

# PERSPECTIVE

Getting the Bang from the Self-Service Buck  
*Value from self-service*



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## Abstract

When done well, self-service can benefit both businesses and customers alike. But when done badly, it can lead to fuming customers and lost business. In this paper, we discuss the four essential steps to deliver effective self-service.

## How it began

From gas stations and banks to airports, hospitals, and restaurants, self-service touches almost every area of our life.

It all began in the early 80s when voicemail was introduced. Voicemail evolved to interactive voice response which was limited to prompting and call routing in the beginning. Later, it moved towards handling simple generic inquiries. Transaction processing was the next evolutionary step. But it was not until the 90s when the sudden awareness of customer service (Courtesy: Jan Carlzon of SAS) put the limelight on self-service portals. At that time, self-service seemed like a win-win for both companies and customers. For the customer, it provided the perceived ability to transact with more comfort and control. While for the enterprise, it meant shaving large proportion of customer care and communication costs with better service. The Internet was the next step in the evolution.

Many enterprises moved transactions of all kinds to the IVR. And this is where the bubble burst. Customers began to realize that automated and 24x7 service did not necessarily mean great service. There were cases of shoppers abandoning their purchases as their frustration increased on being forced to use self-service kiosks in stores as well.



## The downside

### Easy, fast, and seamless but no interaction

A major downside is that no matter how easy, fast, and seamless, technology renders the transactions, customers value the service more when interacting with a person. No human contact is like a lost opportunity for companies and customers to create a relationship – something that is extremely difficult with a device.

### Willingness to engage and adapt

Many customers are at risk of being left behind, either unable or unwilling to adapt. The design of the technology also plays a role key here – some self-service technologies are painful while others delightful.

### Higher probability for fraud

Although there are checks and balances in

place as with any technological solution, there is a significant probability of fraud as transactions are not as closely monitored by sales associates.

### It is not always cheap

There's an assumption that self-service is cheaper. But that's not always true. The cost to serve a customer might work out to be higher, given the constant need to keep on updating the content and service methods

That said, self-service is expected to grow in acceptance with advancements in technology. It undeniably has the long-term ability to meet rising customer expectations while controlling costs and keeping the experience standardized, with little deterioration in quality. However, there is no one-size-fits-all. Enterprises must deploy self-service selectively and smartly, rather than indiscriminately.

## Getting it right – a four step plan

Let customers  
contact you

Accept that personal contact is an absolute necessity under certain circumstances – customers will want to talk directly sometimes, if self-service fails, or importantly, about sensitive matters. Humans are deeply social beings so be available when required.

Enrich your  
content

The goal of self-service is to assist a customer in finding what they need and following instructions successfully to accomplish the desired task. Organized FAQs or help sections are great but only if the customer accomplishes his / her objective. Enrich your content with easy-to-consume videos, voice snippets, etc., along with FAQs.

Be open to dialogue,  
ensure self-service is  
a two-way medium

Make it easy for customers to ask for help. Be available to them through a channel of their choice. And as the degree of involvement changes, make the right communication channel available that effectively conveys the emotional state of the customer.

See what's  
helpful

Capture every question that the customer asks from any channel. Analyze actual usage patterns – FAQ page views, time spent on a page, top-rated articles, questions answered on a community page, etc., for true insights on what the customer is feeling or thinking. Make changes as required based on the insights to make the customer's interaction on the self-service channel more meaningful.





## In conclusion

Self-service works best when customers embrace a well-designed responsive system on their own. It does more harm than good if they are pushed to use a bad system. And as do-it-yourself creeps further into everyday lives via kiosks, mobile apps, and the Internet, don't lose sight of your customer service goal to service as many customers as possible without any deterrence to building a relationship with them. After all, the survival of your business depends on them coming back to you.

## About the Author



### Vijay Narsapur

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Vijay Narsapur is a Vice President and the Strategic Global Practice Head for Customer Service at Infosys BPO. In this role, Vijay is responsible for all customer-service-related sales, pre-sales, solution design, products and offerings, and delivery-related activities. He is also responsible for strategic activities of the practice such as M&A, alliances, and selection of delivery location.

Vijay has been with Infosys BPO since February 2009. Since then, the notable achievements of the Customer Service Practice at Infosys BPO have been expanding the Customer Service business in the Philippines and Europe, and starting service offerings delivery in the Americas. Recently, the Practice has added several exciting offerings in the Social Media space, and was mentioned as a leader by a notable independent analyst firm.

Vijay began his career in CRM with Deloitte Consulting's Parsippany, New Jersey office in 1998. He co-founded iSeva, a BPO company, in March 2000. After iSeva's partial acquisition in 2004, Vijay returned to India and has since been playing senior roles in the global BPO industry. In his previous role before joining Infosys BPO, Vijay was the SVP-Operations with Aditya Birla Minacs. Vijay is an Engineer-MBA by training, from IIT Bombay and IIM Lucknow respectively.

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