

# REDEFINING your Community:

Steps to a Successful Community Portal



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Today's market has seen a significant shift where device manufacturers, software companies and global portal companies are playing in the arenas traditionally occupied by service providers. As a result, service providers are under increasing pressure to offer their own multi-play services to compete with new entrants into their market domain. Multiple content providers are exploring their own strategies for reaching and holding on to their consumers. This is driving service providers to re-evaluate and re-define their customer relationships in order to gain more control of the user experience.

With rising competition entering from all sides of the market and consolidation of vendors aiming to offer the "super platform," building a subscriber experience strategy is now, more than ever, vital for achieving growth and mitigating churn. A consumer portal, once simply a web-based access point for subscribers to find information about services, view a bill, and read messages, has transformed into a dynamic stop for subscribers to meet their friends, share pictures, interact in groups, and act as a window to other services.

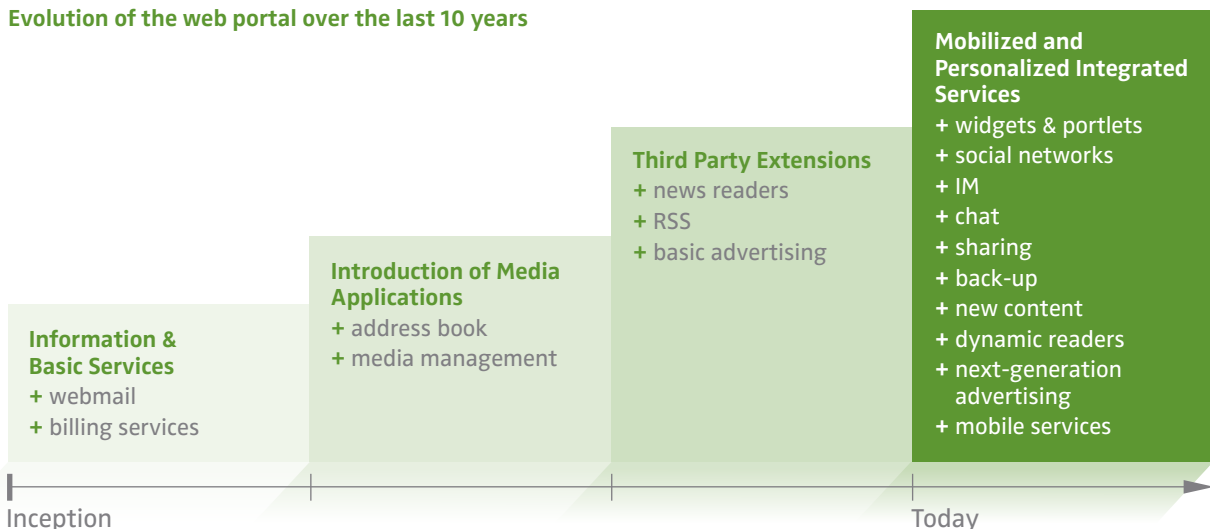
Implementing a successful consumer portal gives operators a competitive edge in gaining subscriber mindshare, increasing loyalty, and driving revenue.

This whitepaper provides insight into the evolution of the customer portal, and then examines the key elements required for a successful portal. Finally, points on developing a business case for a customer portal are outlined to secure buy-in from key organizational stakeholders.

## HISTORY of the Service Provider Portal

The concept of a portal is not new. For years, service providers have used the Internet to promote their services, advocate their brand, and provide information to win new customers and market new services. Technology has driven significant advancements and levels of sophistication. **Figure 1** below illustrates the evolution of the web portal environment over the last 10 years. Today, we are at a stage where new services are being launched on new technology platforms and where multiple vendors are marketing directly to consumers.

### Evolution of the web portal over the last 10 years



## What is the **IMPACT** of a Consumer Portal?

A consumer portal can enrich the quality of experience for customers and, at the same time, can drive service uptake and usage of new applications – resulting in a better bottom line. Research has shown that personalized or ‘tailored’ applications will attract more customers and their usage will not only be higher, but those customers will also use them for a longer period of time. This form of loyalty planning and strategy is not new to service providers and marketing teams, however building the right platform has been difficult to position for many. Service providers have to prepare the business case to ensure that appropriate sponsorship and focus are applied to the project.

## The **APPROACH**: 3 Steps for a Successful Portal

A portal that offers a truly customer-centric experience can provide service providers with an edge in winning the battle for customer loyalty.

Below are three steps for creating a customer portal that will win buy-in from across the organization, develop deepened customer loyalty and yield a strong ROI.

### Step 1: Build a Destination, not a website

There are lots and lots of websites out there. However, not all sites are created equally. When setting out to build a portal, first ask yourself, what is the goal? Are you merely providing information? Or, do you want to provide a destination where subscribers will come and stay – using services, communicating, creating a personal space and developing a relationship that cannot easily migrate elsewhere?

By creating a destination for subscribers where they can communicate with you, and also manage many of their social functions, you will attract and keep valuable eyes on your portal, drive usage and loyalty, and build trust with your customers. They will come to the portal as part of their digital identity and build their community around the experience. Delivering personalized services will give subscribers a sense of belonging and great satisfaction – making your portal a place like no other. And, a successful portal will serve as an attractive destination for advertisers as well.

### Step 2: Know your users, not just their identity

When designing portal services, it’s important to take into consideration the entire subscriber life-cycle. New users have different needs from those who have been using existing services for a long time. Differentiating the experience for diverse users is critical for creating a sticky and successful portal.

ROLE	ACTION	BENEFIT
<b>New Users</b>	Welcomed and Directed	New users need to feel appreciated for visiting and wanting to join the community. Ensure the right communications are in place to make them feel welcome.
<b>Beginners</b>	Educated and Made Comfortable	Beginners who are new to the portal will be unfamiliar with the offering. They should be provided with simple instructions and easy to use learning mechanisms.
<b>Heavy Consumers</b>	Rewarded and Appreciated	Some end users will be heavy consumers of the service – this is the group you are striving to develop and retain. Offer premium services as an inducement and ensure they are aware that they are being rewarded.
<b>Innovators</b>	Empowered and Satisfied	Some customers will maximize the services available to them to define a truly unique place of their own. Encourage them to consume all the community essentials and open their world to visitors. Empower these consumers with capabilities that they can refine and call their own. Their long term satisfaction is important.

### Step 3: Encourage expansion of services

As a service provider, you are in a unique position when it comes to knowing your customers. Demographic information, service preferences and usage are readily available. This underlying trust allows you to offer targeted services and options that improve a subscriber's experience, usage, and loyalty.

If the community is to grow, you must develop the foundation to enable fast expansion into other sub-communities. Expanding into third-party services or enabling broader reach of a service is a key element in the growth and vitality of the community.

Your portal can be used to engage subscribers in learning about and trying new services through interactive promotions to targeted user segments. Think of it as a marketing sand box for your long term goals and loyalty plans. Because you are tied into many more facets than just their web experience, customers will be more open to offers. And because they know they will benefit somehow, either via free services, or new exclusive offers, they will be willing to participate.

## PREPARING your Business Case

You have an advantage when it comes to subscribers – you already have them! However, subscribers are not always in a position to accept their provider as being their personal gateway to their digital life. Community portals offering a rich set of basic services such as webmail, calendar, contacts, albums – which can be offerings from you, the service provider, and third-parties – enable consumers to have that ideal experience. If you allow customers to personalize their experience with enhanced widget capabilities and mobilize the usability of those services, you'll have the 'home' advantage.

Support and alliances across your organization will help guarantee a successful launch of the portal and will ensure appropriate resources are designated to the initiative. All areas of the organization need to be committed to delivering a superior user experience in order to drive your overall success.

Implementing a portal strategy for some may seem to be a daunting task – but by following best practices, the process can be streamlined. Through careful analysis and thoughtful engagement of key stakeholders, you can develop a fast-to-market strategy that will deliver benefits for many areas of your organization, including Customer Care, Service Delivery, and Finance.

### The Situation Snapshot

Using quantitative metrics and qualitative indicators to identify your current situation will help expose areas that can be improved. Examples include customer survey feedback, website traffic statistics and attrition rates, commonly raised customer care problems and subscriber requests for new services. You may find that there are common problems that the entire organization faces which could be addressed through your portal strategy. Paint the entire picture – pragmatically. Using the snapshot, illustrate the effect of developing a new portal versus maintaining the status quo.

### The Impact

Consider the impact on all areas of your organization. Deploying a successful portal can deliver benefits to various areas of an organization.

<p><b>Operations</b> will have the benefit of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A scalable infrastructure</li><li>• A converged and adaptive environment – enabling cross market growth</li><li>• Reduced overhead for budget alignment</li></ul>	<p><b>Customer Service/Support</b> will benefit from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reduced OPEX spending</li><li>• New innovative customer care channels</li></ul>	<p><b>Finance</b> will be able to generate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Greater income, profitability</li><li>• Improved efficiency</li><li>• Increased ARPU – demonstrated through differentiated premium services</li></ul>	<p><b>Product / R&amp;D</b> will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased insight into customer preferences</li><li>• Optimized use of products and services across the infrastructure</li></ul>	<p><b>Marketing</b> can make a greater impact and can accelerate strategies for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Building and launching sustainable new services</li><li>• Mitigating churn</li><li>• Reinforcing brand</li><li>• Deflecting price point pressures</li><li>• Enabling quicker time to market</li></ul>
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## **DELIVERING** the right experience can make the difference

Ultimately, a customer portal is more than just a website – it's a place for your subscribers to connect, share, communicate and organize their digital lives. For service providers, a successful portal will nurture a subscriber community in ways that drive loyalty and maintain subscriber mindshare – all while increasing revenue opportunities.

If each step in the design and implementation process is considered, then you will create a truly differentiated portal experience for your existing subscribers, and new users will be attracted to it. This is a long-term opportunity and strategy that can deliver what users are looking for – helping you deliver your promise in customer satisfaction.

Critical Path has a proven track-record in working closely with leading service providers worldwide to develop and deliver long term consumer experience strategies. If you would like to learn more about how Critical Path can assist you with your business case or develop a methodology to help you extend and expand your portal strategy, please contact us.

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