
Making the Most of Oracle Support

“Ellison denies support cut-back” Explained

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Introduction

In Computerworld on October 7, 2002, Andrea Malcolm wrote an article titled “Ellison denies support cut-back”, in which she highlighted a response given by Larry Ellison to concerns local users raised about Oracle’s support services in New Zealand. On reading this article it was apparent that some Oracle users in New Zealand still think of Oracle Support Services in the context of the old Local Support Centre, where TARs (Technical Assistance Requests) raised by local customers were handled by a team of New Zealand support analysts sitting in Oracle’s office in Auckland. The reality is that this situation has not existed within Oracle New Zealand for a number of years. Today, Product Support is delivered via Oracle’s Global Support infrastructure, while Customer Support is delivered by local support organisations. Differentiating between Product Support and Customer Support is a relatively recent change in philosophy within Oracle and is one of the major driving forces behind how Oracle is delivering and supporting its products, services and, most importantly, its customers.

Mike Rocha, Executive Vice President of Global Support Services and Platform Technologies, along with a number of senior executives in Oracle held several Analyst Days in 2002 to give in-depth briefings about the changes Oracle Support Services has undergone in recent years. A number of these analyst reports can be found at www.oracle.com/support:

- ❑ "Giga applauds the thinking that has gone into the "new and improved" Oracle Support Services. Oracle has adopted a philosophy of service and support that is much more customer-centric than it was before." [New Oracle Support: Reengineering the Process](#) - Byron Miller, Giga Information Group, October 2002
- ❑ " The most significant change seems to be in culture...According to a few large customers, the result has been that "development is much more responsive" and Oracle is putting major effort into quality, usability, and maintainability issues. " - [Can the Internet Change Everything for Oracle Support?](#) - Bill Swanton, AMR Research, October 2002
- ❑ "...two years ago, Oracle's customer support call centers received 500,000 inbound calls per quarter. Today it's down to 60,000 calls per quarter...Oracle has beefed up its free self-service knowledge base, focused on root cause analysis of problems, and centered its focus on crafting a "problem avoidance" architecture. Forrester's take? Given that Oracle has grown its customer base during that period, it's a testimony to how seriously Oracle has heard its customers' concerns." -Laurie Orlov, Research Director, "The Organic IT Voyage." Forrester Research, October, 2002

Obviously with new support services and new support processes come new ways of interacting with Oracle Support and new ways to exploit the services it offers. The purpose of this paper is to provide Oracle’s New Zealand customers with an insight into the changes Oracle Support has gone through, the new spectrum of services it has to offer, and how they can use these services to their advantage.

Evolution of Oracle Support Services

Disclaimer - I must state at the beginning of this section that the potted history you are about to read is not an authorised biography of Oracle Support Services. Rather, it is based on the observations of someone who experienced the changes first hand... me. It should also be noted that I have had to condense many years of business process engineering into just a few short paragraphs, so a degree of poetic license has been employed to allow the history to flow. I trust you will enjoy this insider's view of the Oracle Support world.

I joined Oracle in the May of 1990 and in 1991 took up a position in the newly formed UK Global Support Centre. In those days our greatest resources for solving customer issues were some very experienced support analysts and a large bookshelf full of manuals. This is oversimplifying things a little, as we did have electronic search facilities in our TAR management system and against Oracle's bug database, however, to be successful in delivering efficient, effective support to a global Oracle customer base, we had to have a few more weapons in our arsenal than those available to us. With the globalisation of Support, Oracle began several initiatives to create and populate a number of internal information repositories. Built using Oracle technology, these electronic libraries were used to collate and disseminate technical information about the growing number of Oracle products. As the functionality of the Oracle technology stack grew, the technical libraries were given more powerful search capabilities and web based front ends and as the years passed the knowledge content of the libraries kept growing and growing.

From an Oracle support analyst's perspective, the above initiatives were brilliant. I had at my fingertips a breadth and depth of knowledge that would help me progress just about any issue I could face on a day-to-day basis. From a customer point of view, this impressive resource was all but invisible. While the support analyst was able to be more effective and close more customer calls, the size of the Oracle customer base and the catalogue of Oracle products had both grown, so the overall impact to Oracle customers was negligible. Oracle was growing into a huge beast, with many heads – server technologies, applications products, software engineering tools and web services. The problem now was how do we help our customers harness and tame this very powerful beast?

Question - Why did Oracle customers have to call Oracle Support?

Answer - Because Oracle Support had access to the knowledge that could help them.

To really help our customers harness the power that lay in their investment in Oracle technology, we had to help them become more self sufficient in their use of Oracle products. This meant allowing our customers to have direct access to the information sources available to Oracle employees. Well, almost.

By now a significant portion of the knowledge inside Oracle Corporation was in electronic format and the technology was available to publish that knowledge safely. The delivery vehicle was the Internet. Previously the realm of academia, the Internet was something that more and more private and public organisations were coming into contact with. From this environment the seeds of MetaLink were sown. Oracle began the huge task of sanitising its internal knowledge base, to protect both the customer confidential nature of much of the content and the intellectual property that is Oracle. Knowledge management initiatives were put in place to create standards for the production of information and provide the means to moderate and control the information being published. At the same time, MetaLink was being engineered, prototyped and field-tested and by 1998, MetaLink was beginning to push information out to the Oracle customer base.

MetaLink was a significant turning point for Oracle Support Services. Instead of trying to better equip ourselves to handle an ever increasing number of customer calls, Oracle created a tool that should ultimately reduce our customers' dependence on Oracle Support. It was an attempt to give our customers the ability to be more self-sufficient in their use of Oracle products and the impact was dramatic to say the least. Prior to the rollout of MetaLink, Oracle Support would receive globally approximately 2.1 million calls per year. That figure was just over one million calls last year, with 90% of all Service Requests, the new name for the old TARs, being logged on-line. A statistical comparison of activities in 2001 against 2002 shows that Service Request volumes decreased by 27%, backlog decreased by 36% and resolution time was reduced by 41%. When viewed in the context of a growing customer base and an increase in both the number and complexity of Oracle products, this is a major achievement. In addition, MetaLink is now serving more than 80 million self-service searches per year. The take-up of MetaLink by the Oracle customer base has been exceptional and the impact it has had on the delivery of support services has been huge.

Building on the success of MetaLink, Oracle has been moving its support systems from a regional to a global perspective. This has meant consolidating a myriad of country based local support TAR management systems into a single instance, along with consolidation of the various contracts databases. This time using Oracle's own CRM products, such as iSupport, Oracle Support Services is building a single image of its customers' contracts and configurations, while standardising its internal systems and procedures. There is also a push inside Oracle Support Services to encourage analysts to connect to customer sites as a matter of course during an investigation of a customer issue. My experience as a technical analyst, and that of many others, is that the more visibility we have of our customers' systems, the more chance we have of quickly identifying the source of a problem and fixing it. This is also the logic behind tools such as the Remote Diagnostic Agent, covered later in this paper. Effectively by improving the quality of information available at the beginning of an investigation, it should be possible to eliminate much of the "ping pong" that happens during the course of the investigation.

From the efforts mentioned above, Oracle expects to achieve additional efficiencies that will further improve the level of service delivered to customers. For example, approximately 60% of all Service Requests submitted to Oracle Support relate to configuration issues. By consolidating and improving the quality of information held about customer configurations, improving data gathering techniques and increasing visibility of the circumstances under which certain types of errors occur, Oracle should be able to analyse trends in logged Service Requests and publish more accurate information about how to avoid such errors. This more proactive, error avoidance approach is where Oracle is putting its efforts today.

The benefits mentioned above are achieved as a result of standardising processes, consolidating systems and information and leveraging the expertise and skills that exist in Oracle's global support centres. Having worked in both local and global support centres, I can see definite advantages in having both. In the global support centres there is a critical mass of people. Many of these people are product experts who know specific areas of Oracle technology at a very detailed level and it is these product experts who produce much of the information that gets published in MetaLink. You need the critical mass of people within these centres to provide sufficient coverage for the huge range of Oracle products, features and functions. You also need these centres to provide the training ground, where less experienced analysts are mentored and coached into the role of product experts. In the local support centres, or at least what we had developed in New Zealand, was a team of people who had a breadth of experience in a wide range of product areas and expertise in a few areas. Broadly speaking local support centre analysts tended to be very skilled generalists and that was what was needed as we didn't have the critical mass of people to develop expertise in every area of Oracle. With the globalisation of support systems and the migration of reactive support workload to a global backbone, what was to become of these very skilled generalists?

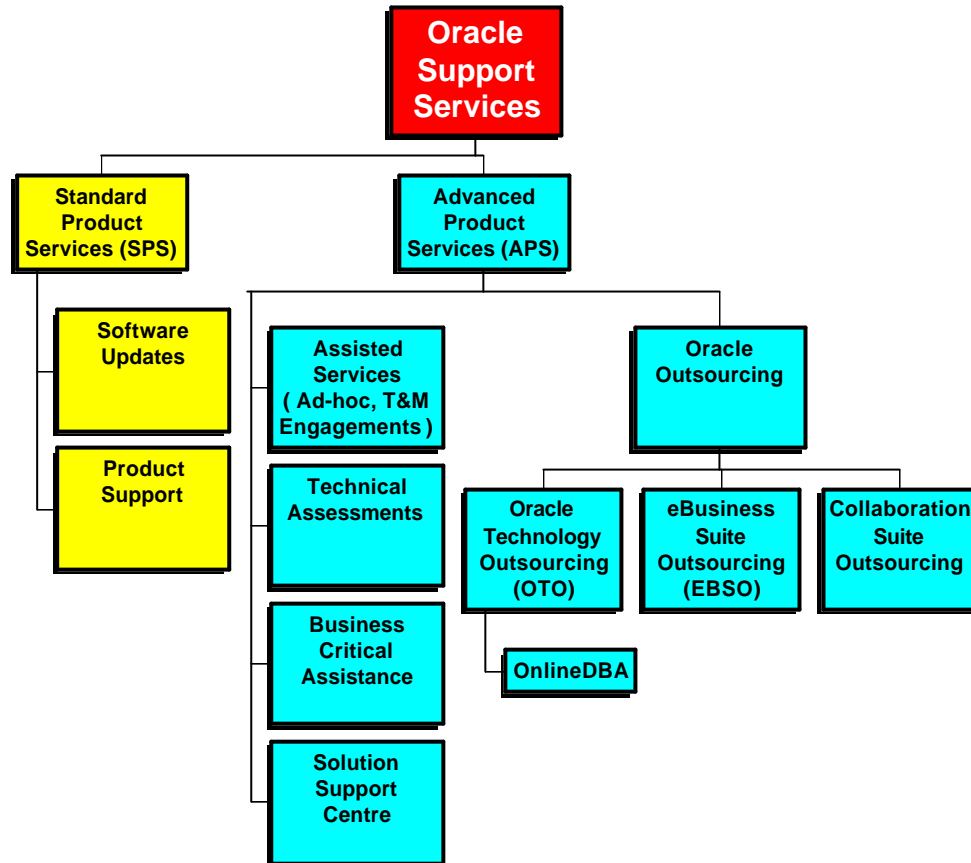
I asked the question earlier, how do we help our customers **harness** and **tame** this very powerful beast that is Oracle? The product support focus spoken of until now is how Oracle is helping customers harness the power of Oracle. Bringing it to the point where you can saddle it up and think about riding it somewhere. Actually riding the beast and directing it where you want it to go is more akin to taming the beast, i.e. using your investment in Oracle to better serve your business. This has become a completely different focus for Oracle and is where the skills and talents of our local support staff are being channelled.

In 2002, Oracle created a new support organisation out of what had previously been the local support centres. This new organisation, named Customer Support, was charged with developing and delivering services that will help our customers get the most out of Oracle. This division and naming was a formal recognition of a path that Oracle had been heading down for a number of years, where field support staff were delivering an increasingly broader range of services from those of the more traditional reactive support activities. Rather than fill this chapter with details about Oracle's new Support Services, I have provided an overview of some of them in the following chapter. Suffice to say for now, Product Support is tasked with making Oracle products work properly, while Customer Support is charged with helping our customers get the most out of their investment on Oracle. *I could have saved myself some writing if I had thought of that sooner!*

With that, we find ourselves up-to-date with the Gregor Lawson condensed history of Oracle Support Services. I hope you enjoyed my little tour.

Service Offerings

When I first joined Oracle Support, Standard Product Services, i.e. the right to software upgrades and access to a support help desk, were the only support services that Oracle provided. As you can see from the diagram below, things have changed considerably in the years between. Gone are the days of Oracle simply providing a support help desk. Now when you think of Oracle Support, think of technical consulting services.



Advanced Product Services (APS) was born out of two initiatives that had existed within Oracle for a number of years, namely Premium Support Services and Oracle Outsourcing. Its function is to provide technical and operational expertise to enable Oracle's customers to get the most out of their investment in Oracle technology. Oracle Support Services is uniquely positioned to deliver technical consultancy and outsourcing services, given its wealth of intellectual capital and technical expertise that comes from years of servicing its own software.

Below is a brief overview of some of the Advanced Product Services that have proven to be more popular in New Zealand. Full details of all of the services can be found at <http://www.oracle.com/support/>

Assisted Services

Assisted Services are generally short term, fixed scope Support Consultancy engagements, aimed at assisting customers with specific tasks. Examples of some of the types of services offered in this category are:

- ❑ Oracle Software Installation
- ❑ Oracle Server Performance Review
- ❑ Backup and Recovery Review
- ❑ Software Migration Planning

Assisted Services can be used to augment a customer's technical skills to satisfy the needs of specific projects or to provide capacity to cope with peaks in workload. They can also be used to mentor internal staff in specific areas through knowledge transfer activities.

Solution Support Centre

Assisted Services are used in an ad-hoc fashion, resulting in a transactional relationship with peaks and troughs of activity between Oracle Support Services and its customers. Being a packaged service at a fixed annual fee, and having deliverables throughout the duration of the contract, a Solution Support Centre brings greater consistency to the engagement, moving the relationship up a level from that of customer / supplier to a more "value add" based relationship. The value of the Solution Support Centre is that it is a focused service that delivers support and technical consultancy services in the context of your business.

Utilising the Assisted Services, the responsibility is on the customer to tell Oracle what it requires of its investment in Oracle technology. To do this effectively requires a detailed understanding of the capabilities of Oracle's varied technologies and how these can be applied to satisfy business requirements. Utilising a Solution Support Centre, Oracle shares the responsibility of understanding your business requirements and will work proactively with you to make recommendations of how Oracle's technology can be used to the greatest effect.

A Solution Support Centre is built around a Focused Engineering Team that interfaces directly with your technical contacts to provide them with advice and assistance with all queries and issues related to Oracle software. Examples of some of the services provided through a Solution Support Centre are:

- ❑ Emergency assistance
- ❑ Installation assistance
- ❑ Performance monitoring and tuning
- ❑ Applied research
- ❑ Knowledge transfer sessions

Some of the benefits offered by a Solution Support Centre are:

- ❑ Increased system stability and availability.
- ❑ Implementation of operational best practices.
- ❑ Facilitate the rapid adoption/deployment of new technologies.
- ❑ Raising the level of service provided by internal IT staff.

The purpose of a Solution Support Centre is operational excellence, delivered in the context of your environment, focusing on assisting your IT group meet the requirements of your business.

Oracle Outsourcing

As you can see from the diagram, there are three flavours of Oracle Outsourcing, Technology Outsourcing, E-Business Suite Outsourcing and Collaboration Suite Outsourcing. These three offerings are targeted at different markets, but all have the same objective, to simplify life for the Oracle customer. By allowing Oracle to take care of the management, maintenance, and upgrading of your Oracle infrastructure, you can gain quick access to the latest technology, significantly reduce IT costs and focus on your core business competencies, while we focus on ours.

In addition to the three Oracle Outsourcing offerings mentioned above, Oracle provides a flexible deployment model to allow choice in how the outsourcing service is implemented. The "@Oracle" model provides a complete outsourcing service provisioning the hosting of the hardware infrastructure in addition to the administration and maintenance of the Oracle software products. With the @Customer/@Enabler model, the customer or nominated third party provides the hosting of the hardware infrastructure, while Oracle delivers the administration and maintenance of the Oracle software products.

The focus of Oracle's outsourcing services is to provide comprehensive management and administrative services focusing on system availability, security, performance, change management – including software migration planning and upgrades, and situation/problem management.

Oracle Outsourcing customers have realized benefits that include:

- ❑ 50 percent lower IT administration and maintenance costs
- ❑ 50 percent faster resolution of product-support issues
- ❑ 40 percent increased employee productivity
- ❑ Ability to focus on core business needs

Oracle Outsourcing is transforming the value our customers receive from their investment in Oracle products by lowering total cost of ownership (TCO) and increasing return on investment (ROI).

Our model blends software and service into one continuum, “Software as a Service”, delivering an Oracle infrastructure that is faster, more stable, more responsive to changing business needs, delivered at a predictable monthly cost. In much the same way as we use telephone services as an essential part of our day-to-day business, the aim of Oracle Outsourcing is to deliver an Oracle infrastructure “dial tone”, letting Oracle both harness and tame the beast for you.

Improving the Customer Experience

While separating Customer Support from Product Support has the potential to offer significant benefits to the Oracle customer base, concentrating the traditional reactive support services into a global backbone, remote from the majority of its customers does have its downside. For example, the loss of contact with local analysts who, over a number of years have acquired considerable knowledge about what local customers are doing with Oracle Applications and technology products. The loss of the ability to send someone out on site to deal with those stubborn problems that just won't go away easily. Problems that occur when dealing with different time zones and languages. These issues and others are recognised by Oracle and are actively being addressed by efforts to instrument or automate the support process. Much of the work undertaken in this area comes out of the Oracle Outsourcing stable, where considerable effort has been put into the development of rigorous processes for the installation, management and upgrading of Oracle products.

We are starting to see the fruits of these efforts already with the release of utilities such as the Oracle Applications Manager, the Oracle Diagnostic Support Pack, the Remote Diagnostic Agent, and Oracle Direct Connect. By utilising these tools, Oracle customers and support engineers can work more collaboratively and effectively in the investigation, diagnosis and resolution of support issues.

The following sections give details of some of the available support tools used to allow customers to analyse problems themselves, improve communications with Oracle Product Support and provide greater visibility into the occurrence of support issues.

Oracle Direct Connect

Reference Note 222609.1 Oracle Direct Connect
230823.1 ODC Interactive Demo

Oracle Direct Connect (ODC) is a screen-sharing tool that allows real-time collaboration between the customer and Oracle Support. Three of the key features of this tool are that it:

- ❑ Uses your existing Internet infrastructure, making it is easy to configure and use.
- ❑ Is secured through the use of industry standard 128-bit AES encryption and compression technology to protect the information passed between you and Oracle.
- ❑ Allows you to retain control of the connection, while having visibility of everything the support engineer is seeing.

The major benefit of ODC is that it assists in effective problem definition, which leads to faster resolution. It allows you to show the support engineer what you are experiencing, including the steps required to reproduce the problem and it allows the engineer to quickly collect the required problem definition information.

ODC is a powerful tool for the investigation of issues that require specific steps to reproduce or that cannot be reproduced outside the customer's environment.

Remote Diagnostic Agent

Reference Notes 139597.1 Remote Diagnostic Agent (RDA) for Unix
153091.1 RDA for Windows
171748.1 Remote Diagnostic Agent (RDA) for OpenVMS
187506.1 Remote Diagnostic Agent (RDA) for Rdb on OpenVMS
186139.1 Reports Remote Diagnostic Agent (RDAREports) for Unix Quick Start Guide
186154.1 Reports Remote Diagnostic Agent (RDAREports) for Windows Quick Start Guide
161474.1 Oracle Applications Remote Diagnostics Agent (APPS_RDA)

The Remote Diagnostic Agent (RDA) has two main purposes:

1. Collect accurate information about the customer's environment.
2. Collect as much information as possible during the early stages of the investigation.

The logic behind the RDA is that it is easier and faster to give the correct solution to a customer if the support engineer has accurate information on which to base a decisions. By creating a tool that automates the collection of all required information from the customer's system the support engineer should be able to avoid having to go back to the customer to ask for additional information during the course of the investigation, unless of course the environment changes during the course of the investigation.

To eliminate unnecessary delay, Oracle Support Services want customers to become accustomed to executing the RDA and providing this information whenever a Service Request is logged. The output may not be relevant to every situation, for example, RDA will not help in the resolution of issues that are more consultative in nature (e.g. how to do something, questions about documentation, certification issues, shipping tar, etc...). However, there are a number of situations where the output of the RDA is especially useful, e.g.

- ❑ Performance issues
- ❑ Configuration issues
- ❑ Error messages that are impacted by configuration, environment, or OS information.
- ❑ ORA-600 and ORA-7445 errors, since they are often impacted by the overall server configuration and performance.
- ❑ Tars on which bug screenings are done or new bugs are filed as this gives bug screeners, bde, and development information about the overall environment.

Oracle Support is constantly enhancing the RDA, so from time to time it is worthwhile downloading the latest version! Current new functionality being worked on includes:

- ❑ Menu interface that allows the gathering of specific info.
- ❑ Windows XP Professional and NetWare.
- ❑ Standards for allowing modular plug-ins so we can then collect more detailed information for specific products and features (e.g. Portal, iAS, RMAN, Advanced Replication, InterMedia, etc.)
- ❑ Standardization of output across platforms.
- ❑ XML output.

To give an idea of the extent of the information gathered and reported by the RDA tool, I have included a list of the output from the UNIX version of the tool below.

Oracle RDA for UNIX:

❑ OS Setup

- Main Report
- Machine Configuration
- Oracle_Home files
- CPUs
- OS Patches
- OS Packages
- System Error Log
- Profile Settings
- /etc/*conf Files
- /etc/hosts...Files
- sysdef
- Links (patches) (docs)

❑ Network

- ifconfig
- tcpip Settings
- SQL*Net Config Files
- Intelligent Agent Config Files
- Heterogeneous Services Config Files
- Oracle Management Server Config Files
- Listener Status and Services
- Environment
- Performance

❑ Performance

- Overview
- Top SQL

❑ Webserver (old)

- Web Environment
- cfg files
- Web Processes
- Apache Over
- Apache Processes
- JServ Over
- Signon - static
- owa_util.print_cgi_env

❑ RDBMS

- Product Versions
- init.ora
- V\$Parameters
- V\$Option
- V\$SGASTAT Memory Statistics
- V\$SGA Statistics
- V\$License Information
- V\$Compatibility Information
- V\$Logfile Information
- V\$System_Event

- V\$Session_Wait
- V\$Latch
- V\$Latch Holder
- Table Space
- Invalid Objects
- ALL_ERRORS
- Install logs
- Alert Log Summary
- Last Trace File

HTTP Server

- Listener config
- Listener Logs
- HTTP Server start scripts
- Possible candidates for mod_plsql config files
- JServ config
- JServ logs

Oracle Diagnostic Support Pack

Reference Note 211025.1 How To Download, Install and Run Diagnostic Tools and Interpret The Output
178043.1 Oracle Support Services Diagnostic Tests
167000.1 Applications Diagnostic Script-Quick Reference Guide

Oracle created and tasked the eBusiness Support Global Automation Team with the development of tools to assist Oracle customers install, use and upgrade Oracle Application products. The goals of the program are to improve problem avoidance capabilities, enhance customer self-sufficiency and increase support engineer efficiency.

The diagnostic tests provided as part of this Oracle Diagnostics Support Pack gather information about specific Oracle products, run tests against information gathered. The output of the pack includes details of the information gathered, the results of the tests and appropriate actions to take where errors are found. The Oracle Diagnostics Support Pack does not alter data or setup information, it simply analyses the current setup and provides advice where the need for corrective actions are discovered.

The Oracle Diagnostics Support Pack is updated and released on a monthly basis and include the latest updates to existing tests and all new tests made available since the previous release. For a catalogue of all available diagnostic tests, please see Note 178043.1

Oracle Applications Manager

Reference Notes 201703.1 Oracle Applications Manager 11i Ver 2.1.1
209999.1 Oracle Applications Manager in Oracle Applications 11.5.8
166762.1 Oracle Applications Manager 11i Availability

The Oracle Applications Manager 11i console provides an Applications DBA-oriented subset of Oracle Applications System Administration functions. This tool replaces much of the Applications administration functionality previously found in the Oracle Enterprise Manager Applications Management Pack and is available for Oracle Applications Releases 11.5.1 and above, though it is only bundled with Applications Release 11.5.8. For releases prior to 11.5.8, a separate patch, number 2600517 is available for distributing Oracle Applications Manager. The following interfaces are available with Oracle Applications Manager, enabling administrators to better manage their systems. With Oracle Applications Manager, you can

- View key system health indicators from the Applications Dashboard
- Manage Application Tier Services
- Manage the Oracle Workflow System
- Explore Applications Patch History

- ❑ Examine and Edit System Configuration
- ❑ Measure the usage of Applications Products
- ❑ View Forms Runtime Diagnostics (Applicable only if you have Forms 6i patchset 10 or above)
- ❑ Register and run your favourite SQL scripts to generate custom HTML and text reports
- ❑ Troubleshoot concurrent manager start-up problems with the concurrent manager recovery wizard
- ❑ Simplify your communication with Oracle Support by using the Support cart feature

For existing OAM 2.0 customers, the 2.1.1 release introduces:

- ❑ The new "Applications Dashboard", which provides a concise overview of the state of the E-Business Suite system, including information about configuration, usage, performance, and required maintenance activities.
- ❑ A system configuration editor for use with AutoConfig.
- ❑ Advanced capabilities for monitoring and managing Forms Listeners and Forms runtime processes. (Applicable only if you have Forms 6i patchset 10 or above)
- ❑ Monitor and Manage Forms Listener Servlet (Applicable only if you have Forms 6i patchset 11 or above. Please refer to MetaLink Note: 201340.1, for further details on using Forms Listener Servlet with Oracle Applications 11i)
- ❑ New extensibility features that allow users to integrate their own SQL scripts into Oracle Applications Manager 11i.
- ❑ A support cart feature that allows you to point and click pages within the tool to capture key information for improved communication with Oracle Support.
- ❑ Enhanced troubleshooting capabilities for Concurrent Managers and Oracle Workflow
- ❑ Improved Applications Usage Reports for tracking system throughput of key business objects such as Order Entry lines, Purchase line items, and expense reports.
- ❑ Read-only access and patch history only access to the Oracle Applications Manager features.

Oracle Applications Manager launches using a URL from any browser. For security purposes, you will have to login as an Oracle Applications System Administrator in order to use Oracle Applications Manager.

Oracle Applications Manager can be used for a wide variety of tasks such as administering services, examining system configuration, managing Oracle Workflow, examining applied patches, and measuring system usage. The console provides tools to detect potential configuration problems such as recently altered site-level profile option settings or database initialisation parameters that do not meet the requirements or recommendations of Oracle. System administrators can easily determine which patches have been applied to a system, including the individual patches included in mini-packs, maintenance packs, and merged patches. Administrators can also examine the patched files on a system, and find all of the patches that altered a given file. For each patch applied, Oracle Applications Manager can show the individual actions taken by each patch driver.

For Release 11.5.8, OAM is fully configured through AutoConfig.

A demonstration of OAM 11i can be found at <http://download-west.oracle.com/appsnet/viewlet/oam.html>.

Conclusion

The focus of Oracle's efforts to automate the support process and publish much of its intellectual property via the Internet, is to make the customer base more self-sufficient in its use of Oracle products. This is a change in philosophy from previous years, where the emphasis was on better equipping the support analyst to deal with an ever increasing number of calls. Oracle's old support model of having analysts at the end of a telephone was unable to scale to cope with the growth in Oracle's customer base and catalogue of products. The new Product Support model scales with the customer base, eliminates many of the bottlenecks that existed in the old model and focuses on problem avoidance rather than problem fixing.

While some may see this move towards promoting customer self-reliance and the automation of much of the support process as pushing Oracle and its customers further apart, Oracle has provided a range of services that will allow customers to integrate Oracle Support Services into the heart of their IT organisation if required. Our customers now have greater choice. You are better equipped to "go-it-alone", if that is the direction you want to take, but remember, there is the ability to log Service Requests if a safety net is required. At the other end of the spectrum you can hand over your Oracle infrastructure to us and get on with running your business. Leave the Oracle technology hassles to the Oracle technology specialists.

Oracle's new support model has new rules of engagement. If you are at the go-it-alone end of the service spectrum, please use the tools that are now available, as these will greatly enhance your experience of using Oracle Support's services.

To quote from Byron Miller in his article "New Oracle Support: Reengineering the Process", October 22, 2002, © 2002 Giga Information Group, Inc.

"Oracle has adopted a philosophy of service and support that is much more customer-centric than it was before. However, we understand that the success of many of these initiatives will probably depend on to what extent the customer is willing to be involved. If, when given the option, your online configuration information is adequately maintained, and if you research the information that is available and try to apply it before submitting a service request, you will likely be a happy customer. If, on the other hand, you simply still pick up the phone, you will likely be less happy since the person on the other end of the phone will probably be going through the same procedures that you could have gone through."

Oracle's efforts to transform its support services to become more pro-active and customer focused culminated in an announcement in October last year that Oracle Support Services had received the 2002 Software Technical Assistance Recognition (STAR) Award for Innovative Support from the Service and Support Professionals Association (SSPA). See <http://www.oracle.com/corporate/press/index.html?1466996.html> for details of the announcement. For information about SSPA, please go to <http://www.thespa.com/>

This award was given in recognition of Oracle's efforts to enhance the Oracle Customer Experience by delivering proactive technical support services. To quote from Bill Rose, president of SSPA, "the SSPA STAR Award showcases companies who demonstrate outstanding achievement in the support services industry. The investment and high standards Oracle maintains for delivering superior technical support, evidenced by the success of its customers, made Oracle the clear leader in the Innovative Support category."

The evolution of Oracle's Support Services will continue, as nothing ever stands still for long in this industry. My years of participation in its evolution to date have at times been frustrating, challenging, educational, but most of all enjoyable. I trust the experience from the customer side of the fence will become more and more enjoyable as the service changes.

About the Author

I joined Oracle UK in May 1990, as a Pre-Sales Support Consultant (now Business Solutions) in the South-East City (London) and Retail business unit. In this capacity I used to spend 10% of my time working in the UK support centre providing telephone support. Having had a technical background from previous employment, I thoroughly enjoyed my time working in the post-sales support role, so in October 1991 I moved into the UNIX Support team of the newly formed UK Global Support Centre. For personal reasons I took a year out of Oracle in 1995 and in 1996 immigrated to New Zealand where I joined Oracle Consulting Services as a Senior Consultant. Since joining Oracle New Zealand I have held the following positions:

- ❑ Senior Consultant in the NZ Auckland Consulting Practice
- ❑ Senior Technical Analyst in the NZ Local Support Centre
- ❑ Support Manager in the NZ Local Support Centre
- ❑ Support Delivery Manager in the Wellington Premium Support Services group
- ❑ Support Pre-Sales Consultant

The latter being my current role.

My predominantly technical background, experience in service delivery and, in recent years, Support sales experience, has lead to my involvement in several New Zealand, Asia Pacific and global service definition initiatives, particularly in the development of the OnlineDBA service.