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Reimagining Field Services

Improving the Support Experience While Reducing Cost

By Spencer Slattery

A reimagined field services model can successfully reduce both cost and complexity while simultaneously enhancing productivity and ensuring a great experience for workers.

The traditional field services model can be summed up in six words: "Something's wrong. Come fix it in-person." In response, a highly technical field engineer would go to the user, diagnose, repair or replace as necessary, and leave. That in-person support model is becoming increasingly ineffective, especially given today's hybrid and flexible work models. Multiple forces are pushing and pulling at business, compelling a reimagination of field services. Understanding these forces and how they change the nature of field services is critical if businesses are to provide users with a great experience, convenience, increased workforce productivity, and reduced cost of support.

Nine Forces Impacting Field Services

Nine major forces are currently at play in the market, within business, and in technology that affect the demand for in-person support and call for a reimagining of field services.

Forces That *REDUCE* the Demand for In-Person Support:

- Device reliability
- Device management processes
- Remote diagnostic and repair tools
- Pressures for cost reduction
- Modernization of Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) processes
- User expectation for speedy resolution

Forces That *INCREASE* the Demand for In-Person Support:

- Physical workplace complexity
- Personalization of the end user
- Workplace device complexity

Unisys partners with major airlines to set up Tech Cafés right outside flight briefing rooms for flight crews who cannot use remote support, as they may be 30,000 feet in the air when they get a call from the Service Desk. For this business role, in-person support is optimal.

1. **Device reliability *REDUCES* demand for in-person support.** Devices are far more reliable today than in the past as a result of operating system stability and reduction in moving parts (Solid State Disks, etc.). When a device does break, it is often exchanged for a new device rather than fixed. Couple this with modern device management processes where users can provision a new device over the air on their own, and the result is a decrease in in-person support requirements.
2. **Device management processes *REDUCE* demand for in-person support.** Historically, much of field support dealt with software needs. Tasks such as updating software, upgrading the OS, and swapping out devices as part of a PC refresh program were manually-intensive procedures. Field engineers needed to be physically present to install apps, perform backups, take care of imaging, etc. That has changed with modern device management processes. Modern device management enables cloud-based delivery of apps as well as data backup in the cloud. This can now be handled entirely by the end user, eliminating the need for field engineer involvement.
3. **Remote diagnostic and repair tools *REDUCE* demand for in-person support.** Obviously, there are plenty of problems that users cannot fix on their own. In the past, a technician often needed to be on site to determine whether an issue was related to the PC, the network, the router, etc. Today, it is getting increasingly easier to remotely diagnose and fix problems. Even if a technician cannot connect to a PC for a screen share, virtual technologies such as merged reality enable support staff to remediate issues without being physically present with the end user.
4. **Pressures for cost reduction *REDUCE* demand for in-person support.** The most expensive part of IT support is in-person field services, particularly dispatch support which includes the cost and time of travel. As businesses seek to tighten budgets, the combination of a re-design for the support process and modern device management tooling makes cost reductions readily achievable.
5. **The modernization of Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) processes *REDUCES* demand for in-person support.** When a business has an immature support process, it is common for field engineers to be dispatched to fix problems that actually could have been resolved remotely. The modernization of ITIL processes reduces these unnecessary on-site visits by accurately identifying when problems can be resolved remotely versus when in-person support is truly called for.
6. **User expectation for speedy resolution *REDUCES* demand for in-person support.** Many users do not want to waste time scheduling or waiting for in-person support. Their demand and expectation is “Fix it fast.” They want remote support – and if that support can detect and prevent problems from occurring in the first place, that is even better.
7. **Physical workplace complexity *INCREASES* demand for in-person support.** Smart buildings, smart conference rooms, the Internet of Things (IoT), the increase in biometrics, and more have created a volume of opportunities that require a physical touch. Installations, repairs, and replacements often cannot be accomplished remotely, but necessitate “feet on the street.”

Unisys works with leading retailers and utilizes merged reality to eliminate travel time for dispatched field engineers, reducing resolution time by up to 90% (from ~3.5 hours to ~20 minutes).

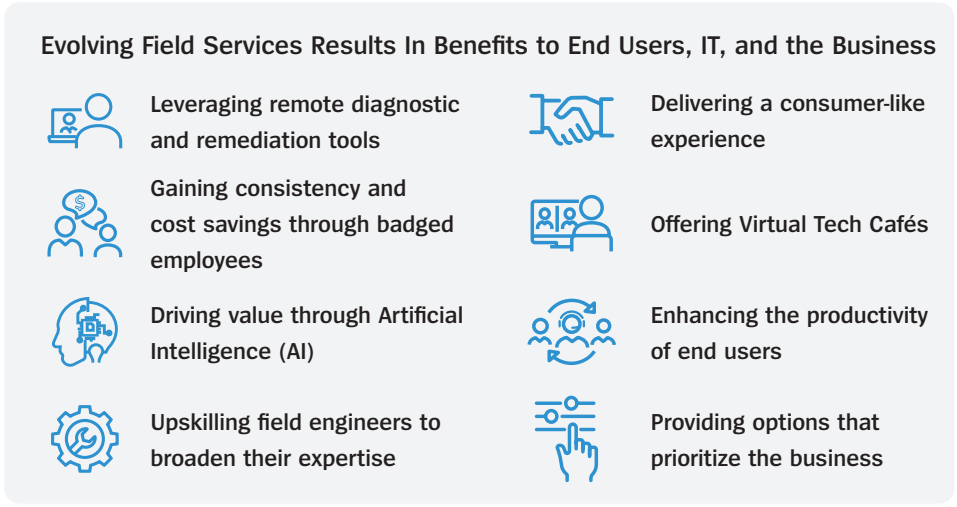
8. **Personalization of the end user experience *INCREASES* demand for in-person support.** Although many users prefer remote support or even self-service options, some users consider in-person support to be a business perk. These users expect white-glove treatment that includes having professional, in-person field technician services if they encounter IT issues. There are also certain business roles that benefit from in-person support because the cost of downtime for that role using less-effective remote support justifies the higher cost of in-person support.

9. **Workplace device complexity *INCREASES* demand for in-person support.** The device ecosystem is becoming increasingly complex. Users engage with multiple device types, including desktops, notebooks, tablets, and smartphones. These devices rely on multiple operating systems and are loaded with endless applications. There are times when users simply want to have personal one-on-one help getting their digital assets in order so that they can work at maximum productivity.

Reimagining Field Services

The combined effect of these nine forces clearly does not eliminate the need for in-person support; rather, it calls for a *reimagining* of field services as a whole. The objective of such a reimagining is to provide a superior end-user experience that raises workplace productivity on emerging technologies while eliminating the need for unnecessary in-person support and its associated costs.

With that goal in mind, organizations should evaluate their field services strategy in the context of broader benefits and capabilities, including:



- **Leveraging remote diagnostic and remediation tools.** Digital experience, application and device performance and analytics based monitoring tools empower field engineers to do their work without physically traveling to an end user's location. Fewer in-person visits lower overall support costs.
- **Gaining consistency and cost savings through badged employees.** Many providers use subcontractors to perform field support – it is not uncommon to have three or four layers of subcontracting taking place. This results in margin stacking and price pressure and also impacts consistency and quality. A provider who uses their own badged employees eliminates these costs and concerns.

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Spencer Slattery is accountable for ensuring client satisfaction within field support and services on a global basis. He is responsible for refining end-user-focused approaches – covering people, technology, and processes – for modernizing and enhancing our capabilities. Spencer has over 25 years of commercial and enterprise IT experience with a focus on employee experience, modernization, innovation, and business value creation.

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- **Driving value through Artificial Intelligence (AI).** Through AI, routine support tasks can be automated, eliminating the need for manual processes. AI can also predict and prevent issues from occurring. Additionally, AI can help field engineers be more efficient in addressing the issues that do require human intervention.
- **Upskilling field engineers to broaden their expertise.** It is imperative to have support personnel who are skilled to handle a wide array of devices: not only computers and mobile devices, but also modern conference room equipment, scanners, sensors, cameras, biometrics, and the like. Plus, field engineers should be equipped to work with complex IoT systems, smart buildings, and other modern workplace systems.
- **Delivering a consumer-like experience.** Today's workers want to be able to interact with field services through modern media tools (MS Teams, Yammer, Slack, mobile apps), track the status of their IT ticket and the arrival of a field engineer, and share information via mobile devices or the cloud to eliminate wasted time.
- **Offering Virtual Tech Cafés.** A Virtual Tech Café reduces the demand for expensive in-person dispatches. Virtual Tech Cafés that are equipped with merged reality help bridge the gap between the ability of end users to self-serve and their need for remote guidance and expertise from field engineers.
- **Enhancing the productivity of end users.** In the reimagined field services model, field engineers do not work solely with hardware and software. Engineers also work with *people* to ensure that the hardware and software are being used to their greatest potential, such as by helping an end user navigate an application more efficiently, on the spot tips and training.
- **Providing options that prioritize the business.** Field services does not always involve in-person support. For instance, a provider can offer smart lockers so that if a device fails, the user can swap it at a locker for a new one. Or even for a highly distributed workforce, like Field Sales, Advanced Replacement via an overnight Depot shipping service. Options such as these allow an immediate return to productivity and keep business operations flowing smoothly.

Ultimately, a reimagined field services model embodies a holistic understanding of the digital workplace ecosystem and all that is required for superior support experience – not just of the hardware and software, but of the users and the business. By partnering with a provider who offers such a field services model, businesses can successfully reduce both cost and complexity while simultaneously enhancing productivity and ensuring a great experience for their workers.

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