

How to double-team your way to more long-term technical support work

Let's say the owners of a small to medium-sized business have taken the leap. They've bought that enterprise resource planning (ERP) software package from Oneir. They know how it can transform their company into a more competitive enterprise.

Wonderful! But how is that an opportunity for you?

Well, let's also say that you are the technical support advisor (TSA) chosen to support the Oneir ERP package. But you're wondering how on earth am I going to make it work? You know it's a sophisticated application. But you also know the buyer has a not so sophisticated computer system. So how can you ensure company users can get all the data they want out of Oneir? Sales? Inventory? Costs? Whatever else?

Also, you wonder if the Oneir ERP will falter as the company grows?

Enter Oneir Solutions – the people who answer those questions. With their attentive, comprehensive, innovative approach to their customers, Oneir staff surmounts challenges. And they do it by double-teaming with a knowledgeable technical expert like you.

Here's how that working relationship begins and soon benefits both.

"Oneir tailors the ERP to each client's specific needs," explains Oneir founder Jon Mainwaring. "So first off, we listen to what owners say they expect from their Oneir ERP.

"Then we roll up our sleeves and go to work with the TSA, who maintains and develops the company's computer infrastructure. And if the company does not have a TSA of its own, we find them a good one. Either way, together with the TSA we make sure everything the customer expects of their Oneir package works.

"At the outset, the TSA makes sure the customer has a virtual private network (VPNs) installed. We need the VPN to protect against any outside access to Oneir and the company data it handles.

"Next, the TSA chooses whether Windows or Linux will drive the host server Oneir runs on. That's determined by the TSA's comfort level of working with either.

"After that, we ask the TSA to install a VMware (vmware.com) application. It can run different operating systems in separate secluded environments on one host server. The TSA loads the Linux-driven Oneir package into one of those secluded environments. So there's no fear of other operating systems or applications on that host server ever interfering with Oneir."

The package contains all the Oneir programs the company needs as well as a framework for the company's data. From then on, Oneir works as its own secluded virtual machine.

With Oneir/TSA help, companies choose from three forms of VMware to suit their business. The most popular is VM Workstation Pro. It works on either a Windows or Linux host server.

The Oneir/TSA double-teaming makes set up and installation work easy and quick. Having the TSA to call on, Oneir staff do not need to learn the intricacies of each new client's computer system. Similarly, the TSA doesn't need to figure out in any great detail how Oneir works. Oneir and the TSA can start working together right from the get-go.

Oneir and the independent TSA also find more business for each other. Ask Kevin Turner of Adamas Solutions and Geoff Ackland of GKS Computers. Both TSA's service small to medium-sized companies. And have long worked with Oneir and its DOS-based Vigilant predecessor.

"Even back with Vigilant, Jon and I worked together as we do now with Oneir," says Ackland. "We identify leads for each other and both meet with the prospective company. Jon handles the software side and I do the hardware side because both must mesh."

Double-teaming with Oneir has also helped Turner grow his business. "Thanks to Oneir, I can now provide all the computer services companies need. Be it anti-virus or backup software, right through to firewalls and other hardware."

In return, the TSA's introduce Oneir to potential new clients. "Whenever they do, we reward them," adds Mainwaring.

Once the Oneir/TSA double-team has a new client, the TSA first does a site inspection. That determines whether the client's hardware is compatible with Oneir. It also uncovers what else the company will need such as printers or other new devices. But not to worry. Oneir can connect with almost anything.

Still, there's a human challenge to overcome.

"Clients need help spelling out what they need to know from Oneir at the outset," says Ackland. "At first they might think they want Oneir to just do their accounting, plain and simple. But then they think of other tasks. Maybe track their inventory. Or connect with their general ledgers. But what they should start with is: What are all the things we as owners and staff need to know? Once you've helped them develop the answer, you can multiply their number of need-to-knows by 100."

So TSAs like Ackland and Turner soon get adept at drawing those need-to-knows out. That helps Oneir tailor the ERP package to a perfect fit. One that Oneir and the TSA adjust here, there, and everywhere as needs change and the company grows.

This double-team approach has eclipsed the technical support norm.

Says Mainwaring: "In the past, we worked through local dealers, who sourced new sales prospects for you. The dealers closed the sale and trained the new clients on the package. They also tried to support and maintain the software. But few dealers could carry out all those functions. That's why when we set up Oneir as a new company separate from Vigilant we took a different approach. Now we reach out via the internet, pick up on referrals, and make direct sales ourselves. Most importantly, we introduced VMware so we could tie in with TSAs.

That's all proving to be a rewarding business model for not only Oneir and the TSAs but also for their mutual customers. For instance, a customer can call or email Oneir asking for support. But also with a call, Oneir's teammate TSA can be at the company's door same day or next morning. As well, both Oneir and the TSA can fix some problems straight away from their respective offices over the phone or via the internet.

So what could be the benefits of you double-teaming with Oneir long term?

Oneir president Jane Giggall well remembers what she heard from an independent technical support advisor who had just retired. "He worked with us as a TSA for 25 years. And he called to say: "Thanks for my career!"