

Customer Service Management

Getting their teeth into service

Professional and rapid support is crucial for the competitiveness of Sirona Dental Systems. That's why the company decided to rethink its customer service solution. The result: a marked increase in service quality and transparency.

As an international leader in the manufacture of dental equipment, Sirona Dental Systems plays a major role in defining the technological and economic standards in the sector of dental treatment. From lab instruments and dental chair units to CAD/CAM systems for dentists and dental technicians – Sirona products can be found in all treatment areas and subsectors of modern dentistry.

For the specialist suppliers of products as complex as those produced by Sirona, technical support is indispensable. In the interest of the patient, the dentist needs to solve any problems as quickly as possible, for example, if water is dripping from a device or if there are questions concerning the handling of a device. Sirona has three hotline teams that look after the specialist suppliers according to product groups. These teams receive further support from the customer service centre. Some 8,000 calls and 1,500 emails every month require a qualified and quick response.

Customer support not only fills any gaps in the knowledge of the suppliers, it contributes directly to the development of the products. Although it is primarily suppliers who call for advice, dentists – i.e. end users – also frequently call Sirona directly to ask for assistance. A comprehensive equipment pool in the customer service centre means that the technicians can simply guide the supplier through the problem-solving process using an identical product as a model.

CEREC AC: With the CEREC Bluecam technology whole jaw-bones can be digitalised in under a minute. After a single visit to the dentist patients receive their fully ceramic prosthesis and are spared the unpleasantness of dental casting.



Sirona's customers are located across the globe, its hotline works in five languages: German, English, French, Spanish and Italian. The overseas subsidiaries have their own service technicians, so that the team in the headquarters in Germany is generally consulted only if the problem cannot be solved locally.

Email is the preferred means of communication

The communication trends in Sirona's customer service have evolved dramatically in the recent past, with a steady rise in the volume of emails. The existing solution for customer service, however, was geared to telephone queries and was thus stretched to its limit. Service staff were having to transfer emails into the system manually because this step was not yet automated. "Plus the fact that we increasingly deal with an international market put further pressure on our customer service," explains Thomas Kübel-Sorger, Manager of the customer service centre at Sirona Dental Systems in Bensheim, Germany.

"As support plays a major role here, we had to act quickly," Thomas Kübel-Sorger continues. Sirona was quite happy with the technological platform; the crux lay in the functions of the support application. Since the existing system could not be extended, Sirona decided in 2007 to replace the system.

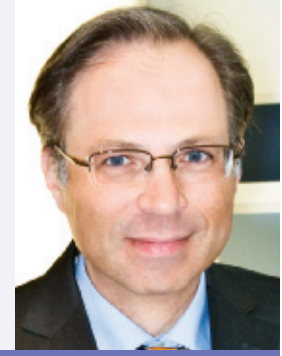
One of the core requirements of the new solution was that it should be web-capable. Switches from one medium to another should become a thing of the past and all incoming emails should automatically be available for processing in the application. Particular emphasis was placed on the comprehensive documentation of all customer contacts and the transparency of customer support activities. Among other things, the company wanted to fulfil the legal requirements, such as the law governing medical products (Medizinproduktegesetz or MPG), more effectively and easily.

Preparation is half the battle

Following a bid for tenders, the company chose MATERNA as its implementation partner, and Pacemaker by Apprologic as its preferred application. Pacemaker is a flexible process toolbox that allows customer support processes to be devel-

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Sirona Dental Systems



oped individually. MATERNA had already been involved previously in a consultancy role and had coordinated the different requirements at department level. During the project itself, MATERNA's experts provided advice on the system, redesigned and implemented the processes, and continued to assist Sirona after going live. “We received an all-round service from a single provider. We worked closely, testing ideas and suggestions directly for feasibility,” says Frank Keck, Technical Project Team Leader at Sirona. Moreover, the service specialists at MATERNA were able to bring in experience from other projects.

The project team invested a great deal of time and made a point of including the service staff in developing the requirements specification. “This phase was important and that's why we spent a lot of time on it,” says Frank Keck. It paid off: implementation took just over four months before the system went live in October 2008. However, the email interface – one of the most important new functions – ended up causing a few headaches: there were still problems with the new operating method in the hotline. “Unfortunately we had to switch off the mail interface briefly and make sure that all service staff completely understood the new procedure for handling email tickets,” explains Frank Keck. Since February 2009 the email interface has been running smoothly and the initial learning process is complete.

Pacemaker runs on the Remedy core system by BMC which was already in use at the company and was migrated to the current version. Sirona had been using Remedy since 2000, and found it flexible and open. It can be linked to the SAP system without difficulty and Siemens also offers CTI add-ons for it. Email and Pacemaker were linked via a MAPI interface with a secure coupling path. “This connection was a real technical challenge,” according to Frank Keck. The Exchange Infrastructure SAP-XI interface takes care of communication and data exchange between SAP and Pacemaker, connecting applications with SAP.

Compliance guidelines followed

All customer contacts are now recorded, documented and visualised with workflows in Pacemaker. Depending on the situation, the ticket is either dealt with and closed immediately

or the query is passed on to the customer service centre. The departments evaluate their tickets for quality management purposes. Sirona is also setting up a database that will provide answers for incoming queries concerning known problems. The customer service centre tickets are finally transferred to the SAP system for accounting. All products are categorised in Pacemaker according to product, symptom and cause. Pacemaker covers the four business processes of query management, technical trouble-shooting, the customer service centre and complaints management.

A particularly important business process is the handling of complaints. The MPG law requires that companies systematically record, document and evaluate complaints. The technical inspection authority, TÜV in Germany, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have also set down similar rules to ensure transparency with regard to medical products. Companies must account for how they deal with a complaint. Safety aspects are important, in some cases obligating the reporting of complaints to the authorities. At Sirona this task is the responsibility of the Designated Complaints Handling Unit. The unit works out a solution and forwards it to the customer. “This wasn't so straightforward with the old solution because everything had to be done manually. That made it all the more important for us to automate processes in the new solution so as to have a high standard of documentation and transparency at the press of a button,” explains Thomas Kübel-Sorger.

Query management takes care of simple problems and triggers the workflow: the hotline team evaluates and solves the content, enters the answer into Pacemaker and informs the customer. If certain messages occur repeatedly, for example if there is a recurring problem, the ticket is sent to a team of technical trouble-shooters. If a visit to the supplier is necessary for repair or maintenance, the customer service centre is instructed. Problem descriptions, customer history and agreements are stored in Pacemaker, whilst resource scheduling and invoicing take place in SAP.

Focus on transparency and monitoring

“Transparency has now increased and we are able to evaluate all information,” smiles Thomas Kübel-Sorger about the improvements. Key performance indicators, such as response

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Frank Keck, Technical Project Team Leader, Sirona Dental Systems



time for email processing, can be monitored and adhered to. An email has to be dealt with within two working days and if this is not possible the customer must be informed. With the old system these processes were complicated to control and monitor.

Furthermore, Sirona used the new solution to improve the ticket structure. The project team added the new category, “symptom”. The quality of the documentation was also thoroughly reassessed. What contents should a ticket have so that it is useful to others and can be evaluated meaningfully? “We vastly improved the quality and documentation quota with the new solution,” continues the customer service expert. Considerably more customer contacts are now documented in the system: whereas at one time it was only 20 percent, this figure has now risen to at least 60 percent. For example, the sales team also works with the system now and posts tickets. The result is a clean workflow that includes everyone involved in the customer contact process. The acceptance of the system inside the company has also grown: since all information is available and transparent, the usefulness of the solution is clear to all staff. Not least its user-friendliness and the fact that staff were included in the development of the system made a huge difference to the acceptance of the system.

It is hard to imagine life without Pacemaker now at Sirona. So Thomas Kübel-Sorger and Frank Keck plan to add a number of further extensions: the important CAPA process (Corrective Action Preventive Action) is to be linked up. In this way, correction and preventive action can be depicted with the system. Their use can be tracked and clearly documented. Moreover, further departments can be integrated into the workflow: once the German sales team has been linked up to the system, all of the EU and worldwide sales teams are to be integrated. In the long term Pacemaker may even be used at international level. One major condition – multilinguality – has already been fulfilled by combining Pacemaker with Remedy. An asset database to illustrate device history and a solution database with intelligent algorithms are already being planned. Sirona has created the basis for this with the “symptom” field, which is displayed in the language of the customer. All that is needed now is a link to a search engine and intelligent algorithms to make this know-how accessible for other queries. Increased efficiency and a higher effectiveness of the customer service – this is how Thomas Kübel-Sorger sums up the success of the new system. Thanks to the transparency of the

entire support system, customer support is now considerably more efficient and Sirona can deploy its resources more effectively. Customer surveys confirm that the customer service has improved in terms of documentation, availability and quality – vital criteria for survival in international competition. ■

Advantages of the solution

- High transparency
- Simple monitoring of the customer contact processes
- Extensive evaluation options
- High documentation quota in the customer contact process
- Fulfilment of compliance guidelines
- Automated email processing

Technology

- Application: Remedy 7.0 and Pacemaker
- Database: Oracle 10.2.0.3
- Email: Microsoft Exchange 2003
- Virtual platform with VMware ESX server
- Server operating system: Windows 2003 Server
- Client operating system: Windows XP

The company

Sirona Dental Systems is a world leader in the manufacture of dental equipment. The company produces treatment units, imaging systems, instruments, hygiene devices and systems for computer-aided cerec restorations (dental CAD/CAM systems). The products are marketed in over 100 states around the globe. The company has subsidiaries and representatives in 17 countries, the largest in Bensheim, Germany. Sirona has stood for innovation in the dental sector for more than 130 years and today employs over 2,300 staff. Sirona has been listed on the Nasdaq (code: SIRO) since June 2006.

Further information: www.sirona.com