Building a self-reliant workforce for efficient virtual office setup
Abstract

For most organizations, the rapid shift to virtual work due to COVID-19 pandemic has created new challenges and also changed the way in which employees will work in the future. Building a self-reliant and self-sufficient workforce for the virtual office is no longer an option, but a necessity — as this is the key to making the organization more resilient and agile. Enterprises need to drill down on areas where employees need support or are dependent on others (like the IT support team) for doing their day-to-day work. Modern technologies such as artificial intelligence, human-like virtual avatars with cognitive conversational capabilities, augmented reality, cloud, and digital kiosk/locker-based automated solutions will be the key to making the virtual workforce self-reliant via self-service channels. This paper focuses on how an organization from any industry can elevate the virtual workforce strategy to set up a more efficient IT support in the virtual office.

Introduction

When businesses across the globe were immobilized by the COVID-19 pandemic, transitioning to digital quickly was the key to restarting work. In this process, as survival took center stage, a number of challenges emerged in doing business digitally. Employees had to be provided with adequate infrastructure to function digitally; many had to upskill on the go to arrive at a level of digital dexterity, adapt to new trends that define virtual collaboration, learn asynchronous digital communication to connect with their global teams, and search for their purpose in a digitally hyperconnected and physically isolated world.

However, this transition wasn’t a smooth and inexpensive one — neither for the employees, nor for enterprises, despite gargantuan efforts to make their ends meet during a challenging phase in the history of business, and consequently, work. As digital became the cogs and wheels of the business machinery, there is one function that played a significant role in shouldering this shift — the IT support teams. In this era of hybrid work, where businesses must switch and balance between virtual and in-person work models, building a self-reliant workforce through effective self-service automation is critical to minimizing the spend on keeping the screens up and running.

The challenges of the virtual office

IT support challenges impede the smooth functioning of a virtual office. Some of the key issues include:

- Virtual work overwhelms the IT support teams with a massive number of tickets which, if left unresolved, impede business function in critical ways. Employees can no longer walk up to a colleague’s desk to fix menial IT issues.

- The virtual workforce constitutes a mix of digital skill levels — many remain unaware of common hardware and software issues and common ways of resolving them.

- A large queue of tickets leads to long waiting times, which ultimately costs man-hours of both employees that need and provide support.
Multinational teams that connect from different time zones and language regions pose the issue of synchronicity and legibility—and at the same time, require a sizable IT support team to provide round-the-clock support across the globe.

Manual support also faces the challenge of similar, recurrent issues that consume the time of expert ITSM talent. Moreover, a lack of prioritization leaves the most pressing issues unattended and queued amidst those that can be solved easily through self-service.

Fixing the IT support for the next-generation operating model

However, the challenges of the virtual office can, and in fact, are being addressed by some of the cutting-edge technologies that have become central to the digital business of today’s world. Virtual work is here to stay, and according to Gartner, the demand for virtual work will increase by 30% as Gen Z fully enters the workforce. However, this is also the part of the workforce that is most comfortable with self-service models that drop the need for human agents. And this is where the cost of live-agent support—that is 190 times greater than the cost for self-service—can be traded in exchange for faster, uninterrupted, and round-the-clock digital operations across countries and geographies.

According to the CIO magazine, the top three challenges of virtual IT support are ineffective support, solutions that fail to speak to a diverse user base, and a sub-optimal support provision strategy. However, technologies like automation, AI-based use-cases like auto-translate, text-to-speech and natural language processing (NLP), and AR and VR have made it possible to leverage the existing knowledge that companies have developed over time—in the form of support tickets, issue resolution orchestration and ITSM knowledge bases, and turn them into real-time, interactive, and highly engaging self-service solutions that excel in provisioning the virtual support needs of today’s digital operating models.

The key to a self-reliant connected workforce

In order to make the virtual workforce truly self-reliant, enterprises must focus on two key areas. The first one must address the capability of the workforce to solve common issues on their own. Second, where self-help fails, the user must be able to seamlessly transition to human-powered support channels. There are three ways to accomplish this. The first step is to establish a self-assist portal that transforms a company’s existing knowledge base and tech support data into an interactive virtual avatar that can guide a user along a resolution orchestration pathway in an engaging manner. Second, where the virtual avatar fails to resolve an issue, a ticket must be escalated to a live agent who effectively understands a user’s issue within a short timeframe, and consequently, directs them in real-time to a solution. And lastly, when physical assets need to be repaired, and installation/setup must be done at the office premises, a touchless system must keep track of all the assets, their underlying ticket IDs, and resolution status, while making timely notifications to users.

How can this strategy be put to action, and what do enterprises need in order to get there? Three action items will help CIOs setup virtual office services:

- **Onload human-like virtual avatars onto your self-service portal:** By leveraging AI, NLP, and automation, virtual avatars can now be turned into empathetic, insightful, and expert IT

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2. [https://www.cio.com/article/3546422/covid-19-top-3-challenges-of-remote-support-now-and-how-to-solve-for-them.html](https://www.cio.com/article/3546422/covid-19-top-3-challenges-of-remote-support-now-and-how-to-solve-for-them.html)
support personnel that understands the enterprise’s historical support knowledge inside-out. These virtual avatars must be programmed to guide users via voice or visual cues like gestures in a step-by-step fashion in order to make them useful to a skill-agnostic user base. To top it off, enterprises can even curate a 3D virtual tech lounge where users can find their favorite avatars and get them to solve their issues by simply speaking to them. These avatars must be trained for recurrent, high-volume issues in order to minimize the load on human agents and generate maximum ROI for the enterprise.

- **Empower human agents with the right toolkit:** When human agents are left to deal with the most complicated tickets that the virtual avatars have failed to solve, ensuring that communicated information is precise and legible to both parties is critical to speeding up the resolution times and keeping the queues short. This can be achieved by leveraging augmented reality solutions that annotate real-time video streams so that agents can be assisted in understanding the issue quickly and users can be guided along the resolution pathway on the same piece of glass — be it a mobile camera or real-time screen sharing feed that is connecting the two people in the virtual office.

- **Touchless AI kiosk with QR-based smart lockers:** In some cases, things do go wrong with the hardware. This is where touchless comes to the fore. Smart kiosks must be deployed at the office premises. These must integrate ticketing systems with QR-based lockers where users can submit assets for repair and collect assets once the repair has been completed.

Such a solution will help enterprises ensure that the employees can keep their digital systems up and running without costing a noticeable chunk of the IT budget. A self-reliant workforce that is backed by a truly touchless, yet highly effective tech support function is the key to making the virtual office a sustainable reality for businesses.

### The advantages of self-serve

Some of the crucial advantages of building a self-serve virtual office for enterprises include:

- Employees can be made self-dependent while making them more productive.
- The frustration of digitrouble-shooting can be replaced with quick, responsive support.
- By offloading common issues, businesses can do more with smaller IT support teams at a lower price.
- Fast and effective self-service can be provisioned 24x7 across a multi-lingual, multinational and multicultural environment.

In sum, an agile, self-reliant virtual office makes digital business more resilient, productive, and cost-efficient, which are the markers of operational excellence for businesses today.

### Conclusion

Supporting the virtual workforce doesn’t have to be a major undertaking, it just needs a more comprehensive strategic approach on how to make employees self-reliant, self-dependent, and more productive with automated and interactive self-service processes using the latest digital technologies along with better built-in tools which are relevant to IT support for employees working virtually. With 60% automation in the entire IT support function, enterprises could drastically reduce costs, while setting themselves up for early-mover advantages as the core technologies like AI and NLP make further advancements. CIOs must act now, and give their businesses a major financial impetus with a renewed approach to their IT strategy by working towards a self-reliant virtual office with a trusted digital partner — and steer their businesses for digital success in the next decade.
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