



Improving the Customer Experience with Visual Support

Uniters North America provides ease of mind to its customers' customers. In selling and supporting service plans for furniture stores and online businesses, the company is responsible for protecting the brand of its direct customers by providing a seamless experience to those who purchase furniture and associated protection plans.

We recently sat down with Michele Zanin, CIO for Uniters North America, to chat about how the company is looking to technology solutions, especially in the area of visual support, to enhance the experience delivered to its broad portfolio of customers.

TSC: What are some of the major trends impacting your business?

Our customers are furniture stores who sell their products and our protection plans to their customers. We are responsible for the administration and management of those protection plans. These stores and dealers want to ensure that we protect their brand by delivering the best experience to their customers. You must recognize that contacting insurance is always considered to be a painful experience and we have to change the script. To do this, we must understand the customer's journey when seeking service or support and take advantage of available technology and extensive experience to significantly enhance the customer's experience.

We've always been on the forefront of using technology to deliver a better experience and have been the first to provide an application to our customers to create service requests. We now find that all consumers have a powerful smart phone in their hands and expect service to be at their fingertips. They no longer want long wait times or archaic phone or fax claim channels. The changing demands from customers around ease and convenience is the biggest theme that I see in the claims support process.

TSC: What does your service solution look like?

People don't recognize this, but there are a lot of different types of furniture out there with many different requirements for service and support. Most people associate furniture with basic upholstery or some screws, but there are more capabilities being built in furniture. For instance, reclining chairs can have various mechanical components and could even have multiple motors that need

Case Study Participant



UNITERS is a global leader in furniture protection and provides retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers, and their customers with service plans, care products, and related support. The company was founded in 1992. The North American unit started its operations in 2009 and the company currently supports 8m plan holders.

Represented by:

Michele Zanin, Chief Information Officer, Uniters North America

Key Takeaways

- Uniters has 200 support agents who handle thousands of service requests a year
- The company is consistently looking at innovation in technology to transform the experience delivered to its customers
- Uniters invested in a visual support solution in 2017 to enhance the customer experience and reduce the time it takes to diagnose a customer request
- With the aid of visual support, the company has seen a decrease in cost, an improvement in resolution times, and an increase in customer satisfaction
- The company is now looking to include visual support in a broader array of solutions and wants to extend the functionality to its field service technicians.

Interview Conducted: May 2018

repair. Other pieces of furniture have digital controls, or refrigeration, or USB inputs that need our attention and care. Service is no longer limited to aesthetic fixes. All of this means that it is vital that you build a team that has the necessary furniture management expertise and knowledge. It's not just about a faster call, but more so about a more complete resolution experience.

For those contacting us regarding service, we enable them to reach us via multiple channels. For those who prefer the phone, we have a dedicated line, while we also have resources on hand to support email, chat, and app-driven service requests. Our North American support team consists of 200 support agents. In addition, we rely on a network of field service partners who actually go out and complete the work on customer sites.

TSC: Why did you feel the need to add visual support to your support ecosystem?

If a customer calls or contacts us, it can be very difficult to understand what the problem is due to the complexity of furniture. The customers themselves are not furniture experts and they expect us to be there to support them. We needed a new way to see what the customers were seeing, and this needed to happen in real-time. This is why we needed a virtual presence in the consumer's home to figure out what was needed to fix the problem.

Previously, we would have two technician visits. One would be more of an inspection to find out what the problem was and the second to resolve the situation. As you can imagine, this was quite expensive, and it lead to a longer resolution time for the customer. In other instances, we wouldn't know the right part for the resolution and would send a technician over with multiple parts or maybe even the wrong part. We saw an opportunity to change.

TSC: Did you attempt other paths to resolve this diagnosis problem?

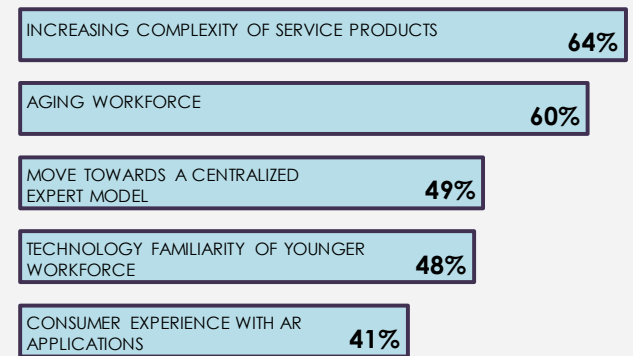
On all of our calls, we do some basic troubleshooting on the phone. Several years ago, we had empowered the customers to send in photos or videos for us to analyze and determine the best course of action. In fact, our European division used to send disposable cameras to our customers nearly 20 years ago to resolve this problem. The issue with pictures was that it wasn't in real-time. And the second problem was that the pictures weren't always reliable as they weren't taken from the right angle and didn't really show the problem. As you can imagine, this became quite cumbersome.

TSC: Tell us about your visual support decision.

The Visual Spectrum

Service organizations are facing a trifecta of pressures. Their customers are demanding faster, more responsive, and more visible service. Their resources to meet these customers' needs are in short supply, and likely to be even more constrained in the future. And they are being tasked to deliver on both the revenue and cost components of service margin.

Figure 1: Why AR Makes Sense in Service



Source: TSC Data April 2017

As a result of these continuing challenges and the factors highlighted in Figure 1, we see an increasing amount of interest in visual tools for interaction and collaboration. This includes the likes of generally available communication tools like Skype and FaceTime as well as more robust commercial AR products. In a recent survey of 85 service technology executives, we found:

- 41% were using or evaluating the use of live video in their service organizations
- 72% were either using or evaluating the use of AR tools

In the eyes of service leaders, the business challenges that AR or video applications are most suited to solve are:

1. Field Service – Improving first-time fix rates via on-the-job support – 66%
2. Overall Customer Service and Support – Improving time to resolution – 59%



We realized that there was a need to introduce real-time video capabilities and therefore started to look at ways to do that. In this modern era, there is no point in reinventing the wheel, and our organization DNA is such that we focus on our core business and let the experts help us with solutions.

We were looking for a visual support platform that was readily available, was proven in the market, and could integrate with our back-end CRM, technician communications, and dealer management systems. We looked at and tested several systems but ended selecting SightCall as we were impressed by their video quality and the SDK that they offered to enable the integration that we needed. We did a trial with their solution and, based on the components of video quality, back-end integration, and available analytics, decided to go ahead with the technology.

Q. What was the ROI justification?

Before we made our final decision, we did a proof of concept with a control group of 3 agents to see if the solution actually enabled us to reduce cost, shorten the days it took to resolve a problem, and improve the customer experience. It was very evident that visual support delivered on those components in all eligible cases. I say eligible because visual support doesn't make sense in all customer contact situations.

Once the proof of concept was complete, we did an expanded pilot wherein we measured all the pertinent support KPIs like productivity and resolution rates, but we also spent a great deal of time on the user experience to see how long it took to get the customer on visual support and the length of time of visual claims.

Q: Any surprises in this process?

We thought that calls with video support (video claims) would take longer to complete because there is a process to establish the video link. When a customer calls, we send them an SMS/text that they have to click on to start the video claim. It is a simple process but does add a little bit of time. To the contrary, we found that our video claim calls were shorter than others as they drastically reduced the information collection time. We have less questions to ask when we can see what the customer is seeing.

Q: What have been the challenges?

The biggest challenge that we have encountered is that not all the agents are able to successfully administer video claims. There's a clear skillset around multi-tasking that is necessary for an agent to

3. Customer Support – Enhancing resolution rates via contact center or remote support – 39%
4. Training – Increasing speed to productivity – 33%

What we've found in the early stages of AR and Video evaluation is this:

Consider Multiple Layers of AR.

True AR might involve deep product and sensor information overlaid on a technician or support agents visual field. This might be relevant in certain service situations but can also be overkill. Most scenarios may only require a simple video connection with basic instructions and telestration. It's essential that service leaders truly understand the scope of the problem that they are trying to solve and consider layers of visual solutions to meet their needs.

Customer Support Before Field Assistance.

Most organizations go into AR evaluations with the intent of enabling remote assistance for field service technicians. This is a valid use case, especially in the service of high value or mission critical assets. Most organizations realize that incremental benefits can be achieved in extending a visual experience to customers. This can significantly aid in establishing a better diagnosis of the service situation and in determining the appropriate path to resolution. In certain instances, a visual interaction might create the opportunity for self-service.

Expand the Metrics of Success.

Along the lines of the recommendation above, newer use cases for visual support tools create newer opportunities for value. For instance, visual support tools can enable a better first-time fix, but they also improve the overall time to resolution and enhance the customer experience. These tools might also lower the cost of service through accurate part shipments. These areas must also be considered in the ROI of visual support tools.



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be successful. This is because they have to be able to manage the video session, give instructions to the customers, and take the necessary notes all at the same time. We found that several of our agents weren't prepared or equipped to multi-task at this level. Therefore, there was the need to retrain people. We also recognized that we had to drastically improve the furniture knowledge of those agents who were managing the video claims. They were essentially replacing the inspection actions of well-trained field service technicians and therefore needed a much better knowledge of the furniture being serviced. You can't put any agent in this position without appropriately training them and providing them the knowledge to be successful.

Q: Has there been any resistance from customers?

We've found that a majority of our customers love the solution and very few raise any issues. They find the support experience to be very easy, extremely intuitive, and ultimately recognize that they are going to experience a much faster time to resolution. I won't be surprised if our customers begin to demand this.

Q: What are the results that you have seen from your rollout and where do you see going next?

We've now been using the solution for 9 months now with an expanded group of 20 agents and have seen continued and consistent improvement in all of the ROI metrics that we had established. We've really eliminated a good number of inspections as a result of this, which ties into the improved cost and resolution time metrics. Another thing that we've noticed is that our agents have a much higher level of confidence in the solution that they are offering to our customers. This wasn't anticipated but has been a welcome benefit and creates a much better support environment for our agents. What we plan on doing in the future is to integrate the technology with our broader set of apps which will allow us to expand the use of visual support in many situations. For example, instead of calling us first to receive a video link, we see a scenario where a customer could initiate a video directly, which further improves the overall experience. We also see the opportunity to extend the technology to our field teams to assist them when they run into problems.

SUMMARY: DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES YIELD CUSTOMER VALUE

Our research on Digital Transformation finds that organizations are looking to digital technologies to enhance the value delivered to their customers. What we often find is that organizations don't really understand what their customers value or don't consider the impact of their strategies on the customers' customers.

It is easy to say that service organizations must focus on outcomes, and we believe that this is the future. But the delivery of outcomes come at a cost and customers need to be confident of their service partners ability to deliver the basics of service before they look for support in business outcomes. When it comes to reactive service and support, the basics involve a focus on the customer experience around service event management, and on business efficiency tied to a faster time to resolution. As we see in the case of Uniters, a digital strategy that focuses on these two aspects can have a great deal of benefit to the servicing organization and the customer. It then allows for a deepening of the service relationship and for co-innovation around digital solutions, an outcome that service organizations are seeking in an extremely competitive environment.

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