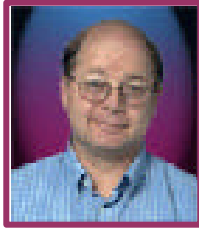




Customer Success Story: Ford Motor Company



Ford Implements a Virtual Representative to provide fast answers at reduced costs for North American Dealership Network

vRep Ernie Assists Ford Technicians with Worldwide Diagnostic System

The Situation

In January 2000, Ford's Automotive Consumer Services Group launched a sophisticated, portable diagnostic system to assist the company's 5000 dealer franchisees with fast and accurate diagnoses to common engine problems. The Worldwide Diagnostic System (WDS), a lightweight test unit with sophisticated instrumentation, a CD-ROM drive, and a variety of vehicle specific cables, is a core component of the Ford dealer diagnostic process, and as such requires a high level of technical support from Ford Technical Support Operations.

The Need

To provide technical support for the WDS, Ford has a Hotline call center but wanted to expand the operation to be available 24 by 7 and maintain owner loyalty initiatives. Based on these factors, Frank Ligon, Global Manager of Technical Support Operations in Ford's Customer Services Division, led the effort to research and identify new, Web-based technology that could help Ford improve customer support for the WDS while reducing phone center costs.

Ford wanted a system that:

- Significantly reduced phone support time.
- Leveraged the Web's advantages such as speed, 24x7 availability, and immediate access.
- Leveraged existing data sources, such as Ford's Vantive CRM system and OASIS database.
- Provided personable self-service that encouraged technicians to use it.
- Was adaptable to Ford's business and IT infrastructure, and could scale as necessary.

The Solution

After extensive research, Ligon's group identified and selected NativeMinds' NeuroServer® technology. NativeMinds is a pioneer in the development of self-service interaction management software to build and maintain automated online customer service and support agents called vReps™. Created with NeuroServer, vReps answer customer questions via conversational dialog and rules-based display of relevant content from pre-existing information sources including Website search, CRM knowledge bases, and customer-facing databases.

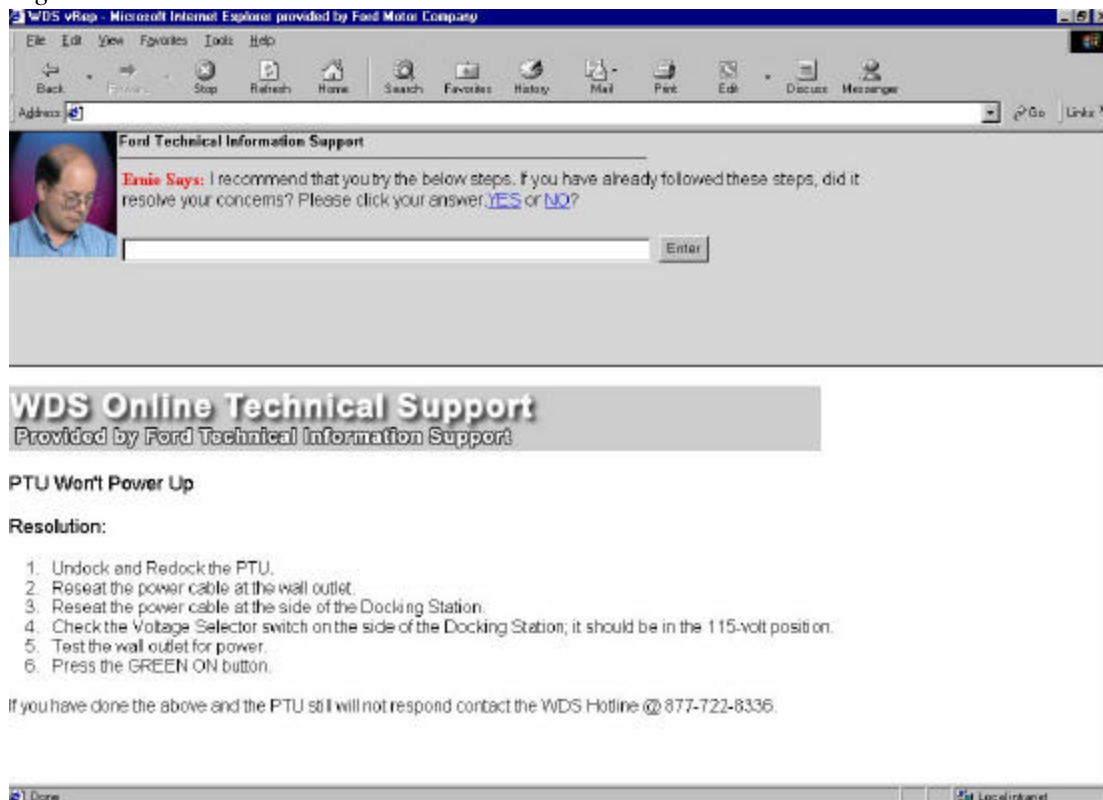
“We were looking for a Web-based solution that would incorporate all of Ford's institutional knowledge and handle a majority of the frequently asked questions that were going to our call center,” said Ligon. “The vRep solution integrates with our Vantive and OASIS systems to maximize the data that's already there, and technicians are no longer restricted by our phone support hours, which greatly improves our internal customer service.”



In eight weeks, NativeMinds Professional Services team built and implemented Ford's vRep, named Ernie. Ernie's image and personality are modeled after a real Ford Support Engineer, which instantly makes him a favorite with the technicians. His capabilities include:

- Understanding and instantly answering technicians' diverse questions in conversational, natural language format 24/7.
- Serving Web pages of information relating to the specific questions technicians ask about the WDS.
- Displaying WDS manual pages when they are an appropriate part of the answer.
- Performing searches on the Web site and database content to expand the information offered on certain subjects.
- Pulling information from the Vantive and OASIS databases.
- Escalating customers to live technical support on an as needed basis by generating a trouble ticket in the Vantive system.

Figure 1



Ford's vRep Ernie answers technicians' questions in natural language and serves Web pages of additional information that help technicians resolve WDS issues quickly and efficiently.



Ford launched its vRep to technicians via an introduction to Ernie on the front of the PTS Web site, an announcement in the PTS newsletter, and a one-page flier about Ernie that ships with WDS software documentation. Ford also plans to send an electronic dealer letter second quarter 2001 to overview Ernie's benefits.

Results

Ford expects that Ernie will be able to handle 25 percent of all technicians questions by the middle of 2001, and 30-plus percent by the end of the year – which will constitute a significant reduction in phone calls made to the Technical Information Support call center. To determine Ernie's success, Ford reviews the vRep's conversation logs to see how many issues Ernie resolves and provides an online survey with Ernie's answers that enables technicians to give feedback as to whether they were satisfied with the answers they received from Ernie.

About Ford Motor Company

Ford Motor Company is the world's second largest automaker, with approximately 335,000 employees in 200 markets on six continents. For more information regarding Ford, log on to www.ford.com.