Slash Support

Header: It’s a different story
Intro: They are the tech geeks. Facing any tech glitches? Call up Slash Support. They have the answer to all your software problems

They support you over telephone lines. But they don’t like to be called a call centre. They prefer to be called a technical support company. That is Slash Support for you. A call centre with a difference.

To be honest, Slash Support did not start off as a typical call centre. Indeed, the background is extremely technical. Slash Support is part of a triumvirate - Cybernet Software is into software development, Ready Testgo offers performance-testing services while Slash Support offers technical support over the telephone.

Unlike a call centre, where the biggest component of service is telephonic conversation, the service offered at Slash Support is technical expertise. Here, the telephone is simply the mode of offering the service, which is extremely technical.

Slash Support offers various services. The first is technology-intensive support to providers of technology. Here a software engineer in the United States might call up Slash Support inquiring about a technical problem that he is facing. Clearly, the person at Slash Support has to be a lot smarter, more knowledgeable and extremely intelligent to be able to resolve the problem which could not be resolved by the software engineer in the US with the competencies available in his office. This could be a highly technical problem in Java, C++ or an extremely complicated design problem. When the customer (software technical person) reports the problem, the Slash Support team records the problem. The problem is then simulated on the hardware and software installed at the labs at Slash Support. Then the best minds work at finding a solution to the problem. The priorities to resolution are based on the criticality of the problem amongst other factors. The resolution could take between hours to days. The solution is reported back to the customer.

The second kind of service is providing customer support to users of highly complicated and technology-intensive equipment. These could be network routers, modems, broadband hubs and so on. Unlike other support centres, the nature of support offered is highly technical and requires great understanding of the technology involved. The problems are also rather complicated and at the most three problems get sorted out in an hour.

The third kind of service is in the area of consumer helpdesk. Here the service offered is support to installed software like Windows, Excel, Word and so on. It must be admitted that this level of support is not radically technical and many call centres that admit to being call centres also offer this kind of support. About four problems get sorted out in an hour.
The fourth kind of service is providing network management, systems management and database management to American customers from remote locations in India. Very clearly all the work done at Slash Support is high technology intensive. Hence, the staff has to be of a high technical calibre. Furthermore, training has to be intensive - lasting from six weeks to three months. Training is mostly related to technology and is highly technology driven. The voice training and accent training are a very small component and do not last more than two weeks. Though Slash Support started of as a high-end technical software company offering the resolution of extremely complicated and technology intensive problems, gradually the basket of services has become wider with the inclusion of the entire band of services from low-end to high-end technical problems. Initially 90% of revenues came from high-end technical work. However, now the basket of revenues reflects the market opportunities and almost 40% of revenues come from low-end technical problems. Out of a team of 600 people almost 400 work in slightly low-end work of customer support and help desk, whereas only 200 work in the area of enterprise technology problem and systems and networking management. There are many issues involved in focussing on the kind of services to offer. While high-end technical problems offer high rates to the tune of US$ 20 -US$ 25, the resolution of low-end technical problems offer very low rates in the range of US$ 10 - US$ 15. The margins clearly are higher in high-end technical work. But there are no adequate market opportunities and it is very difficult to scale up the business or ramp up the operations. Hence, to play a volume game and gain top line growth to match bottom line growth, Slash Support has, in line with market opportunities, chosen to provide adequate attention to low-end technical problem resolution. Again, low-end services offer greater seat utilisation opportunity with almost two shifts per seat whereas there is usually one shift per seat for high-end technical services. Revenues for Slash Support were in the region of US$ 10 million for the financial year 2002-03 and this represents a growth in excess of 80%. Strategically, the company wants to focus on its core competency of technical support. Slash Support is, therefore, unlikely to dilute its brand equity by diversifying into becoming a call centre for financial services. However, the incorporation of another company is not entirely ruled out to cater to the opportunities in the call-centre opportunities in other segments.
Start-Up Year: 1999
Area of Operations: High end and low end technical support
Location: Chennai
Head – India Operations: Rajeev Kapoor
Ownership and Funding: Cybernet Group
Approximate Headcount: 600
Approximate Revenues: US$ 10 million