

**IBM Electronic Support
White paper
January, 2010**



Transforming IBM Electronic Support



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Executive summary

Complex environments that include software and hardware need simple support solutions. IBM understands that. IBM transformed its electronic support to deliver consolidated, customizable online support to meet each client's unique support requirements.

Technical teams save time and lower costs by using electronic support tools to:

- work more efficiently with support teams to resolve problems;
- stay ahead of problems with proactive notifications to keep the environment running smoothly;
- easily search to find information to solve problems; and,
- enhance skills and solve problems using problem determination tools.

The work continues to develop new and improve existing electronic support tools and resources to deliver electronic support that is easy, fast and smart.



Highlights

IBM electronic support is one of four support options

IBM's goal is to ensure the successful use of IBM software and hardware

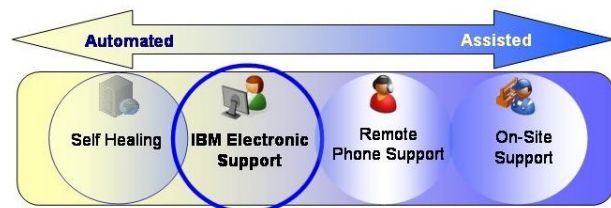
Clients choose the option that serves their current situation

Introduction

IBM electronic support offers a portfolio of online support tools and resources that provides comprehensive technical information to diagnose and resolve problems to help maintain IBM products. It is one option on the continuum of IBM support.

IBM support and services offer four options, including on-site support, remote support, electronic support and autonomic or self-healing support to ensure clients use our products successfully. On-site support can be a service request from the client. IBM technical experts come to the client site to resolve a support problem. Remote technical support engages an IBM Support Engineer who provides assistance for suspected defects and product-specific, task-oriented questions for currently supported IBM software and hardware products.

Electronic support includes the online tools and support content that can be used to access technical information to diagnose, resolve, and maintain installed technology solutions. Self-healing support uses capabilities built in or installed into IBM technology. An example is the Electronic Service Agent™ that resides on a system to automatically report problems to IBM support.





Highlights

Transformed online support meets and exceeds expectations

Many tools support both software and hardware

Consolidated and customizable tools save time and offer efficiencies

Constant improvement of electronic support tools and resources over the last few years resulted in the transformation of online support that meets and exceeds client expectations. Since 2008, the major focus was consolidation of the many tools available to support both hardware and software. New tools offer consistency and eliminate redundancy as well as the need to access multiple web sites for multiple IBM products. This simplified support experience results in time savings.

IBM used various feedback techniques to better understand client wants and needs. These responses served as the basis for many of the improvements now available. One way to view electronic support is through a client's information needs:

- Finding information
- Staying informed
- Downloading fixes
- Troubleshooting problems
- Submitting problems to support
- Learning more about products

We'll take a look at each category and see how IBM transformed its support resources to provide easy, fast, smart electronic support.



Highlights

IBM Support Portal offers one unified, customizable technical support view for all IBM software and systems

"This is the first time IBM scored an A+ on my list of a user-friendly support page. With one word: WOW!!! ... Keep up the good work !!"

*User Feedback,
August 2009*

Finding Information

One of the challenges IBM faced in delivering electronic support was the multitude of sources available to obtain information about IBM's 900+ products, including software and hardware. A global IBM team was formed to focus on consolidating a client's view of IBM systems, software and services. Their goal was to unify technical support websites into a global support portal that clients could customize, based on personal preferences and products of interest. The team began the task to develop the IBM Support Portal to provide one unified, customizable support view for all IBM software and hardware. It was developed using these IBM products:

- IBM Services provided a premier hosting infrastructure, with site facilities offering near 100 percent availability, as used in the US Open and Olympics events.
- IBM Systems included their Power®/AIX® Virtualization solution, with SAN Storage for fault recovery and dynamic workload demand capability.
- IBM Software provided the Portal and development framework through the WebSphere® Portal and WebSphere Application Server products in a clustered environment. IBM DB2® Universal Database provides the IT data repository that references large amounts of data. The Support Portal was developed using Rational® Software Architect and tested with Rational Functional Tester and Rational Performance Tester.



Highlights

IBM Support Portal is the gateway to technical support information for software and hardware

IBM SMEs (subject matter experts) constantly contribute up-to-date technical knowledge to the knowledgebase

Improvements to content and the search engine provide more accurate search results

The IBM Support Portal reaches across brands and divisions, and brings all the diverse support resources together to make them accessible through one simple, consolidated, customizable interface. The Support Portal is the gateway to technical support information and online tools.

At the heart of any online support system are the technical documents that comprise the knowledgebase. Information developers, knowledge engineers, developers and support engineers contribute to the technical knowledgebase established for each IBM product. These teams worked together on existing and new documents to develop consistent presentation of information, through structured documents, clear writing styles, along with consistency in keywords and tagging. Their efforts, coupled with improvements to the search engine, provide greater accuracy in search results, contributing to time savings.

Technical documentation for many software and hardware products can be found in the form of Information Centers. These Eclipse-based documents make it easier to find information using the table of contents to drill down to specific topics. And the built-in search engine also helps to quickly find needed information.

IBM Redbooks® are another information resource for software and hardware. These documents are created by the IBM International Technical Support Organization (ITSO) to address topics related to the integration, implementation, and operation of IBM products.

The IBM Support Portal makes it easy to find all this, and more, technical information.



Highlights

Alerts provide critical information about known issues and product updates

My Notifications subscription offers proactive customized technical product updates

The subscription profile includes both software and hardware

Each client chooses the delivery method that is most convenient for them

Staying Informed

My Notifications is a proactive subscription capability to keep clients informed about software and hardware product news, updates and alerts. This complimentary subscription offers daily or weekly emails or RSS feeds to stay informed about products of interest.

A customizable profile based on software and hardware products of interest forms the basis of the subscription, along with the choice of document types. Single or multiple subscriptions can be created. Another delivery option is available through the IBM Support Portal which offers a portlet to display messages for the products in a profile.

WebSphere clients receive quarterly technical news updates through the WebSphere Support Newsletter. It delivers updates for the products they use.

Social networking is an informal way to get news and communicate with the community. IBM electronic support hosts a blog. Brands post news and support-related information on Twitter.

Clients choose the delivery method that works best for them to stay informed about the products they use.



Highlights

Fix Central is a one-stop platform to download fixes and updates for many IBM software and hardware products

One more example of tool consolidation to simplify support

Downloading Fixes

Fix Central offers a consolidated download site for interim fixes. It offers the ability to search, select, order, and download software and hardware fixes for many products with a choice of delivery methods.

The fixes include changes to software, Licensed Internal Code, or machine code to fix known problems, and add new functionality.

It's easy to find fixes by searching by product, by fix ID, or by APAR. Fix Central also helps identify any prerequisite or co-requisite fixes associated with the fixes.

This is one more example of ongoing work to consolidate tools and simplify support for owners of multiple IBM products.



Highlights

Save time searching

*Automate troubleshooting
file collection*

Reach resolution faster

Shorten length of downtime

Lower cost of ownership

Troubleshooting Problems

IBM Support Assistant is a complimentary problem determination software support workbench that makes it easier to find answers and resolve issues with IBM software. It provides a variety of tools and features to expedite the resolution of software problems. The concurrent search capability to search product support sites, developerWorks and Google with one search string helps save time finding answers to questions.

If data collection is necessary, IBM Support Assistant makes it easier and faster by offering automated remote and local collection tools that are software product specific. The symptom-specific data collectors automate log and data collection. ISA Lite is a lightweight application for quick deployment of IBM Support Assistant's automated data collection tool if the workbench is not installed. It is customized to automate product-specific data collection.

Once troubleshooting files are collected, they can be viewed and analyzed to identify the source of a problem. IBM Support Assistant offers step-by-step analysis and guided troubleshooting to find an implemented solution. There are over 20 problem determination tools accessible through IBM Support Assistant to help discover and resolve problems.

IBM Support Assistant connects to the Service Request tool to create or update a Service Request, as well as attach collected troubleshooting files to send to IBM support.

This powerful collection of tools and capabilities offloads cumbersome and time-consuming data collection tasks to save time and reach resolution more quickly.



Highlights

Jumpstart service requests to save time

Create and track service requests online

Attach troubleshooting files to streamline the problem submission process

Receive email alert to take action when IBM updates the service request

View, download or print reports

Submitting Problems

IBM Service Request tool is an online problem management tool for software and networking solutions to open, update and report on Service Requests associated with an IBM contract. The profile associated with the SR tool offers customization. It includes demographics that automatically populate new Service Requests. Choosing and saving products to the profile makes it easy to choose from the tailored product list when creating a new request. The choice for who to contact and how to be contacted is stored in the profile. These time-saving measures make it easy to create and submit a Service Request.

Troubleshooting files can be attached to the Service Request through the SR tool, making it easier to send the files and associate them with the Service Request. The request can be edited and tracked through the tool, giving the user more control. And, the reporting capability makes it easy to track historical information.

The SR tool offers many options to manage Service Requests more efficiently, saving time when it's most critical - when there's a problem.



Highlights

IBM offers many education options

Classroom, customized, eLearning or online training

Webcasts and their replays are available on a variety of topics

Cutting edge technical information is available on developerWorks

Electronic support options and tools are reviewed in training modules posted on WebSphere Electronic Support site

Learning More

IBM offers several ways to learn more about software and hardware products.

IBM Education Assistant offers a complimentary, rich set of self-study education modules. These task based modules offer a quick way to learn how to use many IBM software products.

IBM education offers in-depth training, worldwide, for its vast set of products. Flexible training delivery includes traditional classroom settings, customized training for specific requirements, and e-Learning and online training courses. Role-based training defines a path to acquire skills for specific software product offerings.

Complimentary Support Technical Exchange webcasts from WebSphere, Lotus® and Tivoli®, deliver technical information on a broad range of products and topics. Subject matter experts deliver the webcasts. Charts and MP3 files are available for replay.

developerWorks® offers cutting edge technical information for developers, managers and administrators. Roadmaps and other links are available to help learn more about many software and hardware products.

WebSphere's Electronic Support site offers an electronic support reference document as well as training presentations for the complimentary support tools and resources.

All these education options help clients learn more and develop skills to use IBM products successfully.



Helpful links

IBM transformed electronic support to make it easy, fast and smart

IBM Electronic Support
<http://ibm.com/electronic-support>

IBM Support Portal
<http://ibm.com/support/entry-portal>

IBM Support Assistant
<http://ibm.com/software-support/isa>

WebSphere Support Technical Exchange webcasts
http://ibm.com/software/websphere/support/supp_tech.html

WebSphere Electronic Support training modules
<http://ibm.com/software/websphere/support/d2w.html>

Conclusion

IBM transformed electronic support for software and hardware to make it easy, fast and smart. The consolidation of tools and resources, across divisions and brands, simplifies the IBM support experience.

The ability to quickly access and find needed information and resources saves time and contributes to support efficiencies.

Consistency and elimination of redundancies streamlines support and contributes to its effectiveness.

Customization capabilities allow each individual to tailor support to their own unique requirements. This results in a personalized support experience that saves time, efficiently delivers product notifications, enhances problem determination skills and contributes to quicker problem resolution.

Complex environments need simple support solutions. IBM electronic support delivers simplified, effective, time-saving support.

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