

BUILDING A WORLD-CLASS CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Managed Services Providers
Reveal Their Best Practices for
People, Processes and Automation

BUILDING A WORLD-CLASS CUSTOMER JOURNEY

From business planning to customer retention, discover key elements to build lasting relationships.

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Success Begins and Ends with the Customer Journey

Over the last decade, the managed services industry matured, and client expectations grew steadily, along with their knowledge and sophistication in regards to IT. As technology services become more commoditized, it won't be possible for Managed Services Providers (MSPs) to differentiate their businesses based solely on their technological prowess or automation tools.

Instead, MSPs will need to carefully define and enhance the customer experience they deliver to clients. In this era of digital transformation, business success depends on delivering a consistent, satisfying customer journey, beginning with sales and marketing, then progressing to onboarding, customer service and support, and ongoing account management.

COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION OF WISDOM

In the sharing economy, collaborative consumption increases the utilization of things such as rides, rooms and workspaces. Collaborative consumption of ideas increases the collective insight—and perceived value—of an industry. Everyone improves when we share best practices.

We asked 16 IT services executives and 6 executives from Liongard to share their own best practices for delighting clients all along the customer journey. In the pages that follow, we'll reveal the processes, tools, and people skills that experienced MSPs use to:

- **Find and win great clients**
- **Onboard new clients while managing expectations**
- **Deliver “wow moments” in service and support**
- **Implement the right strategies for client retention**



→ SALES

Set Up Your Sales Processes to Support Customer Experience



Your business can't grow without sales and recurring revenue. You won't close new deals if you don't deliver value through the customer experience. Analyze your core strengths, define your ideal customer, and understand your market—then design a winning sales approach.

DEFINE YOUR TARGET CUSTOMER

Executives agreed that knowing who you want to do business with (and who you don't) is a sign of a mature, confident MSP. Without a clear target, you will accept clients that don't align with your business model. These become your 'problem children'—always unhappy, often unprofitable. Consider these characteristics when defining your ideal customer:

- **Geography:** Will you stay local or offer remote support farther afield?
- **Company size:** How many employees? How much revenue?
- **IT budget:** Businesses without dedicated IT budget are a poor fit for most MSPs.
- **IT philosophy:** Basic or strategic?
- **Vertical niche:** Do you have knowledge/skills about compliance in particular industries?

WALK AWAY FROM A BAD FIT

Experienced MSPs warn it is impossible to scale if you don't stick with your target client and say no to bad business. Know the strengths of other MSPs and build a referral network with those that service different types of clients.

BUILD A RECURRING REVENUE ENGINE

Initially, most MSPs build their businesses on referrals from satisfied clients. To really scale, you need proactive sales and marketing. Determine what percentage of sales currently comes from referrals, and work towards incremental improvements in non-referral revenue.

KNOW YOUR ADDRESSABLE MARKET

How many companies fit your ideal client mold? What is your current market penetration? Calculate how much marketing spend it takes to sign a new client and the length of your sales cycle. With these metrics, you can create achievable goals for growth.



→ SALES

Optimize Your Sales Assessment and Discovery Processes



Before you generate a proposal for a prospective client, you need to understand their business and their growth goals. You also need to look at their IT environment and get a sense of ongoing issues they may not even know they have.

OFFER A SECURITY ASSESSMENT TO LEARN ABOUT THE IT ENVIRONMENT

In order to get a good “peek under the hood,” most MSPs offer a “security assessment” or “network assessment” during the sales process. There’s divided opinion over whether to charge for this service. Some MSPs offer assessments for free as an investment in demonstrating value and learning about the prospective client. Others charge a fee, believing this to be a good gauge of how serious prospects are about investing in their technology.

The initial security or network assessment is conducted by techs using standard processes and automated discovery tools. The experts we spoke with described Auvik, Liongard and a few others as their primary discovery and assessment tools during the sales process.

ANALYZE THE BUSINESS WITH YOUR SALES ASSESSMENT

While the network or security assessment analyzes technology, the sales assessment is used to learn about the prospective client’s operations, strategic business goals, technology vision, and current frustrations with IT. Most MSPs develop favorite qualifying questions that can elicit insights into client motivations—such as ‘do you have a technology budget?’ or ‘why are you looking for someone new?’

Talk to stakeholders, but go much deeper into the organization than just the decision-maker(s). Conduct personal interviews with employees from each business area, or in a smaller business, with every employee. You’ll be surprised how different the perception of technology may be at different levels or divisions of the company.

Liongard provides deep configuration data of cloud, network, and on-premise systems providing visibility across all customer environments. This visibility gives the team the ability to understand the new client, and set the expectations for your engagement.



→ SALES

Make the Sale—Then Continue the Journey

You've seen the tech environment and learned about the client company. In the next step of the customer journey, the relationship becomes real.

It's time to close the deal.

4 TIPS FOR CREATING A PROPOSAL THAT SELLS

1

Align what your business delivers with what the client needs.

Most IT clients have experienced reliability issues, out-of-control IT costs, or security issues with their IT providers. While others experienced promised technology strategies that would drive business growth but never realized reality.

2

Find the win-win. The deal has to work for the client and you. Lawrence Guyot, President of ETTE, Inc., noted, "every proposal must create a win-win for both the client and MSP. Clients must see a way to save money or make more money as a result of the relationship."

3

Present sales proposals in person. Don't email the documents ahead of time. Otherwise, price is likely to be the first thing you and the client discuss.

4

Make it a business conversation. Focus on the business more than the tech. Like, how will you build value into the organization and help them grow? Speak in the language of business objectives.



→ SALES

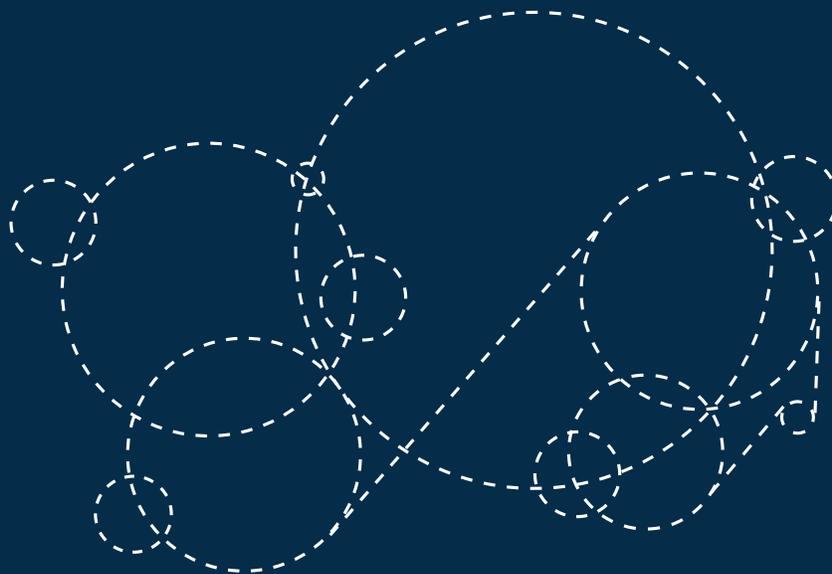
Ensure a Smooth Hand-off to Onboarding



You've earned a new client! Now don't drop the ball on a new relationship. Create a positive experience with a seamless hand-off of client information to the onboarding team. The salesperson should introduce the client to the rest of the team, including the account manager. Centralize sales assessment notes and make sure system/network discovery data collected during sales makes the transition to your documentation tool.

6 TIPS TO BUILD HIGH-PERFORMANCE SALES AND MARKETING

1. Align roles and goals with the customer journey.
2. Build a bottom-up team by encouraging questions and suggestions.
3. Hire salespeople who are competitive, yet collaborative.
4. Incentivize sales and marketing to work together with unified compensation goals.
5. Establish regular communications between the sales team and sales manager.
6. Create feedback loops between sales and marketing.



→ ONBOARDING

Manage Customer Expectations from Day One



As the managed services space becomes more crowded, you have to spend your time delighting the customer, not doing manual work. Today, automation can cover many of the routine onboarding tasks of system discovery and configuration documentation. This leaves your team with time to craft a good technology plan and deliver measurable value early.

START WITH A GOOD TRANSITION PLAN

Today, most managed services clients will have already been working with another MSP. Planning for onboarding can be complicated before the client gives notice to the former MSP. Develop a good game plan and try to establish a good rapport with the other MSP. Whenever possible, Allan Jocson, CEO of Agilitec IT, asks clients to pay both MSP firms simultaneously for a one-month overlap of service. This provides a financial incentive for the former MSP to work together for a smooth onboard transition.

“Always, always communication is the pitfall in onboarding. We can automate a lot, but not the human aspect of communication.”

Chris Long, CEO, Computer Troubleshooters



→ ONBOARDING

Set Appropriate Expectations for Clients



When you flip the switch and begin providing service to a new client, you will probably not have finished your onboarding process. Clients need to understand your process, so force your team to over-communicate:

- **Set the expectation** that the first 30 days will have a different feel and experience than after onboarding is complete.
- **Create a packet** that explains the process and introduces customers to their onboarding, service and account management teams, so they know how to reach out with questions.
- **Keep communicating about status** and checking on the client. Tools and technology rarely cause onboarding problems—they occur from misunderstanding or lack of communication.

By leveraging Liongard in your pre-sales discovery process, you already have much of your new client's information. In fact, Liongard partners are reporting onboarding times of less than 60 minutes on average.



→ ONBOARDING

Make An Up Front Investment in Customer Satisfaction



Most of our experts agreed that the onboarding process sets the tone for the rest of the customer relationship. If it goes poorly and many mistakes are made, this will forever be the first impression of the client. A positive onboarding experience establishes client confidence.

FRONT-LOAD LABOR EXPENSE AS AN INVESTMENT IN CLIENT SATISFACTION

You want onboarding to be as efficient as possible, but experienced MSPs not to rush it. Time spent now on documentation and optimizing configurations will pay downstream dividends in better service resolution times and looking more prepared in front of the client. If procedures are followed and thorough documentation is captured, every ticket worked in the future will be resolved a bit easier—every interaction more satisfying to the client.

Managed services experts aren't afraid to make a significant investment in this part of the customer journey. Aaron Huff, Operations Manager for ERGOS Technology Partners, allocates double or triple the onsite hours for his techs during onboarding. Jerel Howland, CTO of Mytech Partners, sends a tech onsite full-time for 30 days with each new client.



→ ONBOARDING

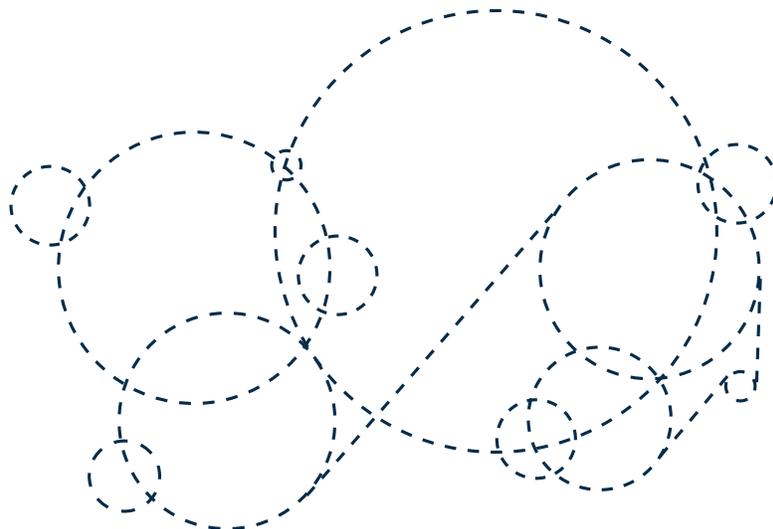
Avoid Tribal Knowledge



Even if you enjoy very low technician turnover, don't let mission-critical client information get trapped in engineers' heads, warns Charles Love. Tribal knowledge creates dependency on senior techs, frustrating other team members, and potential clients. It's also a good way to burn out your best techs. Instead, Showtech Solutions captures documentation methodically. Their most senior tech recently took a four-week vacation, and they only called him twice!

TRAILBLAZERS: DRIVE FOR THE "WOW FACTOR" IN THE FIRST 90 DAYS

Have you ever delivered such an expectation-beating customer experience that your client actually said "wow" out loud to you? At Computer Troubleshooters, it's a regular occurrence. In fact, they designed their onboarding experience to blow clients' minds. CEO Chris Long wants and expects to achieve the "wow factor" with every new client within the first 90 days of the relationship. It's a KPI the firm measures.



→ ONBOARDING

Onboarding Never Ends, So Discovery Should Be Continuous



Client environments change. New solutions are implemented, and others are eliminated. Businesses hire new employees and lose others. Onboarding never truly ends. MSPs need to recognize that onboarding is a fluid process that continues even after a new client has been passed off to the support team. Continuous, automated discovery can catch changes in client environments and update the documentation to reflect them.

Without continuous automated discovery, documentation accuracy degrades quickly. Many MSPs go so far as to schedule a quarterly or annual “re-onboard” for each client, where they perform onboarding routines again to bring documentation back up to date.

“Think about all the things you need to document when you’re bringing on a new client. All of the information you need to gather and manually enter, and then the next day that information is out of date. Liongard can do it all for me and then auto update, and I don’t have to worry about having stale information in my documentation tool. It’s invaluable. My boss says I saved us thousands of hours with Liongard, and he’s probably right.”

Will Young, NOC Manager, CCS Technology Group



→ CUSTOMER SERVICE & SUPPORT

Well-Defined Processes Create Consistent Support

Support is the heartbeat of your customer journey. Deliver it well and the clients remain happy. Too many mistakes and their irritation can erode the relationship. The keys to consistent support are process, communication and automation.

STANDARDIZE CLIENT ARCHITECTURE

MSPs know more about technology than their clients—that’s why they are hired. So it makes sense for MSPs to define the best-in-class IT infrastructure, and then move their clients incrementally toward that. Jerel Howland refers to this as the “reference architecture” and Charles Love calls it “cookie-cutting the tech stack.” Whatever you call it, architecture standardization helps MSPs increase support resolution efficiency and keep their team well trained. Don’t be afraid to turn away clients who refuse.

CREATE A GOOD PROCESS FOR RUNNING IT PROJECTS

1

Capture a good scope of work.

2

Map that work to project tickets in your PSA.

3

Assign tickets to your calendar.

4

Communicate the plan to the client.

5

Provide regular status updates.

6

Have a body in the building whenever major changes roll out.



→ CUSTOMER SERVICE & SUPPORT

Beware of Tool Sprawl

MSPs are huge fans of automation, with good reason. Rob Bracey, CEO of Quartet Service, Inc., advises that less can be more. Too many tools can create “tool sprawl,” where tools are not adopted well, not used to their fullest potential or are applied inconsistently to processes. His advice: Use fewer tools, and choose those that empower self-discovery and self-learning.

TRAILBLAZERS: MASTERS OF PROCESS

“I’m trying to franchise my company, so to speak. The MSPs who separate themselves follow repeatable processes. If I’m going to onboard a customer, I do it this way. If I’m going to set up a job, I do it this way. If I’m going to back up a customer, I do it this way. If you **have every process written and everything documented**, when there’s an issue, only one person has to deal with it. We don’t have to have a team huddle going.”

Charles Love, Director of Professional Services, Showtech Solutions

“We have a Director of Process Improvement on staff. His primary position is to document and create workflows for every process we do, both internal and client-facing. Procedures are all documented with huge flow maps and supporting materials attached, so that we can do things in a very consistent manner over and over and over again. The big benefit is if something goes wrong, we find out exactly where it broke and why, and then solve it so it doesn’t happen again. There’s a common business rule—the 80/20 rule—that if you standardize and do things the same way 80% of the time, you can expect 20% exceptions. We shoot for at least a 90/10 rule. We only want a 10% exception rate.”

Jerel Howland, CTO, Mytech Partners



→ CUSTOMER SERVICE & SUPPORT

Service and Support Is Mostly About Communication



Executives identified client communication as the most important factor in delivering top-notch service and support. In fact, they recommend hiring engineers mostly for their people skills. While you can train for technical skills, it is impossible to change someone's personality.

HOW TO HIRE AND TRAIN THE BEST TECHS FOR YOUR CLIENTS

- **Focus on communication:** Hire for people skills, including a 'can do' attitude, a friendly demeanor and a natural communication style.
- **Avoid lone wolves:** Find people who work well in a team and will follow processes.
- **Use shadowing:** And checking on the client. Tools and technology rarely cause onboarding problems—they occur from misunderstanding or lack of communication.
- **Train listening skills:** Coach techs on listening to clients for specific details including what they don't say.
- **Establish the path to promotion:** Mytech Partners developed an internal learning management system that lays out clear paths for technicians to level up. Micro-incentives between levels keep them motivated.

"Anyone can support the environment. It's always about the communication. Your best, most technically skilled technician is useless if the client doesn't like him."

Kevin Blake, CEO, ICS



→ CUSTOMER SERVICE & SUPPORT

Create a Culture of Accountability

Mistakes happen, and Aaron Huff said clients understand that but they do expect MSPs to practice accountability. His team follows a five-step “accountability path”:



By implementing Liongard, the engineers at TeamlogicIT Memphis gained unified visibility into their client's environment. The consolidation of data into a single portal eliminated the need for shoulder taps or escalations, **improving the average time to resolution by 62.5%**.



→ CUSTOMER SERVICE & SUPPORT

Trailblazers: Going the Extra Mile for Communication



ICS New York and ERGOS Technology Partners both differentiate their customer journeys through exceptional client communication during service and support. They've chosen different communication methods to build strong client relationships.

At ICS, Kevin Blake uses four personality types (lion, camel, monkey, turtle) identified in the book *Make a Difference*, by Dr. Larry Little, to determine the preferred communication style of every member of his team. The company trains employees on how to best communicate and collaborate with each personality type. Every employee keeps a stuffed animal representing their personality type on their desk as a visual reminder to teammates.

To enhance client communications, ICS has also identified client personality types. Each user profile in their system includes an animal identifier. Staff trains for how to nuance their approach to supporting resolutions based on personality type, making clients feel more at ease.

Often users keep quiet about small issues, but sometimes these issues detract most from their day-to-day satisfaction with IT. So the ERGOS approach builds personal relationships with the employees at each client business. They include a dedicated engineer on the account management team for each client and encourage contact by sending that engineer for regular onsite visits.

“We schedule somebody to visit once a month and spend half a day onsite. Clients tend to like that as a service differentiator. It does increase costs, but in the long run, we're much more likely to retain clients because they have that touchpoint with us. They have that person they can trust, and they can call and lean on for stuff. It's not just the help desk. For most of our clients, this is who they interact with the most.”

Aaron Huff, Operations Manager, ERGOS Technology Partners



→ CUSTOMER SERVICE & SUPPORT

Measure Performance and Strive for Continuous Improvement

You've worked hard to create the right customer experience. How can you ensure the customer journey you built delivers enough value to retain clients? Our experts all agreed that MSPs need to measure key performance indicators and strive for continuous improvement in service and support. Here are some of their favorite KPIs for analyzing service team performance:

FIRST CALL RESOLUTION / FIRST TOUCH CLOSE

- **Measures:** Speed of results
- **Goal:** "Between 50% and 75%, you're in a good place. Below 50%, you're hurting, because of all the follow-ups. If you get close to 80% or 90%, you're just a rock star!" – George Bardissi

MINUTES OF SUPPORT PER USER, PER MONTH

- **Measures:** Amount of client productivity sacrificed to IT issues
- **Goal:** Most companies average about 1 hour/user/month. If an MSP can decrease that to 30 minutes, the client experienced significant productivity gains across the workforce. The goal at Mytech Partners is just 15 minutes/user/month.

TIME TO FIRST CONTACT

- **Measures:** Responsiveness
- **Goal:** "We measured time to first response as our first KPI, because we want to get that as close to zero as possible. That's really what clients want, so that's what we focus on." – Allan Jocson

TICKET AGE / TICKETS CLOSED / TOUCHES TO RESOLUTION

- **Measures:** Productivity of your support team
- **Goal:** With higher productivity, your team can support more clients. This is the path to prosperity and more satisfied customers. Continually improve these KPIs through good process.

MINUTES OF SUPPORT PER USER, PER MONTH

- **Measures:** Likelihood of client retention
- **Goal:** "We do c-sats on every ticket, and we get a 60%-plus response rate. We shoot for at least 97% green. We take action on every neutral or negative state." – Jerel Howland



→ ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

Build Relationships with Dedicated Account Management



Clients want a trusted advisor who understands their business and can help them navigate a long-term, strategic vision. Your client retention strategy should support these partnerships.

HAVE A DEDICATED ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT TEAM

Most MSPs start with very few employees wearing many, many hats. At this stage, the founder/owner serves as an account manager for every client relationship. As your business grows, providing a dedicated account manager can pay big dividends in customer satisfaction and retention. Introduce the account manager to the client before onboarding, and then establish a regular cadence of client communications. Many MSPs also include a tech on the account management team.

“Too often people look at their agreements as a whole and say, ‘They balance out. My average profitability is where I want it to be.’ **We would say you’re missing the point.** You have some number of agreements on one side that are killing you. You have to fix these. And on the other side, you have off-setting clients so profitable they sort of mask the problem. You should be in touch with those clients as well because they might say, ‘I get this big invoice and what am I paying for?’ People don’t buy fire insurance because they want their house to burn down, but they do want to know they’re getting value.”

Larry Cobrin, CEO, MSPCFO



→ ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

Analyze Profitability at the Customer Level



Many MSPs calculate the average profitability across their client portfolio, but Larry Cobrin thinks that's a wrong approach. Instead, analyze the profitability of each client and optimize individual relationships. Review tickets before raising prices—could you resolve problems with your least-profitable clients by providing training or replacing hardware?

TRAILBLAZERS: EARN TRUST WITH RADICAL TRANSPARENCY

- **Clients can easily see** Noverus Innovations' pricing because Stephen Monk puts his pricing calculator online. Services are truly all-inclusive—and totally transparent.
- **Lawrence Guyot tells clients** if they could purchase hardware or software cheaper somewhere else. It inspires trust, which usually generates the order anyway.

“We encourage clients to utilize us more for procurement, for education, **for support on anything related to tech**. If it's something we can't help you with, we'll redirect you. But use us as a primary resource. Clients really appreciate that.”

Lawrence Guyot, President, ETTE



→ ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

Guide and Educate Clients About Technology Strategy

Our MSP experts expressed very different views on the Quarterly Business Review (QBR) process, but all agreed MSPs must find ways to demonstrate their strategic value to clients.

TO QBR OR NOT TO QBR...

Frankly, not all clients want to meet every quarter. Some MSPs don't perform QBRs anymore, and with clients so busy, that trend may accelerate. ETTE clients prefer personal "check-in" emails over meetings. Computer Troubleshooters delivers a visual interface using Audit IT that displays green/yellow/red metrics, following up on anything yellow or red. Using data streams from automation tools, some companies reported delivering real-time support performance dashboards to clients, and they rarely QBRs.

PRESENT A STRATEGIC TECHNOLOGY ROADMAP

Remember the MSP Paradox: If you do everything right, you may become invisible. Conduct a face-to-face meeting with client executives and stakeholders, during which your account manager or vCIO presents a three- or five-year Strategic Technology Roadmap. Some MSPs bring in subject matter experts to explain service areas such as telephony or cloud migration. The STR provides a transparent forward view of the hardware refresh cycle, so clients can see expenses coming and budget ahead.

HELP CLIENTS PRIORITIZE IT PROJECTS

Keep suggesting incremental improvements that move clients toward your reference architecture and advance their business goals. Don't do too much too fast, or your client may become overwhelmed by proposed costs and business disruption. Ian Richardson of Doberman Technologies helps clients prioritize IT projects in four progressive stages, each building to the next:



Rob Bracey of Quartet Services simplifies technology projects into three categories:

- **Must Do:** Critical issues, such as security. These are not optional.
- **Should Do:** Technology with solid use cases for the current business.
- **Could Do:** Technology with solid use cases for the current business.



→ ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

Go the Extra Distance for Your Clients



You've created a solid, consistent customer journey by focusing on client communications, building high-performance teams, implementing standardized processes and choosing great automation tools. Now go the extra mile to create customers for life.

6 IDEAS FOR CREATING STICKIER CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS:

1. **Remember client birthdays with a card or gift.** Celebrate their significant business milestones, too.
2. **Take something with you** to client meetings, such as food or other treats.
3. **Find ways to educate.** Leon Lordeus created a series of how-to videos to help clients become more self-sufficient with IT applications, reducing client frustration and incoming support tickets. George Bardissi suggests designing a website or newsletter content for specific client user roles and delivering educational webinars.
4. **Care about client causes.** Kevin Blake makes it a point to discover the charitable causes his client's support. Whenever possible, ICS will also support those causes, either with contributions or through participation in charity events like golf tournaments.
5. **Don't nickel and dime them.** Clients work with you to make their lives easier. So Stephen Monk makes a point of fixing small issues without asking for more money. He will even purchase small hardware items like a hard drive and install them at no charge.
6. **Perform random acts of appreciation.** Call a client and take them to lunch or dinner when it isn't time for contract renewal. Or send a gift, just to say thank you.

TRAILBLAZERS: GIVING CLIENTS FLEXIBILITY

- **Doberman Technologies helps clients** find financing options to work around cost barriers—especially if there are costly upfront hardware needs.
- **Noverus Innovations fluctuate** client billing to accommodate seasonal employees.
- **After an initial period**, George Bardissi suggests MSPs consider continuing client relationships without long-term renewals that make clients feel trapped.



→ CONCLUSION

The Road to Enhancing Your Customer Journey Starts Here



One of the managed services industry's strengths is its willingness to share ideas and collaborate in order to elevate the value delivered by the industry as a whole. The information provided by our IT industry contributors is invaluable—and we hope you have found some new ideas that you can incorporate to improve your customer journey.

It's ironic that in a business devoted exclusively to technology, success really hinges on people. In a rapidly commoditizing industry, MSPs will need to pay greater attention to the client experience. For MSPs willing to walk the extra miles to deliver an exceptional client experience—the road starts here. Support your customer journey by having standardized processes, account management strategies, good client communications and automation tools.

Liongard is committed to advancing IT industry knowledge and to helping MSPs automate essential processes such as continuous discovery and detection, automated documentation updates and critical change alerts. With more process automation, MSPs are free to focus on designing and delivering exceptional customer journeys, that reduce IT pain.



→ CONTRIBUTORS

THANK YOU!

When MSPs and other IT business leaders put their heads together, it creates special opportunities for learning. The team at Liongard deeply appreciates the following IT business leaders who donated their time and business acumen to help us build this resource.

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→ RESOURCES

Additional Resources to Enhance Your Customer Journey

Ready for more inspiration? Here are some highly-recommended books, courses and methodologies that MSPs are using to improve business processes and service delivery:

- Gary Pica, *TruMethods*
 - Alex Rogers, *CharTec Academy*
 - Gino Wickman, *Traction, Entrepreneur Operating System*
 - Dr. Larry Little, *Make a Difference: In the Lives of Those You Love, Live With, and Lead*
 - Customer Service
 - ConnectWise Content
 - Auvik Content
 - CompTia Customer Journey
-

