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Help Wanted: How SaaS is Changing the Support Needs of SMBs

Introduction

The cloud and SMBs are made for each other. In addition to the mobility, scalability, speed of deployment, ease of use, and other benefits, cloud-based applications help SMBs level the playing field. That's because SMBs—thanks to software-as-a-service (SaaS) offerings— now have access to the same enterprise-class technology that their larger competitors use, at a fraction of the cost of traditional, on-premise software.

It's no wonder then that an AppDirect survey of SMBs in the U.S. shows that 57 percent of businesses with 101 to 250 employees have all or some of their solutions in the cloud.¹



However, it's not all blue sky for SMBs when it comes to taking advantage of the cloud. Small businesses have found that they've had to weather some storms while moving existing data to the cloud, getting up to speed on new applications, diagnosing problems for their employees using the applications, and more. The more SaaS applications they adopt, the more SMBs realize that they need help to maximize their return on investment.

That's where service providers come in. If you want your cloud strategy to be effective and sustainable, then you need to focus on not only the marketing and sales of cloud-based applications, but supporting your SMB customers after they purchase as well. To become a trusted cloud advisor, you should help your customers:

- › Accelerate their time-to-value with SaaS offerings
- › Maximize the benefits of using SaaS apps
- › Increase adoption within their business, thereby increasing their stickiness with your business and the SaaS products you sell
- › Understand which additional SaaS products can help them improve their business

SaaS penetration in the U.S. SMB market is expected to reach 94 percent by the end of 2017

Techaisle, "Within SMBs the larger cloud trend is towards deeper use of SaaS," January 28, 2017.

This white paper looks at how SaaS has changed the support needs of SMBs and the opportunity that support services create for your business to become a trusted cloud advisor and drive incremental revenue.



SaaS Adoption Continues to Expand Among SMB

Nearly every business is looking to the cloud for agility, scalability, speed to market, and innovation. SMBs are no exception.

Armed with the same core business software as their larger competitors, cloud-using SMBs eliminate some of the inherent advantages enterprises have had in the past while using SaaS to work more efficiently, grow faster, and do more than ever before. Today SMBs are looking to SaaS solutions for everything from email marketing to project management, anti-virus software to accounting systems, payroll to customer relationship management (CRM).



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Just how popular are SaaS solutions becoming? According to an AppDirect survey, SMBs in the U.S. are using an average of 6.48 cloud-based services on a regular basis. Particularly lucrative for service providers are those businesses with 11 to 100 employees, which are using 7.72 cloud apps, and those with 101 to 250 employees, which are using an average of 11.28 cloud-based services on a regular basis.

SMBs aren't stopping with a handful of SaaS solutions either. Instead, they are looking to expand their use of cloud-based services. In the AppDirect survey, a whopping 84 percent of SMBs are looking for a greater variety of cloud services to choose from, and 62 percent say that they expect to increase their spending on cloud services in the next year.

SMBs Need a Place to Turn to for SaaS Help

It's clear that for the vast majority of SMBs, IT is not their core competency. While they may have gotten along fine in the past with little IT assistance, the increasing reliance on software in general and the breadth and range of cloud services on the market are compounding the need for more IT assistance than ever before.

Popular SaaS solutions for SMBs

As SMBs continue to adopt SaaS solutions to help them manage their business, they are branching out beyond cloud-based email and productivity apps to solutions that address specific business areas such as: customer relationship management, enterprise resource planning, supply chain management, inventory management, marketing automation, customer service and vertical applications.

Techaisle, "Within SMBs the larger cloud trend is towards deeper use of SaaS," January 28, 2017.



SMBs often lack the time and skills needed to migrate existing data to new cloud applications and set up and deploy those new cloud applications to their employees.

Let's be clear, the IT assistance that SMBs require today is more than typical technical support for when things go wrong. SMBs are looking to trusted advisors to help introduce and secure new SaaS applications, as well to train and empower their employees to use the technology effectively. The need for a seamless onboarding experience is so critical that studies show if a user does not adopt a SaaS application within the first 90 days after purchase, there's only 10 percent chance that they ever will.²

A large majority of SMBs in the AppDirect survey—85 percent—say that they want to talk with a person who can help them and answer their questions about cloud technologies. Where do they want to get these services? From their main service supplier: one-stop shopping and consolidated billing appeal to 66 percent of SMBs to help them better manage their cloud services.



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Service Provider as Trusted Cloud Advisor

Because they already deliver essential business services such as voice, internet, and mobile, many service providers have nurtured trusted relationships with their SMB customers. This makes them a natural—and preferred—choice for SMBs to turn to for cloud-based services as well as expertise and guidance. It's a tremendous opportunity for your company to expand those trusted relationships by adding value around cloud.

72% of SMB decision makers say that technology solutions can help them significantly improve business outcomes and/or run the business better, and 53% plan to increase technology investments

SMB Group, "SMB Group's 2017 Top 10 SMB Technology Trends."

In the AppDirect survey, even though nearly half of SMBs buy their software from individual vendors, most also say that dealing with different vendors is a hassle. In fact, 67 percent of SMBs say that having to go to multiple vendors for services is "a waste of their time," a number that increases to 74 percent at the largest SMBs.



For service providers to take advantage of SMBs' widespread dissatisfaction at having to deal with multiple vendors for SaaS applications, they need to deliver one-stop shopping for products as well as the complementary services that help SMBs be successful with the cloud.

In addition to becoming the preferred supplier of the SaaS products and services that SMBs need, there are additional benefits to providing a full range of support services. When offered as a complement or wrapper to a core product, robust customer support for SaaS can help drive brand differentiation and premium pricing. Overall, strong customer support can increase a solution's perceived value, boost customer loyalty, and drive sales and revenue all while lowering future support utilization.

The Four Critical Categories of SaaS Services

Let's look closer at the types of support services that SMBs need and that your company should provide.

Even the most technology-savvy SMB owners and managers simply don't have the time to manage IT projects, train employees, and troubleshoot issues. That's why the services you offer should be turnkey solutions that include:

- > **Onboarding:** Onboarding, which includes set-up and deployment, is critical for maximizing adoption, plus it establishes trust and loyalty to your business. It also reduces pressure on technical support later.
- > **Data migration:** By helping SMBs move data from existing applications to their new cloud applications, you help accelerate their time-to-value. It also gives you the opportunity to understand more about their business so you can recommend additional products and services.
- > **Training:** Training helps SMBs get their staff up-to-speed quickly. It also improves adoption and reduces pressure on technical support.
- > **Ongoing technical support:** High quality technical support improves customer satisfaction and provides cross- and upselling opportunities.

Everyone wins when you deliver the SaaS support services that SMBs require. For instance, when you offer services such as onboarding and migration that complement SaaS products, you help make your customers "stickier" by streamlining the deployment and reducing the effort and cost of adopting new software.





Cloud Application Support is Different

Unlike the types of services your company may offer for its own products, supporting the SaaS life cycle for your SMB customers often requires a substantially different approach. Here's why. To deliver high quality customer support for SMBs using cloud-based applications, you must be prepared to support many different:

- > **Products:** Depending on which cloud services your company offers, you could be providing support for potentially dozens of third-party SaaS applications, all designed to automate a wide range of business needs and processes.
- > **User ecosystems:** SMBs have embraced the mobile and bring-your-own-device (BYOD) trends, which means supporting SaaS usage on a wide variety of different types of devices, browsers, networks, and more.
- > **Use cases and systems:** You should be prepared to support everything from basic configuration and how-to advice to diagnosing errors. To do this, you will need access third-party knowledge bases and escalation paths for the different SaaS products you support.

As you can imagine, providing SMBs with the services they need to be successful with SaaS can be time consuming and expensive to staff, train, and manage, as well as provision the right systems. You'll need a support organization with vastly different skill sets and experience than what you have currently. To support that staff and enable them to deliver superior customer service, you should also have the right systems and technology tools.

Comcast Business delivers high-touch help for SaaS solutions

Comcast Business understands that support is critical for driving SaaS activation, usage, and overall satisfaction, which is why it selected an additional AppDirect product, AppHelp, to offer high-touch 24/7 technical support for Microsoft Office 365 and other SaaS products under the Comcast Business brand.

"We are now selling AppHelp services with a significant percentage of the Office 365 licenses we sell. It's just another way we can differentiate our offering with the help our customers need to be successful with the software."

—James Mumma, Executive Director of Product Management, Comcast Business





Plus, creating a SaaS customer support function for your SMB customers is not a “one-and-done” proposition. You must constantly analyze and improve your support organization’s performance on customer-facing metrics such as Net Promoter Score. And don’t forget that you’ll be continually growing your team’s skillset to include new SaaS applications as your company begins offering them.

Help for Providing Help

For all of the reasons mentioned above, planning and implementing your own in-house customer support for the cloud applications that your company sells is most likely not the most effective or efficient option. It typically takes far too much time, cost, and effort to create a top-performing center for customer service excellence—which is required for success with your cloud-reliant SMB customer base.



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Instead, consider partnering with a company that offers end-to-end, white-label enablement services for cloud-based applications. By partnering with an established, cloud-application customer care provider, you can focus on your company’s core strengths around selling and marketing products and services and quickly and effectively deliver the support your SMB customer base seeks.

Insist on a provider that offers:

- > White-label support for the cloud applications you plan to offer your SMB customer base, including training, migration, onboarding, and ongoing support
- > Strong technical skills and broad expertise in SMB SaaS technology
- > Proven sales strategies for upselling and cross-selling
- > A training framework to empower and enable SMB success
- > Custom tools and best-of-breed technology for solving technical support problems
- > A consolidated knowledgebase across SaaS offerings



Conclusion

SMBs are embracing SaaS, but realizing that they need help to be truly successful. Service providers are in the ideal position to step in and become the trusted advisor for cloud for their SMB customer base—increasing customer lifetime value and loyalty.

Leveraging an expert provider of technical support for SaaS applications can help service providers deliver services and support to their customers with a fraction of the resources and time required to launch their own support function. Partnering with an established, industry leader like AppHelp allows service providers to focus on what they do best and know that their support offering will be exactly what their SMB customers want and needs.



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AppHelp delivers industry-leading customer experiences

AppHelp, the support services division of AppDirect, has a track record of delivering cloud support with high feedback scores

- › 93% first call resolution
- › 90%+ customer satisfaction ratings
- › 78 Net Promoter Score

ABOUT APPHELP

AppHelp delivers solutions that “help” businesses and consumers be more successful with their adoption and use of the latest in technology and cloud services. By leveraging a unique combination of technology and human capital, AppHelp ensures customers have the support they need as they traverse the customer journey. With millions of technical support incidents solved, and decades of experience assisting people with technology, AppHelp is proud to power the technical support programs for premier brands across the globe, including Comcast, Cincinnati Bell, Rogers, Bell, Telus, Windstream, Virgin Media, Panda Security and more.

Ready to take your cloud business to the next level? Email us at sales@appdirect.com or visit: <https://www.appdirect.com/products/apphelp>