An In-Depth Look at Multichannel Support

Jenny Rains
Senior Research Analyst, HDI

With the advances in technology over the last decade, it is no surprise that 96.5 percent of technical support centers are providing support through multiple channels. The industry as a whole is utilizing more than one channel to provide end-user support; tickets are being created not only by phone but increasingly by email, chat, and web request (i.e., a request for support submitted by the customer through a web-based application).

By analyzing data collected by the *2012 HDI Support Center Practices & Salary Survey,* this month's HDI Research Corner takes an in-depth look at the use of multiple channels for creating support tickets and the changes in practice from the previous year. The data, collected from April to July 2012, includes 875 responses from support professionals representing technical support centers across more than thirty industries.
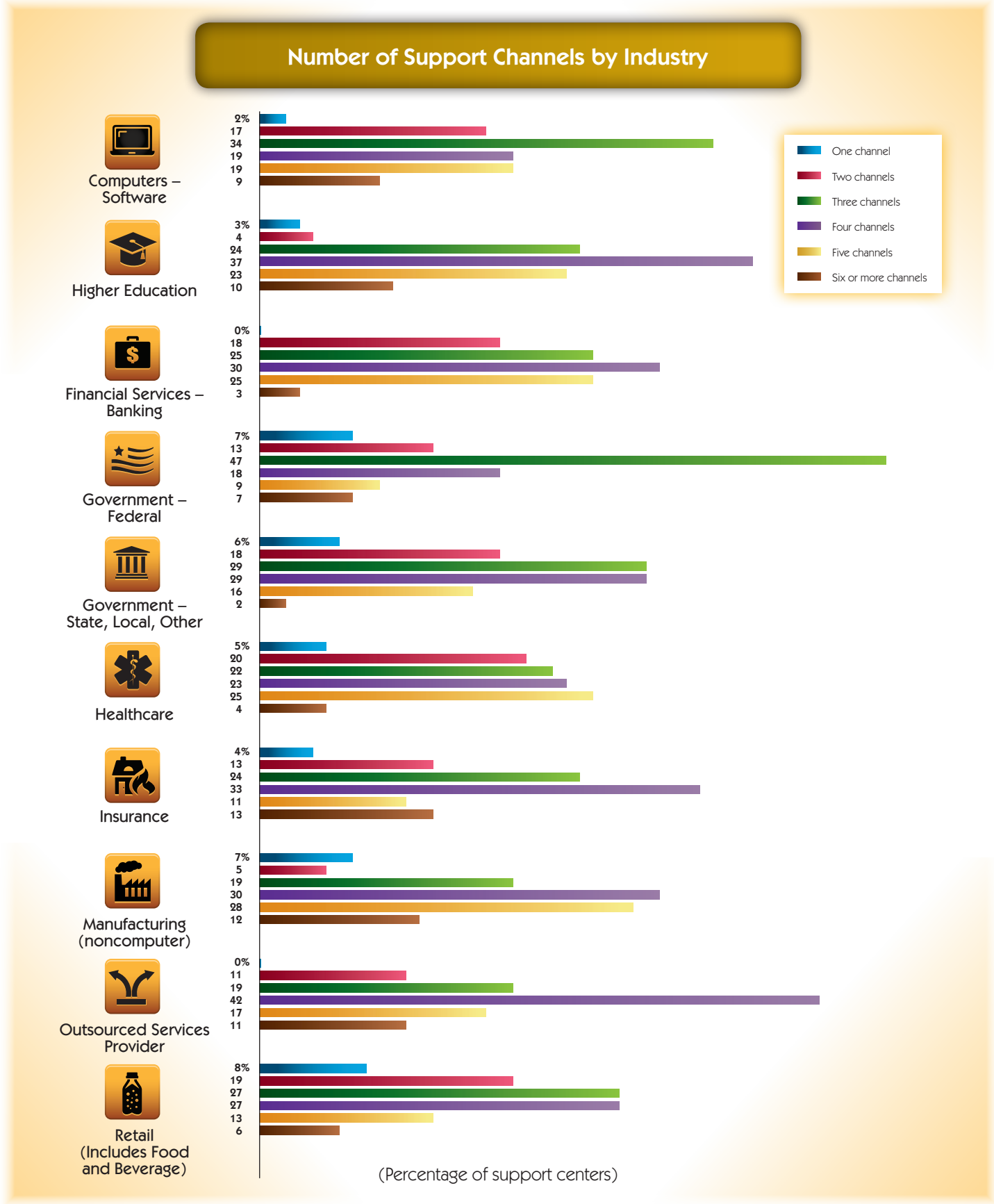
Survey Results

Multiple Channels: 1, 2, 3...No, More

A little more than half of the tickets created in the technical support industry are the result of phone calls. This indicates the adoption of additional (and, in some cases, alternate) means of contacting the support center. Providing three or four channels of support is the most common practice, with four channels being the average in 2012.

Number of Support Channels Available

One channel **3.5%**

Three channels **26.9%**

Two channels **12.9%**

Four channels **29.1%**

Five channels **19.8%**

Six or more channels **7.8%**

(Percentage of support centers)

The chart below illustrates the number of channels utilized by vertical industry (i.e., any vertical industry that submitted thirty or more responses to the survey). Each vertical industry averaged three to four channels. Manufacturing (noncomputer) tends to use the most channels, with 40 percent providing five or more contact channels.

Number of Support Channels by Industry

Legend:
- One channel
- Two channels
- Three channels
- Four channels
- Five channels
- Six or more channels

Computers – Software
- 2%
- 17
- 34
- 19
- 19
- 9

Higher Education
- 3%
- 4
- 24
- 37
- 23
- 10

Financial Services – Banking
- 0%
- 18
- 25
- 30
- 25
- 3

Government – Federal
- 7%
- 13
- 47
- 18
- 9
- 7

Government – State, Local, Other
- 6%
- 18
- 29
- 29
- 16
- 2

Healthcare
- 5%
- 20
- 22
- 23
- 25
- 4

Insurance
- 4%
- 13
- 24
- 33
- 11
- 13

Manufacturing (noncomputer)
- 7%
- 5
- 19
- 30
- 28
- 12

Outsourced Services Provider
- 0%
- 11
- 19
- 42
- 17
- 11

Retail (Includes Food and Beverage)
- 8%
- 19
- 27
- 27
- 13
- 6

(Percentage of support centers)

Multichannel Staffing

Does multichannel support require more people on the help desk? The staffing ratio for the technical support industry as a whole, based on the 2012 HDI Support Center Practices & Salary Survey data, is 337 end users per support center staff member (FTE). This varies by vertical industry, but not by much, based on the number of support channels. The table below shows the number of customers per FTE based on the number of support channels.

Number of support channels	Median number of end users per staff member
1	343
2	340
3	250
4	350
5	352
6 or more	645

Based on the 2012 data, organizations managing three channels have the fewest end users per staff member (250:1). In other words, this group is requiring more staff than the other groups. Organizations with six or more channels have a much higher ratio of end users to staff (645:1). However, it should be noted that many of the organizations with six or more channels are also larger organizations, which tend to have a higher staffing ratio anyway. (See the full *2012 HDI Support Center Practices & Salary Report* for staffing ratios by industry and size of organization).
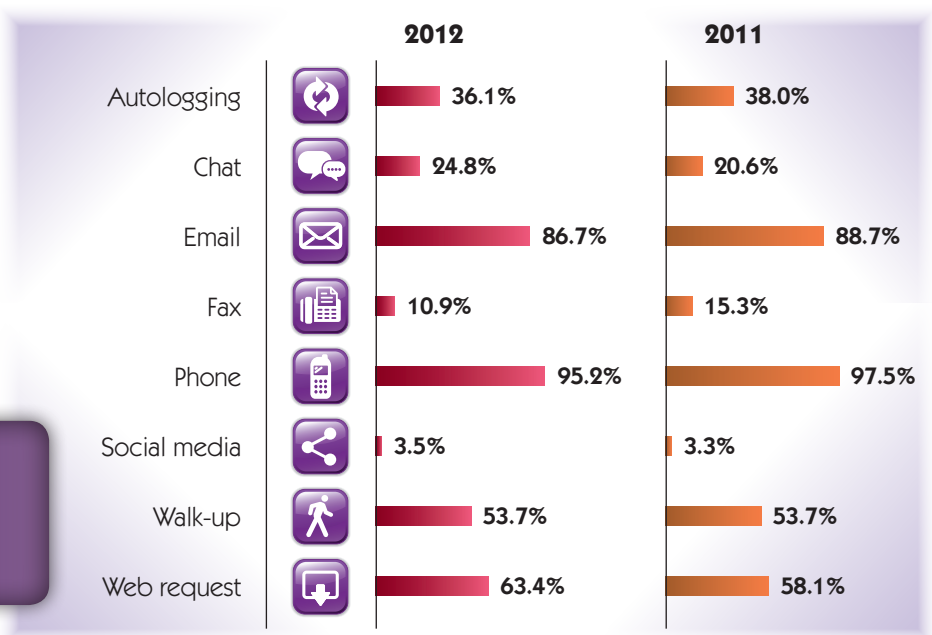
Multichannel Customer Satisfaction

Providing multichannel support seems to indicate a certain degree of maturity. Not only do those organizations that provide only one channel have lower customer satisfaction ratings (just 17% of customers are "very satisfied"), they are also the most likely not to measure customer satisfaction at all. It is interesting to note that, again, the three-channel group stands out; it also has a large percentage of organizations that are not measuring customer satisfaction and have lower ratings (39% of customers report being "very satisfied") than the other groups. Organizations with six or more support channels are the most likely to have "very satisfied" customers (60%).
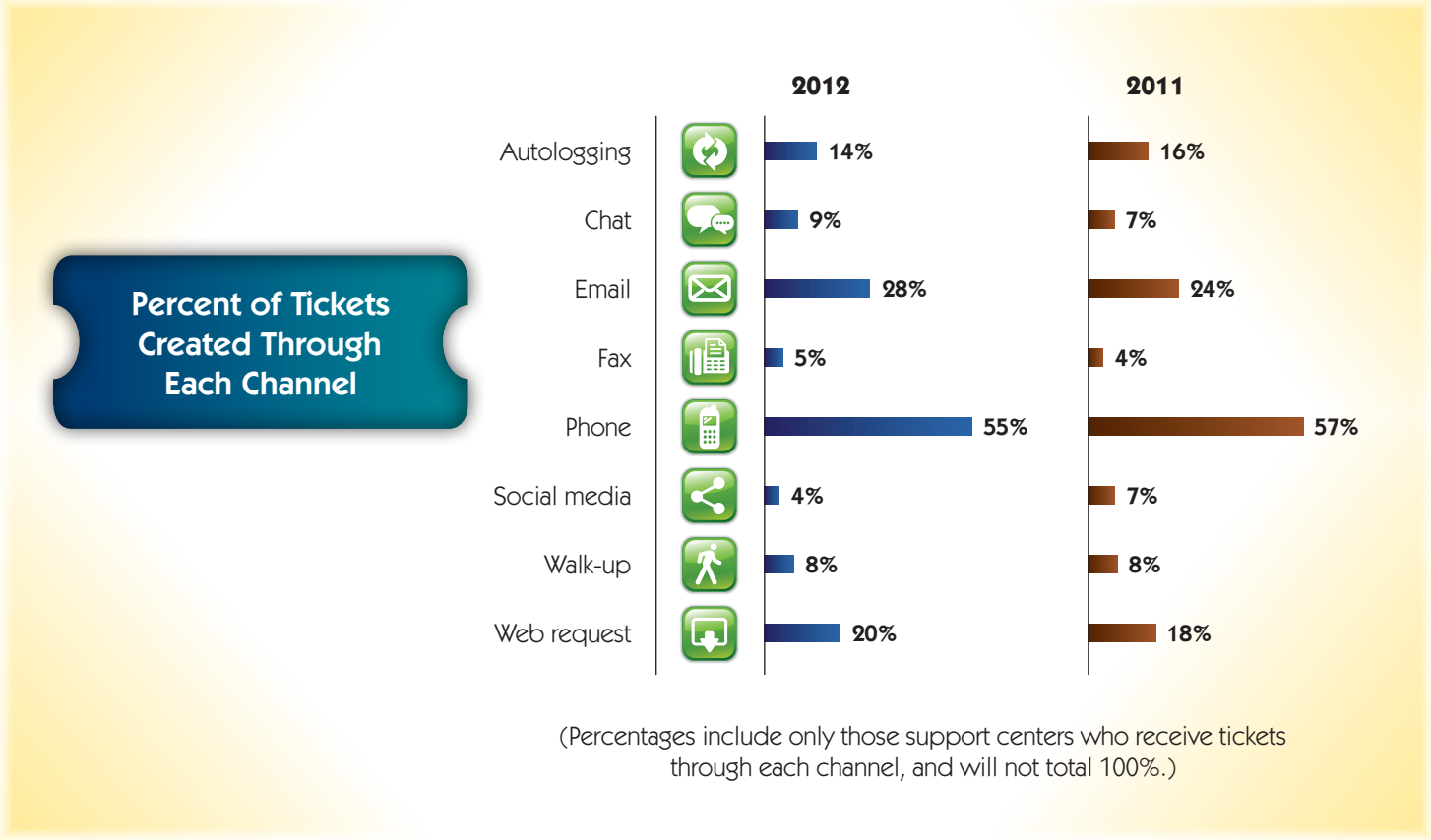
Support Channel Use

Although it dropped slightly from the previous year, the phone remains the most commonly offered contact option for end users. However, the use of that channel is declining, while both web request and chat are both increasing in availability and use. The chart at right shows the use of each channel for creating tickets in 2012 and 2011.

Percent of Support Centers Using the Following Channels to Create Tickets

	2012	2011
Autologging	36.1%	38.0%
Chat	24.8%	20.6%
Email	86.7%	88.7%
Fax	10.9%	15.3%
Phone	95.2%	97.5%
Social media	3.5%	3.3%
Walk-up	53.7%	53.7%
Web request	63.4%	58.1%

For those organizations providing support via phone, 55 percent of their tickets are communicated through the phone, down two percent from 2011.

Support centers that provide a web request option for end users receive one out of five tickets through that channel. This is up two percent from 2011. While the availability of email as a support channel has decreased slightly, as seen in the table above, those organizations that do provide it have seen an increase in the tickets created through this channel.
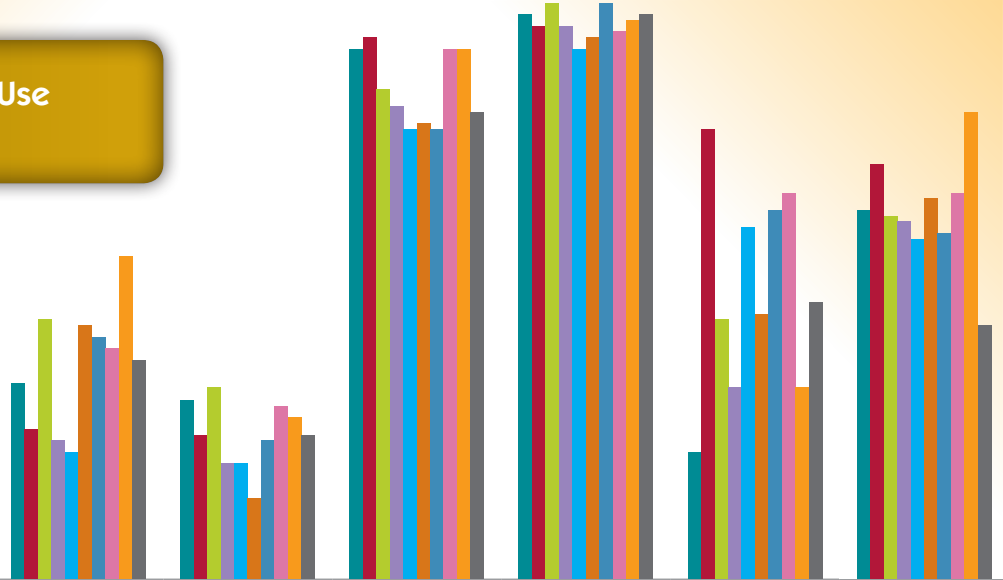

Percent of Tickets Created Through Each Channel

	2012	2011
Autologging	14%	16%
Chat	9%	7%
Email	28%	24%
Fax	5%	4%
Phone	55%	57%
Social media	4%	7%
Walk-up	8%	8%
Web request	20%	18%

(Percentages include only those support centers who receive tickets through each channel, and will not total 100%.)

A relatively small percentage of the industry (about 5%) does not use the phone as a support channel at all. Even though this number is low, it raises a question: What are they using as an alternative? Web request (54%) is the most common channel used by organizations that are not using the phone to create tickets. This is followed by email and autologging (i.e., tickets are logged automatically when an event is detected; no action is taken by the end user) at 45 percent, walk-ups (14%), and chat (12%).

Support Channel Use by Industry

The following chart illustrates the use of each channel by industry (i.e., any vertical industry that submitted thirty or more responses to the survey). Some data points worthy of note (as seen in the table below) include the use of autologging by outsourced services providers (56%), as compared to other industries such as government and higher education; the use of walk-ups by higher education; and web request adoption by outsourced services providers and higher education, compared to retail.

Support Channel Use by Industry

	Auto logging	Chat	Email	Phone	Walk-up	Web request
Computers – Software	34%	31%	92%	98%	22%	64%
Higher Education	26%	25%	94%	96%	78%	72%
Financial Services – Banking	45%	33%	85%	100%	45%	63%
Government – Federal	24%	20%	82%	96%	33%	62%
Government – State, Local, Other	22%	20%	78%	92%	61%	59%
Healthcare	44%	14%	79%	94%	46%	66%
Insurance	42%	24%	78%	100%	64%	60%
Manufacturing (noncomputer)	40%	30%	93%	95%	67%	67%
Outsourced Services Provider	56%	28%	92%	97%	33%	81%
Retail (Includes Food and Beverage)	38%	25%	81%	98%	48%	44%

(Percentage of support centers)

Cost of Support

Lastly, when adopting new support channels or eliminating existing ones, the effect on the budget is a key factor in that decision. In 2012, phone support was reported to be the most expensive channel for resolving customer tickets, at $17 per ticket (median, US data only). Walk-ups were close behind, at $16 per ticket, while autologging, which requires no initial communication between the end user and the support center, was the least expensive channel, at $8 per ticket.

Fully-Burdened Cost for the Support Center, per Ticket Resolved for Each Channel (US data only)

Median

Autologging	$8
Chat	$10
Email	$13
Phone	$17
Walk-up	$16
Web request	$10
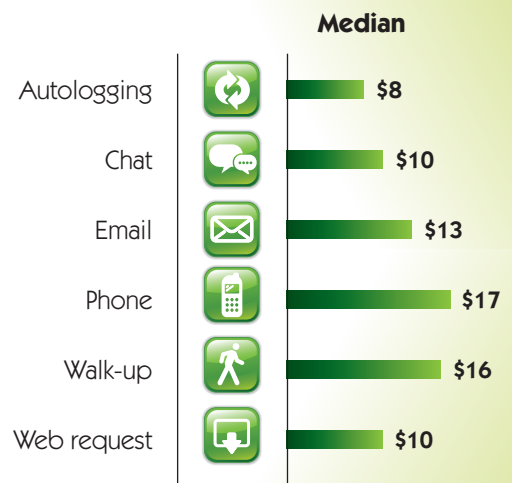
Conclusion

Single-channel support centers, though only a few remain, struggle with customer satisfaction and require just as much staff, if not more, than other organizations. In contrast, those with six or more support channels appear to be managing the multichannel format quite well. Their percentage of very satisfied customers is much higher than any other group, including the industry at large, and they are able to manage more end users with smaller staffs.

The phone is still the most prominent and available channel in the industry, but the use of it continues to decline as organizations and end users adopt alternate channels for issue resolution. The use of web request increased from 2011 to 2012, and is expected to continue to gain popularity. Chat use, which has risen and fallen over the last few years, appears to be on the rise again, as email gradually declines.

Technical support as we know it is changing. And, as customer demands and expectations increase and the support center evolves to become a critical part of the business, the need for multichannel support will only continue to grow. We look forward to seeing evidence of the continued growth and maturity of multichannel support in the results of the 2013 HDI Support Center Practices & Salary Survey.

Sponsored by

GoToAssist

For all available HDI Research Corner reports, visit **www.ThinkHDI.com/BePartOfTheCorner.**

UBM
Tech