



## RealNetworks teams with Talisma to provide customers with top-notch electronic technical support for their customers.

Deemed “one of the hottest software developers for multimedia on the Web” by *Computer Reseller News*<sup>(1)</sup>, Seattle-based RealNetworks, Inc. (NASDAQ: RNWK) is helping to transform the Internet into the next mass medium by developing and marketing cutting-edge Internet broadcasting technologies. Its popular “streaming” software has become an industry standard, enabling PC users to experience — and create — live and on-demand audio and video Web content. To date, over 30 million RealPlayer® systems have been downloaded for purchase and free trial from the [www.real.com](http://www.real.com) Web site.

### **The Situation**

Since RealNetworks started tracking Real Player usage and registration in 1995, over 20 million users have registered. The average number of downloads now exceeds 100,000 per day, an increase of more than 135 percent since the beginning of 1997. That's the good news. It also means an increase in the number of users needing technical assistance. Although RealNetworks products are easy to use, questions routinely arise about settings, platforms, configurations, browsers, broadcast variations, and hardware concerns. Technical support often accounts for a high percentage of an organization's headcount and overhead costs. Companies know that as product variety and sophistication grow, so does the demand for good technical support. Finding qualified people who have the communication and “people” skills, as well as the technical knowledge, to fill support roles is a major industry challenge.

### **Technical service and support is strategic for RealNetworks.**

Providing quality technical support to end users has always been fundamental to the RealNetworks business model and remains an important aspect of the company's mission. The company receives industry praise, not only for innovative products, but also for top-notch support. It is essential for RealNetworks, as an industry leader, to provide comprehensive support to keep its growing customer base happy and maintain its competitive edge.

RealNetworks also sees a much bigger picture: “We believe if people like our free product and they get great support, they will come back and purchase enhanced and enterprise-wide versions of our products. This way, we further build our customer base,” explains Dave Hardwick, technical support manager for RealNetworks.

Hardwick develops support programs to service RealNetworks' expanding customer community. The challenge for RealNetworks is to meet the increasing need for full-fledged assistance without investing heavily in added support personnel and related expenses.

### **Web-based solutions make sense.**

Many companies have turned to Web-based solutions to make support more efficient for customers. RealNetworks, for example, lets users access the support area of its Web site at any time. They can search through frequently-asked-questions (FAQ) for answers about installation, browser configuration, system requirements, playback quality, and known product issues. There is also a documentation library site for in-depth research.

Broadening the scope of RealNetworks' support to include e-mail was the logical next step. “We knew electronic support was going to be big; it was obvious we needed to enhance our e-mail support function,” explains Hardwick.

## The big question: in-house or outsource?

Hardwick thought long and hard about e-mail support alternatives. Strategically, outsourcing was the only way to meet the company's goals and protect the bottom line. "RealNetworks is in business to be the leading developer of audio-video streaming technology, not a customer service expert. But, we were concerned that we would have to invest heavily in support staffing — to provide the kind of support we want," says Hardwick.

## The answer: Talisma Corporation.

When assessing outsourcing vendors, factors important to RealNetworks included

- Depth of experience
- Level of talent and skill
- Industry reputation
- Overall flexibility
- Ability to blend in with the company culture, and
- Costs.

Talisma Corporation was the best match. "We needed a partner with technical support expertise as their core business," Hardwick explains. "Talisma has the experience we require, and they provide service in a cost-effective way," he adds. "Talisma is able to combine a high skill level with lower costs, due to their professional support group in India."

The Bangalore, India-based staff of top technical graduates possesses knowledge and skill sets that are unmatched in the industry. Ten engineers are dedicated to the RealNetworks account, assuring the highest level of quality. Talisma is also able to improve response times, with

engineers working in shifts around-the-clock, in a time zone a half-day ahead of the US. "The support teams can answer complex questions while we sleep, and our customers have solutions when they show up for work the next day."

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Dave Hardwick, RealNetworks

## RealNetworks and Talisma team up to keep quality high.

Extensive ongoing training keeps the Talisma team current with product enhancements and updates. RealNetworks conducts quality assurance programs that include customer surveys and random monitoring of e-mail inquiries. Talisma helps RealNetworks accurately monitor customer concerns, by issuing regular reports that list frequently asked questions and recommended additions to the knowledgebase.

"Talisma has helped RealNetworks meet or exceed e-mail service levels, keeping the quality of the written response high, while reducing per e-mail cost," says Hardwick. "This is a big win for our customers — and our shareholders."

Outsourcing electronic support to Talisma enables RealNetworks to keep tech support standards high, with fast response times and quality solutions. Accessing online support from the RealNetworks Web site is a simple process in which users are prompted to first select a product category, then choose a platform (PC or Macintosh), and then submit their question. The source of responses to customer inquiries is

transparent, as it should be. "First and foremost, what customers want and need is the correct answer to their technical questions," says Hardwick. "They don't care where the response comes from, but they do care that the response time is swift and that the support people help them solve their problems."

Above all, Hardwick did not want the technical support functions to limit or inhibit sales of RealNetworks' product. By outsourcing to Talisma, RealNetworks saves costs while positioning for future growth.

Talisma sales manager Doug Lawson says many companies resist outsourcing support because they see it as an integral part of their business and are uneasy about entrusting it to an outsider. "They may believe their product is too complicated or changes too often to make outsourcing viable," contends Lawson. "Understandably, they don't want to lose touch with their customers. When I tell them about the kind of support Talisma provides for many companies, including RealNetworks — and how quickly and efficiently customers are taken care of — they begin to see the value of outsourcing done well."



Upside Magazine calls Talisma one of the hottest privately-held high-tech companies of 1999.

## Business Journal

Puget Sound Business Journal ranks Talisma Corporation 4th in the Top 100 Fastest-Growing Private Companies of 1999.

## Contact Us

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