share experiences and answer questions.

Yet today's technology solutions are increasingly complex, with multiple solution providers creating potential for disconnects across the various knowledge-sharing forums that accompany IT solutions. The knowledge disconnect bleeds into IT services, making it more difficult to provide seamless support for a portfolio of solutions. IT needs the ability to see the various technologies comprising a solution and access the technical expertise and business knowledge for each component part.

Collaboration in IT services happens when multiple parties (individuals, teams, and business partners) work together toward achieving a service outcome by sharing their ideas and skills. IT experts and their customers can use technology (e.g., chat support and remote camera sharing) to exchange information as they explore issues, options, and solutions.

Collaboration allows customers and service providers to extend their knowledge and search for solutions far more widely than one person's own limited vision. It also increases (and makes visible) accountability and ownership of problems and solutions while reducing solution times by pooling talent, information, knowledge, and skills.

An example of collaboration in action is occurring at a major energy utility where IT is driving support and operational best practices by collaborating with its third-party support provider and line-of-business leaders. Reducing the time it takes to set up remote access from months to a few days plus reducing meter and billing incidents are just two of the improvements seen.

Personalized Services Create Differentiation

Service costs are being squeezed along with other IT budget items. Some IT leaders are being asked to provide a business case to continue funding levels for IT services. At the same time, users are demanding better customer experiences. IT support teams need a service approach that moves knowledge closer to their customers, reduces costs, and improves customer experiences, all while balancing technology and the human connection.

Adopting a "Shift Left" philosophy addresses these very needs, resulting in a faster, more efficient, and more effective service resolution. The philosophy of Shift Left aids in solving technology service issues by bringing knowledge and expertise closer to the customer. It works best when automation is balanced with (not blocking or inhibiting) the human factor to provide a personalized customer experience.

More than just self-service or web submission (automation) which lower service costs, a Shift Left philosophy makes experts and knowledge more readily available to customers. Its adoption can provide enterprises with better service and better business results, and can make customer service a differentiator.

In a recent CIO Dive article, Sarah Miller, Niemen Marcus CIO, described how the company applied the concept of Shift Left to provide a more personal shopping experience with in-person experiences that are powered by digital technology. Miller stated, "Regardless of whether it's a retail site or not, you have to perform," and customers "are much more aware of what that experience should look like and so they're defining that experience for us."

Global, Experienced Talent can Deliver Expertise Anywhere, Anytime

The demand for technology experts is increasing as IT services are transformed to meet a more complicated technology landscape. IT services teams must be able to support complex, global, multivendor solutions.

From a supply perspective, even with the recent economic downturn, the pool of cloud expertise is smaller than the demand for those skills. To alleviate the expertise shortage, teams are being built that collectively have experience rather than relying on individuals with broad knowledge. At the same time, modern technology is allowing companies to source and hire talent regardless of location. With the restrictions on a person's physical location removed, recruiting and staffing are based less on location and more on skills needed.

For many companies, remote work has become the new norm. This cultural shift makes new staffing approaches possible. As processes, technology, and tools are rapidly adopted to enable virtual support delivery, they are linking teams together and connecting users and the experts who can help them. Technology has also made it possible to provide 24/7 access to IT support for global solutions, making a broader pool of talent available from anywhere to deliver services any time.

Although the global staffing model has been in place at consulting firms for years, it is still early days for many companies that are just now getting comfortable with the global staffing and remote work models. Watch for these approaches to evolve rapidly over the next couple of years.

PART II: DIGITALIZED IT SERVICE DELIVERY

The New Face of IT Services: Empowering a Proactive Service Model

For several years, IT service delivery has been moving from personal interaction to automation, with mixed results. The pendulum has swung too far and today, it must swing back toward more person-to-person interaction in order to balance the benefits of technology with improving customer experiences.

At the same time, digitalization is impacting how IT services are delivered. Digital — via cloud, IoT, and other technologies — is making IT landscapes more complex. The questions are harder, and the problems involved in operating and maintaining IT landscapes are more difficult to solve. With digital, technology changes are also happening at a more rapid pace.

As IT adapts to the digital era and new customer experience demands, IT service delivery requires evolution as well. IT service must be able to support, maintain, and manage these more complex IT environments comprised of multiple vendors, as well as a hybrid mix of cloud and non-cloud products and services, while at the same time making its customers want to come back for more.

Currently, most IT service models are not proactive; they are reactive, based on users calling IT support when they need help or when something requires attention — whether for ongoing support, break/fix, or operations and maintenance functions. A part of changing IT service delivery (whether internally or externally managed) includes changing the face of IT to proactively provide support and **empower the support experts using digital technology** while at the same time providing differentiation through *personalization*. All of this must come together in a new organizational structure that supports business needs at the speed of digital.

Digital Technology Proliferation

Technology is being used to control IT service delivery costs, yet it is also increasingly being used to empower and enable IT service experts and the users they support. Now is a great time to look at the technology landscape to enhance the IT service being delivered and the way in which it is consumed.

Searchable knowledge bases continue to be a first step for most customers instead of calling a help desk. This redirection away from person-to-person interactions is generally favored by IT vendors because it reduces IT service costs. *However, it doesn't put people first.* In today's market, users and customers are demanding a better personal experience. IT leaders must find a healthy mix between self-help technology and the human touch.

Automated operators are increasingly being used to provide 24/7 IT service access. Online chat tools (e.g., chatbots, digital assistants) are good for selected highly repeatable, noncomplex use cases. Although most vendors tend to use this to deflect away from person-to-person communication, the technology can be an effective tool for *intelligent routing — pointing users to the right human expert faster.* Like search tools, automated operators also reduce IT service costs.

Cloud-based collaboration tools, including virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), are changing the IT service industry. One aspect of this is technology that allows an IT service delivery expert to remotely see what the customer is seeing or doing in order to understand a problem first-hand and then help resolve it. Another aspect is the real-time interaction that expedites sharing of information between users and IT service experts.

These tools can reduce the amount of time it takes to service a request, but the company's web presence needs to be user-friendly and the tools must address security and compliance risks. Cloud-based collaboration can complement the search tool and automated operator trends in order to help reduce cost and, at the same time, improve the customer experience.

Mobile devices have opened the door to obtaining and providing IT service anytime, anywhere. People are changing the way they use mobile devices — originally from talking to texting, and now from texting to using specific communication applications (such as WhatsApp and Skype) where mobile is making multiple channels available for user/expert interactions. Local usage of mobile communication apps is being adopted, but this is still an emerging area for IT service.

IoT is making it possible for data to be gathered, stored, analyzed, and reported proactively, giving the IT service expert a head start on identifying, understanding, and solving IT service requests before users even call for help. Emerging 5G networks will encourage proliferation of IoT devices for real-time information gathering.

Machine learning is becoming a capability that IT service providers use to enhance a range of IT services. An example of this is using ML to find insights and relationships in IT service requests and create personalized user training programs based on the pattern of requests. Companies are just beginning to explore the possibilities of ML in IT service management and delivery. In addition to improving personalization and proactivity, watch for increased use of ML to empower humans.

Access to Expertise and Knowledge at the Right Time Provides Differentiation via Personalization

Technology can be isolating. In areas where improving the customer experience can have a big impact, IT leaders are *personalizing IT service and* making experts and knowledge more readily available to users. In a way, this harkens back to historical customer service models where the human aspect of customer service was used to build relationships and loyalty.

AI-powered IT service is taking this a step further by empowering IT service experts to make smarter decisions and provide faster, better responses to users/customers. The results, on average, are better outcomes and happier users. For a detailed look at using AI in IT service, see "Use AI to Enhance the Human Connection in IT Support Services."

Web-based video (e.g., Zoom, Teams) is adding to the effectiveness of personalization, making it possible to have an actual person-to-person interaction instead of a voice on the phone or email. This can have a big impact when building relationships and making connections. It is not as common for ongoing IT service efforts where sharing data or documentation is more critical than seeing the faces of the people involved.

IT Service Organization Transformation

The IT service organization structure is transforming to accommodate changes in how solutions are placed (cloud, non-cloud, hybrid) and in how IT service is delivered.

A unified IT service experience across multiple vendors and environments is growing in importance for companies that are investing heavily in cloud services. While many enterprises' IT service organization models remain product-focused (such as an SAP competency center), those enterprises that find themselves with an increasingly hybrid IT environment are restructuring their IT service processes to deliver support, maintenance, and operations services by business capability (such as product management) in order to provide a seamless and consistent support experience regardless of the technology used to enable that business capability.

An integrated support and managed IT services model for systems operations and management is becoming popular for companies that are moving applications to the cloud as software-as-a-service (SaaS). As organizations move certain applications toward a cloud path and retain others in a non-cloud environment, they are seeing an increase in demand for cross-portfolio integration and security services. This adds to the need for one organization to be responsible and maintain the operations skills and staff to run and manage solutions across the IT portfolio.

Remote work and telecommunications have expanded both the reach of experts and the reach of users/customers to access that expertise. Companies now have more flexibility in terms of from where they hire experts and where the experts reside. Users and experts can be connected around the world; this is making it more possible than ever to have a truly virtual IT service organization.

As IT service providers plan and execute digital strategies and seek ways to differentiate their IT service models, leveraging service technologies, personalization, and IT service organizational changes can transform their IT services into a model that meets customer needs at the speed of digital.

CONCLUSION

The current era of IT modernization is increasingly driven by business transformation and advances in technology. As modern business starts to look very different from historic business models, IT service providers must also remodel how they service the technology that enables the business.

Implementing attributes of modern IT support services can significantly improve overall success with business transformation and help navigate the challenges of moving to new technologies. Upgrading IT support with enhanced IT services from a provider model that integrates digitalized IT service delivery is a strong first step.

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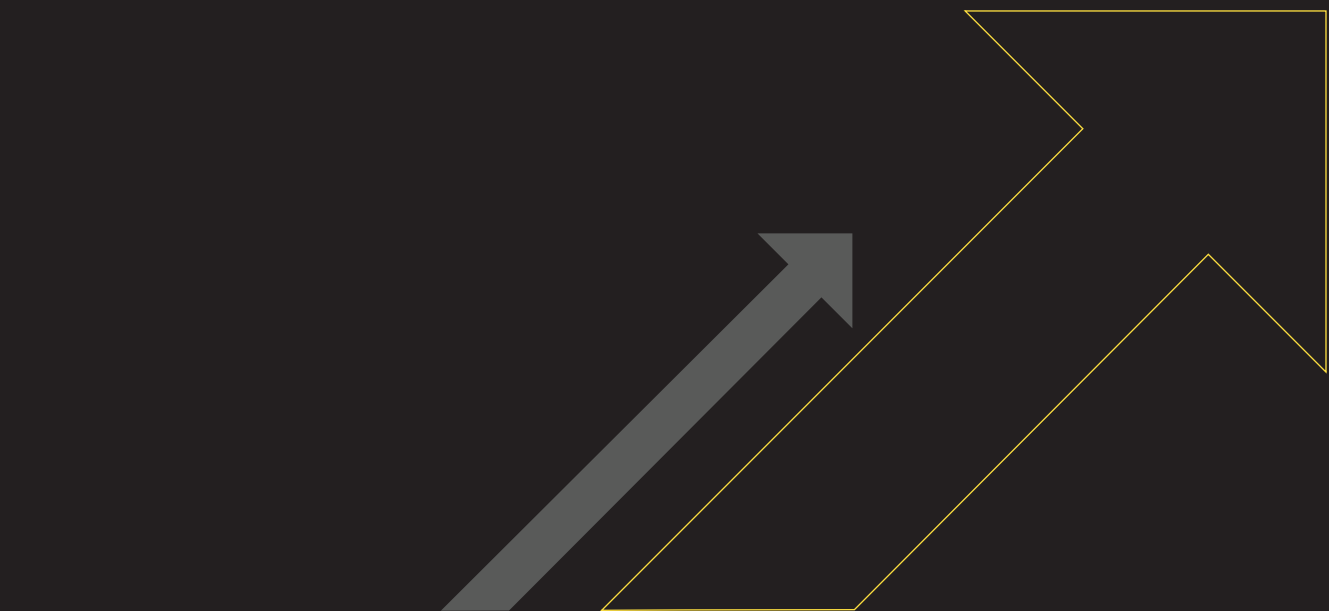

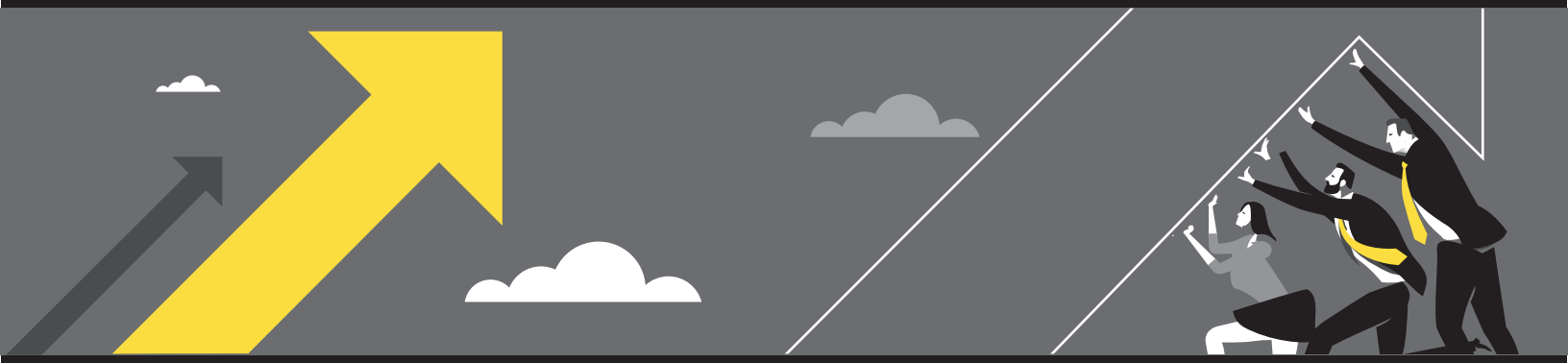

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