SoftBank kicks off customer support transformation

We chose ServiceNow because it has a great UI and conforms to the global standard for service management.

Yosuke Arita, General Manager, Operations Service Division 1, ICT Operations HQ, SoftBank Corp

Modernizing customer support in line with new service offerings

Japanese multinational, SoftBank, provides mobile, internet, digital payment, and other services to millions of customers around the world. It also serves corporate customers from its enterprise business division.

Industry: Telecommunications
Location: Tokyo, Japan
People: 18,929 employees (Mar 31, 2022)
Products:
• Telecommunications Service Management
• IT Operations Management
• Automation Engine
Alongside communication services, the company actively invests in innovative new technologies for the B2B market. As Yosuke Arita, General Manager of Operations Service Division 1, ICT Operations HQ, SoftBank Corp explains, “Our main focus is on providing network, mobile, and voice services, but in response to the digital revolution, we’ve introduced cloud, security, IoT, and other corporate services.”

As the number of services increased, so did the number of inquiries and requests for support. Being able to respond to these quickly and efficiently is a key component in achieving high levels of customer satisfaction, but SoftBank needed to update its approach.

“Having the right case management system in place is really important. Responding quickly with relevant information is essential to build trust with customers and secure repeat business,” says Arita. “Our previous solution was aging and we had different channels for every service. The team had to monitor them manually to maintain high levels of service.”

ServiceNow builds a history of customer inquiries and our responses, which helps us use real insights to continuously improve services.

Yosuke Arita, General Manager, Operations Service Division 1, ICT Operations HQ, SoftBank Corp

To continue delivering great customer support as more new services were released, SoftBank needed to embrace automation and establish more efficient processes before its team and solution reached capacity. It decided to refresh and align the systems and processes behind its fragmented service desk.

“We’d been using the same case management system for so long it had become outdated. In that time, system constraints meant support agents had all developed their own ways of responding to customers. We decided to establish a standard approach,” explains Tomohiro Shitozawa, Manager of Smart Operation Development Department 1, Operations Service Division 1 at ICT Operations HQ of SoftBank Corp.

Centralizing teams and processes on one platform

The ICT department kicked off a project to unify processes across support teams. “One major challenge was if a customer inquired about more than one service, we couldn’t process the queries at the same time. The systems weren’t integrated, so the only way different teams could communicate was by phone or email,” reveals Shitozawa. “This was complex and meant customers were kept waiting while the support team tracked down the right information.”
In 2018, SoftBank introduced ServiceNow Telecommunications Service Management (TSM) to replace its aging ticketing system with a modern, feature-rich platform. “ServiceNow unifies and standardizes operations for different services onto one platform,” adds Shitozawa. “In addition to conforming to global IT infrastructure library (ITIL) standards, we were impressed by its great user interface (UI) and features that enable a rapid response to customers.”

To reduce the burden on the support team, the ICT department developed a ServiceNow portal for customer queries. SoftBank also took the opportunity to implement smarter processes to make case management more seamless and efficient. This will pave the way to achieve its ‘Smart Operation’ goal.

Centralizing inquiries on one portal is expected to be one of the biggest wins of the refresh and has the potential to significantly improve the customer experience. Previously, enterprise services customers had to phone or email a different contact for each service, but they didn’t always know who to call. The new portal will simplify online inquiries by giving them one place to go for support, while leaving the existing channels of communication open if the customer prefers to call or email.

“Customers can self-serve for common queries using the FAQ section on the portal. Unlike with phone and email, they don’t need to wait for someone to help them so there’s no delay in response times,” says Shitozawa. “This should reduce the number of calls and emails our agents need to handle, which will significantly decrease their workload.”

Plans to standardize features for all support teams

When all queries start coming into one portal, SoftBank will need to adopt standard processes to handle them efficiently. The company has decided to use ServiceNow routing to give customers a consistent experience. The platform will also aid collaboration and knowledge sharing between different support teams.

“The only system that met our requirements was ServiceNow. It’s flexible, supports app development, and has great functionality.”

Tomohiro Shitozawa, Manager, Smart Operation Development 1, Operations Service Division 1, ICT Operations HQ, SoftBank Corp
“To define standard processes, we reviewed how each team was working. We assessed what we needed to change to unify operations and make better use of ServiceNow,” Shitozawa explains. “We interviewed agents from each team, mapped workflows, and we’re working on defining alternative, more streamlined ways of working.”

This is expected to highlight gaps in processes, and the ICT team has demonstrated that ServiceNow not only has the functionality to close these gaps, but also to deliver higher standards of working. SoftBank uses this collaborative approach to promote ongoing platform development and roll out new functionality to the service team.

Smarter features will transform customer experience

With standard ServiceNow functionality, the ICT department aims to improve agent efficiency and customer satisfaction. The translation function of the portal, for example, will be particularly useful. SoftBank’s enterprise services are used by both Japanese companies and their overseas subsidiaries and affiliates. With ServiceNow, customers can choose between Japanese or English when using the portal.

“The solution comes with a standard translation function that can be integrated easily and cost effectively using APIs. We use it to translate text typed into the portal between Japanese and English in real time,” said Shitozawa.

The portal’s dashboard also gives customers an overview of service status, so they can quickly find out if there are any failures or issues. Both status history and notifications of any upcoming maintenance are displayed, alongside failure alerts, which is also a standard feature of TSM.

Previously, customers could only check system status by phone or email, so enabling them to access this information by simply logging into the portal offers a much better experience.

To further empower customers to self-serve, SoftBank rolled out automated requests for tasks such as spinning up a virtual machine or pausing system monitoring. This was previously managed by phone or email and can now be triggered by tapping a button in the portal.

“Using ServiceNow Integration Hub, part of Automation Engine, we built a system to automatically execute certain tasks when the customer clicks on a button. In the past, agents received requests over the phone and passed them to the product owner to process manually,” explains Shitozawa. “Although this feature is limited to some services for now, it’s much more convenient for customers who can make requests 24/7 without waiting for someone to be available. It’s also saved a lot of man hours for our team.”
Introducing more products and learning from richer insights

Next, the company is planning to roll out a chatbot powered by ServiceNow Virtual Agent to provide first-line responses to customer queries. In addition to ServiceNow TSM, the ICT department is also using IT Operations Management (ITOM) to monitor systems and networks. The solution automatically discovers and normalizes valuable configuration management data, generates alerts, and reduces noise for the IT team. The company expects to expand the use of ServiceNow across the organization in the future.

“As the platform matures, ServiceNow builds a history of customer inquiries and service desk responses. We use this information to analyze the content and quality of our response so we can continuously improve how we serve customers,” says Arita. “There are still some features of the platform that we haven’t mastered, but we’re excited to keep learning and find new ways to optimize service quality.”