OpenVMS: Striving to provide the support you need

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Introduction

It is no secret that support for HP operating systems and accompanying software is changing. New phone numbers, interactive voice response systems (IVRS), and unfamiliar voices on the other end of the phone all present customers with new challenges and frustrations. OpenVMS is not immune from HP's outsourcing strategy, and much discussion has taken place regarding the issues of the program. There is no denying that, during the initial rollout to outsource front-line support, problems surfaced and customer satisfaction suffered. This transition has also proved to be challenging for OpenVMS staff who have been supporting and investing their energies in the product for years. These are also the same people that you have worked with many times. As the HP advocates closest to the customer, we felt it was important to involve ourselves with the areas that we could influence. Presented with the new direction of the company, we needed to the identify gaps in support and to develop plans to improve those areas. The goal of this article is to give a behind-the-scenes view of to the actions we have taken to consistently strengthen the support of the OpenVMS product while adhering to HP's outsourcing strategy.

It became clear that training and retraining would be the key to a successful support program. Even though the initial support team spent hours in the classroom, we knew that a process to strengthen learned skills was required. The call center identified areas of OpenVMS functionality that generated the highest volume of calls, and then targeted those areas for developing training. Key to the success of the training would be development of the curriculum by call center engineers who had the most experience working with customers and solving problems. This would ensure that the proper topics were covered to assist with identifying and troubleshooting problems as well as knowing the appropriate questions to ask.

Training was delivered using two methods. First, call center personnel traveled to the HP site in Bangalore to present the training in person. Not only did this provide the best learning experience, but it also developed relationships among staff. In addition, in-person training helped employees to understand the environment their counterparts deal with in their daily jobs. Bangalore staff could ask questions easily and get answers clearly. Second, remote training was held via conference calls and virtual classrooms. This allowed for the involvement of many experience OpenVMS engineers as well as a focused road map of training. Remote sessions allow for standard instructor-led training as well as ongoing seminars and brown-bag programs to ensure that new engineers are kept current about many different OpenVMS products.

In addition to the constant schedule of training, new engineers are assigned mentors who are seasoned OpenVMS professionals. Engineers are paired according to time shifts so that questions can be addressed in real time and direction can be given as necessary. Mentors can also help identify knowledge gaps and suggest the appropriate training. Along with one-on-one mentoring, chat tools are available to internal support staff that allow for immediate access to additional resources. These chats are monitored 24 x 7 x 365 by OpenVMS experts from around the world. Participants include not only support engineers, but Ambassadors, Proactive services representatives, and managers in the OpenVMS community, all of whom share the goal of continuing the success of the OpenVMS operating system. Once an individual raises a question regarding an OpenVMS issue, suggestions, solutions, and even offers to participate in solving the case are generously received. This type of collaboration can help new engineers grow and develop the same levels of expertise as engineers who have many years of experience.

Along with specific training and mentoring, we have assigned individuals to projects that are focused solely on resolving issues related to outsourcing. The individuals are very familiar with the new teams, management, and structure, and handle communications that aim to improve efficiency and

performance. If an issue needs to be addressed, these project leaders act as intermediary, ensuring that correct information is clearly communicated to the teams or individuals involved. This approach ensures the availability of resources that are required for providing elevated support.

Measurements and ratings have also been developed to make sure that training and mentoring goals are realized. Although these measurements are not new to customer support, they have taken on an even more important role with the new strategy. One method is the customer survey. Each customer survey response is taken very seriously, and every concern is addressed appropriately. In addition, a separate team is dedicated to listening to incoming calls to observe English skills and other cultural differences that might need attention. Each call is recorded, and questions about its handling can then be reviewed by managers and other HP personnel.

Probably the most exciting initiative taking place in OpenVMS is the globalization of customer support. HP has always been a global company, but efforts in services to join its global resources together to work as one entity has been elevated to higher priority in the last few years. OpenVMS is working hard to lead the way in this endeavor. The global chat channel mentioned previously is just the beginning. Organizational change opportunities are being taken advantage of to bring resources with like skills together no matter where they are located in the world. As of late last year, OpenVMS experts in HP's Australia, Pacific, and Japan (APJ) region began reporting to a manager from the America's region. Additionally OpenVMS teams in Europe work closely with the America and APJ team to provide 24x7x365, seamless support. Processes are in place to pass calls between the regions when necessary. An example of successful global support occurred recently, when a customer in the Americas Region needed an expert in cluster configuration to be standing by in the early evening. Rather than require the customer to pay for an off-duty engineer, agreements were made for an APJ resource to be available at the appropriate time. Although the resource was required at night in the United States, the APJ engineer could be engaged during their mid-morning hours. The flexibility of a large global team also allows regions to cover for each other without hesitation during holidays and paid-leave periods. Although globalization presents its own challenges, these are easily outweighed by its achievements in providing efficient support. How does the globalization of OpenVMS support help customers? It ensures that an expert can be engaged any time of the day, anywhere in the world. Most important, these resources are available to the initial problem response representative.

We always welcome feedback and suggestions from our customer base. In order to keep the reputation of OpenVMS and its support mechanism at its well-known levels of quality, we need input from all involved. We encourage customers to share their good and bad experiences with us, along with ideas for improving their support experience. Although we are working within the strategy set by HP management, our goal continues to be providing high levels of quality of OpenVMS support under any constraint we face.

For more information

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