



## REAL TIME SOLUTIONS FOR THE CUSTOMERS

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**ABSTRACT** The proposed article describes how effectively the real time enterprise can address the customer queries in the minimum time without incurring heavy cost to the customers in all the three related areas of sales, marketing and after sales service. The real time solution basically decrease process cycle time to the minimum after an inquiry is generated from the customer and to the point when his problem is fully resolved to his expectations. To the customer, it results in the satisfaction and long term brand loyalty. However, it requires heavy investment to create a real time infrastructure for an enterprise. Needless to say, it could be done overnight but Indian companies should be getting ready to provide real time solutions to the customer to create competitive advantage initially and survive in the long run.

**KEYWORDS :** satisfaction, Customer, competitive, investment, expectation.

## INTRODUCTION

Customer has always been a passive element in the business process model because he has always been located outside the physical premises of the company. Unless all the members in the business process become equally achieve, the maximum efficiency could never be achieved. The real time solution should cut down the time for the task assigned to each member of the business process whether the member is internal or external to the organization. It is obvious that information technology has removed the barriers of time and space in several applications in the business world and has been able to break the value chain for most of business applications. Therefore, it depends upon the organization how effectively it utilizes the web technology to make all the members of the business process equally achieve and participate. In this particular case, for real time solutions for customer, problem is relatively simple because the customer is the only one who is passive and other members who deal with the customers are relatively more achieve as they are within the organization.<sup>1</sup>

Customer has always been and is still looked upon as someone who is served by the organization. This view has to change where customer should actively participate in the business process to serve himself effectively and efficiently to his own advantage and the organization should provide necessary IT infrastructure to make that happen. It should be understood that real time solutions for the customer problems is like a "Zero defect philosophy" where the product delivered to the customers should have no defects whatsoever. The real time to attend to the customers can never be reduced to zero but it could be minimized to a value allowable by the physical limits imposed by the business process and information technology. There is no doubt that most of the companies all around the world is able to interact with the organization through e-mail, fax and telephone to resolve his problems.

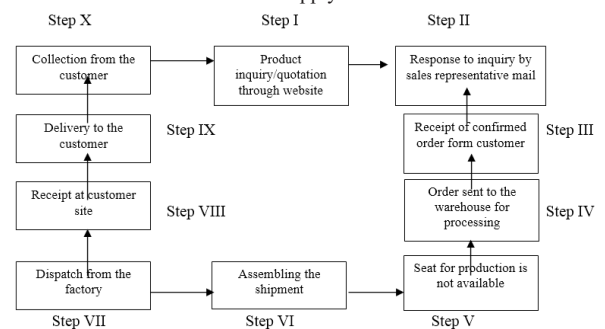
But the interaction with the business process should not be confused with the integration of the customer into the business process along with other process members at same level.

## I. Web enabled order processing cycle

The figure below shows a web enabled order processing cycle for regular items carried in the warehouse and also the items made to specifications. In the diagram shown below, the extra step of sending to production is shown for the items, made to specifications of the customers.

The first step shows when customer first legs on the companies website to explore the possibilities of buying the product by sending an enquiry. He waits for the response to quarry in step II. The customer then sends a confirmed order in Step III. The step form IV to VIII are interval to the company. However, the step IX again deals with the customer for collection of the payments. In order to minimize the entire process cycle time, the time taken between two consecutive steps should be minimized. It could be seen that company has no direct control on reducing the time between step I to III and again steps VIII to I because the process member i.e., customer is outside the premises of the company. It is assumed that touch and feel of the products is imported to the customer and therefore, he pays the price only after the

merchandise is delivered to him at his site. This of course applies to B2B transactions and would also apply in B2C transaction.



## ORDER PROCESSING

## Real time marketing solutions

In the web enabled world, the ultimate desire of the customer is to find the information about the best product with the highest quality in the minimum time so that he could make the optimum decision. The moment the customer accesses a website of his interests and explores further, it is the time for the company to catch the customer and retain him till he deliver deeper and deeper to be convinced that it seems to be product of his choice. This the time when the company has to really web enable the marketing process by presenting several competing offers, collect responses and successfully complete customer initiated interaction. It should be noted that the series of interaction with. The website has already made the customer the active member in the business process. Which is the requirement of the real time model. The above scenario is promoting integration with the business process just not the interaction.

Every company has a website today and many provide customers with the web access to know about the company and the products more popular the website, wider the market reach and many customer will visit the websites, however, there is no guarantee that the customer will still buy the product. Therefore, having a sophisticated web present is vastly different from truly web enabling your business.

In most of the cases, the customer would have an inquiry about the product if the "touch and feel" is extremely important to the customer. The customer therefore, submits an inquiry to the company and the representative from the company responds to the customers e-mail.

The sequence of events may be broken here and based on the authors experience, it may be eight to ten hours delay and more if the representative from the company decides to wait over night before responding to customers e-mail, the process cycle time is unnecessarily extended by twenty four hours or more. It is very risky for the company because the potential would be buyer may never return to check the e-mail in next couple of days. In may cases, it may amount to losing the customer for even. Therefore, it is necessary as a first step in the real time customer software that a whenever an

important event takes place in a business process, the concerned members should be informed immediately automatic notification to the right people about the right events at the right time is the first requirement to reduce the business process cycle time.

### Real time solutions after sales service management

Today the customer is demanding higher than ever levels of service and organizations must respond to retain customer loyalty. Organization need to interact with customer across many communications channels and utilize the service force as efficiently as possible to bring the real time of service to minimum. The moment the customer submits a service request through the company website. The service request should be immediately logged in the service database. We could consider the first case where the service engineers visit to the customer site is not headed right away. The new systems which are in place allow customers to use self diagnostic tools to find out where the problem is in the product. The company should build over a period of time an extensive and intensive database based on the recurring service problem of the customer such that the customer can himself figure out what needs to be done to fix the problem. It will be based on the self diagnostic tool which is part of the product feature itself and the service database provided through company, website. It would be the ideal thing to make the customer an active member of the service cycle by providing necessary tools to fix the problem by himself. This would reduce the service cycle time to the minimum.

Needless to say, the customer will not be able to fix all the critical problems himself and service engineers visit is very much needed. The service cycle time could be reduced by minimizing the number of trips made by the service engineer. Based on the feedback provided by the customer, the two facilities will ensure that the service engineer will know in advance what spare part he needs to carry to fix the problem in the very first trip. Please see that the service engineer used to make more than one trip at least two to fix the problem. The first trip the service engineer used to make in the past to find out what the problem is so that he could get necessary spare parts in the next trip. This function of trouble shooting has been given to the customer through self diagnostic tools and service data base accessible through website. The objective is very clear so as to make the customer an active process member as much as possible and customer the process time avoided with each task.

The service engineers are generally in the field during weekdays. Therefore, it would be advisable to locate the service engineer market to the customer site and based on the information provided by the customers regarding the problem, the service engineer should be able to reach customers site in the minimum possible time. The company should provide necessary mobile technologies to service engineers so that the customers ability to deal with them at anytime, anywhere basis.

It is also useful that the organization promotes the culture of developing one to one relationship between the organization service representative and the customer. A change our form one representative to another for the same customer should be avoided at all costs. The service representative would know the customer right from the beginning and using be in a much better position to solve the customer problem than a newly assigned sales representative. The customer also wants that he does not have to repeat what he said to the last service representative and describe the history of his interaction with the organization all over again. This not only makes the customer fall uncomfortable but may also increase the cycle time for completing the service. The service cycle time is defined as the time difference between the initiation of service request call and completion of service required by the customer.

### CONCLUSIONS:

The objective of this article is to provide a series of well thought out methods to provide real time solutions for the benefit of the customers in all the three areas and marketing, sales and after sales service. It can be noted from the article that real time solutions are possible by developing the keen understanding of each step of the process. The cycle time can be reduced not necessarily by combating the process, but by obliterating the steps if necessary. Summation will come if process cannot be simplified by obliteration. One of the requirements of the real time is to make the business process i.e., order processing to interest and connect customers end to end directly to the company. To cut down the order processing time to minimum, it is obvious to

minimize the number of process members. The scenario would look like as if customers enter their own orders, check inventory, track shipments, pay invoices and enter support inquires. Similarly, to minimize after sales service time, the customers should be first able to resolve the problem using internet service diagnosis tools. If self service after using the tools by the customer fails, the trip by services representative to the customer site is justified.

It is clear that real time solution for customer involves reducing the cycle time to minimum. It justifies the need for moving the business process to internet for twenty four hrs. access to the customer, minimizing the number of process member effectively to reduce human intervention. In the web enabled order processing cycle, we have basically discussed reduction of time involved from step I to III in this article. There may be however, an opportunity to reduce the time involved from step IV to step X to bring the total order processing time to minimum.

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