



# TOUCHLESS SERVICE

## A New Paradigm for Managing the New Normal

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# “In the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity”

Albert Einstein

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, few companies were prepared for the impact. Only 12% of 1,500 respondents surveyed by Gartner in March 2020 believed their business was highly prepared for the new realities of COVID-19. During the height of the pandemic, shelter in place orders, travel bans, and facility-wide lockdowns made the provision of field service extremely difficult. According to a study published by TSIA in April 2020, nearly three quarters (78%) of Field Service Organizations (FSOs) had either eliminated or restricted onsite field service dispatches in response to Covid-19 restrictions. Almost half (47%) of the companies surveyed renegotiated their Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with customers.

One of the ways that FSOs have been able to overcome the challenges of Covid-19 is through the provision of Remote Support, also known as Touchless Service. This represents a viable way for FSOs to renegotiate SLAs and to effectively resolve customers' service issues where restrictions exist. Although remote support has been around for some time, it was not always the preferred solution. Covid-19 has made the provision of remote support a necessity.

## Remote Support Pre-COVID-19

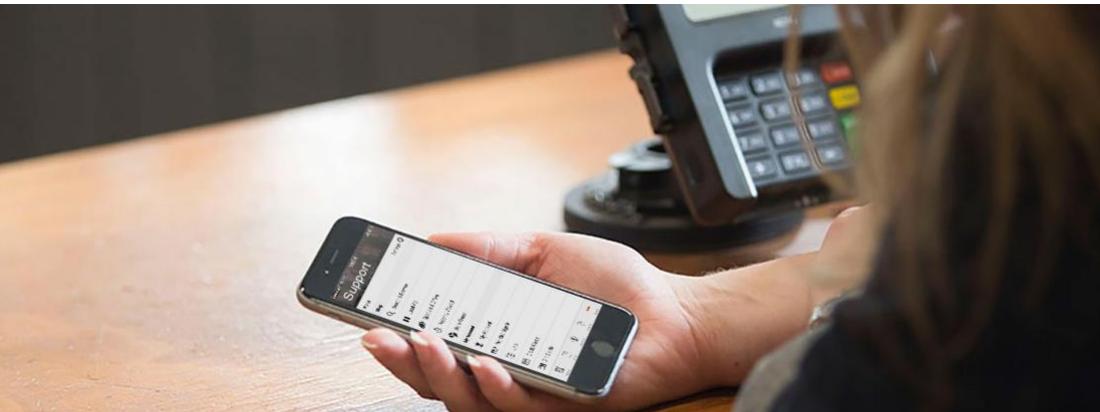
Field Service as we know it has changed for good. Gone are the days when a service incident was evaluated based on how long it took a Field Service Engineer to arrive on-site and fix the problem. Increasingly, onsite service has been replaced by remote support. This trend began long before the onset of COVID-19.

Several factors have been attributed to the proliferation of remote support offerings by service providers. First, growing demand among end-customers for faster resolution times combined with their willingness to engage in self-service activities. Second, the proliferation of tools and technologies that make remote support possible. For example, call center software, IoT, remote monitoring & diagnostics, and Augmented Reality (AR). Third, a growing shortage of skilled field service engineers (FSEs) making remote support a must-have option.

Touchless Service enables Field Service Organizations to overcome the challenges of providing onsite service

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the trend toward Remote Support.

Before IoT and AR, remote support was a time-consuming activity. It typically involved a telephone conversation between the customer and the service provider. Without the ability to physically observe or inspect the problem, remote support calls often resulted in the dispatch of a Field Service Engineer to resolve the issue onsite.



### Initiative to Improve Customer Experiences

In recent years, there has been a concerted effort by companies within all industries to improve the Customer Experience (CX) through Digital Transformation (DX). These efforts have centered on using technology to eliminate or reduce time-consuming tasks, also known as friction, involved in customer-facing processes. Friction is defined as any process or activity where there are many touchpoints.

The more touches, the more time involved and the more friction.

Field Service, in general, and remote support, specifically, have proven to be fertile grounds for reaping the rewards of DX initiatives. Indeed, there are numerous touchpoints within the service supply chain. Unfortunately, each touchpoint adds to time and costs to the service resolution process which negatively impacts both service providers and end-customers alike.

DX initiatives supported by enabling technologies like AR, IoT, and AI have led to a new standard of service. Service tasks that took hours to perform can now be performed in less time with less human intervention. As a result, customer expectations have changed. Not only do they demand a rapid, always on, always available service experience but they are willing to be more engaged in the service process than ever before.

These developments all helped set the stage for dealing with the current pandemic.

Customers' expectations have changed.

They now require a rapid, collaborative, always on and always available service experience.

## New Challenges to Field Service Delivery

The new realities of Covid-19 have placed a greater demand on the need for remote or touchless service. We are all too familiar with the need for social distancing and face masks to prevent the spread of the virus. Of course, quarantine is required for those who contract the virus. Some cohorts, for example, the elderly and those with comorbidity issues, self-quarantine as a matter of course.

These issues create new demands for FSOs. On one hand, end-customers still expect high quality, fast, and reliable service. On the other hand, Covid-19 places constraints on when and how service is delivered. Service resolution becomes a challenge if the customer does not permit FSEs on their premise due to lockdown or self-quarantine, or if FSE availability is limited.



During the initial days of the pandemic, when the country was in lockdown, many FSOs stopped dispatching technicians entirely, Yet, their customers still required support. New workflows and processes were needed to support the emerging requirements for touchless service. In parallel, customers were asked to adjust their expectations and take a more participative and collaborative role in the service experience.

Delivering touchless service is straightforward and easy to implement in some industries. For example, touchless delivery essentially involves leaving the package at the front door and notifying the customer that the package has been delivered. However, touchless service is more complex when it comes to equipment maintenance and repair.

Despite the need for touchless service during this pandemic, field service is a contact sport. Human intervention is still required. Sure, there are situations where a technical expert can help the customer resolve a service issue over the telephone. However, often, the customer requires more guidance, or lacks familiarity with the equipment, or is unable to describe the situation to the expert. Ultimately, some form of visual interaction is required. The expert and the customer may need to see what the other person is talking about to resolve the problem.

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## Touchless Service Becomes a New Reality

To overcome the challenge of providing human intervention in a touchless service world, FSOs have found that they can provide Virtual Expertise, enabled through video-based technology, to close the optical gap. Fortunately, this technology hit the scene several years before the outbreak of the pandemic. As such, adding Virtual Expertise to the remote support experience is nothing new or revolutionary for FSOs.

Virtual Expertise provides a deeper and richer contextual experience for remote support. With Virtual Expertise, a customer can use his Smart Phone or Tablet to stream an image of their machine/problem to a remote support specialist or technician.



*Using existing mobile devices or a web browser, Help Lightning's Virtual Expertise solution allows experts to visually interact with colleagues and customers.*

Using this same technology, the technician can isolate the fault, diagnose the problem, and determine the corrective action. If it is a relatively simple issue, the technician can send images, text, and annotated repair instructions back to the customer so that the customer can resolve the issue himself.

If a spare part is required, the technician can ship a part to the customer and issue an RMA. The Shipment of the replacement part and the return of the defective part can also be handled through touchless delivery.

All these activities happen on-demand, and in real-time through nothing more than Wi-Fi or mobile cellular connectivity. The technician and customer can continue to communicate on their smart devices through voice or chat. It is as though the remote support specialist is present, standing next to the customer and advising them on how to resolve the problem.

Virtual Expertise provides a deeper and richer contextual experience to remote support then previously possible.

## Overcoming Resistance to Touchless Service

Before COVID-19, Virtual Expertise was a relatively novel concept. Although there was a lot of interest and buzz around the promise of this technology, the adoption rate was relatively low within the Field Service Industry. The resistance was the result of several factors.

First, many FSOs took a wait and see approach to rolling out Virtual Expertise technology since it was such a new technology. Second, and more importantly, Virtual Expertise was perceived as a tool to be used among Field Service Engineers (FSEs), primarily for exception management. In other words, utilized when an FSE experienced issues they've never seen before and required support from a remote expert. Third, many FSOs were not ready to utilize Virtual Expertise in remote support transactions directly with the end-customers.

## Establishing a New Service Standard

As we all know, COVID-19 severely disrupted normal business operations. Shelter in place orders, facility lockdowns, self-distancing/quarantine restrictions have required FSOs to rethink their service delivery models. Through AR technology, FSOs have been able to pivot from onsite service delivery to a remote support model that includes virtual telepresence.

No longer perceived as a tool to be used to manage service events by exception, Virtual Expertise is now becoming a necessity for FSOs. The data supports this claim. According to Marc Guthrie, COO of Help Lightning, usage of Virtual Expertise technology has increased nearly five-fold (450%) since March 2020. Also, the company has experienced a 40% increase in customers over the same timeframe.

The results of using Virtual Expertise in support of Touchless Service delivery speak for themselves. Early adopters of Help Lightning's solution found they could reduce truck rolls by an average of 15% and improve first-time fix rate and total resolution times by 20% and 30% respectively.

Experiences with using Virtual Expertise to overcome Covid-19 challenges have demonstrated that performance improvements can be significantly higher. Truck rolls can be replaced by remote support sessions. Less or no travel time means customers can experience less downtime. The first-time fix can increase because the FSE can quickly add other experts to the AR-enabled support session.

No longer perceived as a tool used to manage service events by exception. Virtual Expertise has become a necessity.

## Success Stories

### Faster customer support without physical contact

Virtual Expertise has enabled Cable TV provider, Cox Communications, to support an increase in new installations that occurred during the pandemic. Due to travel restrictions, Cox had limited ability to deploy its field technicians. The company needed a solution that provided “virtual on-site support” without entering the customer’s home.

Using Virtual Expertise technology, Cox technicians can troubleshoot customers' issues remotely and send a text to a customer’s smartphone to connect to a virtual support session. Customers are advised to follow the technician’s remote guidance and instruction to troubleshoot and install equipment without being physically present in the customer’s home. As a result, Cox was able to provide faster and better service to customers.



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### Short-term fix provides long-term value

Munters, a leading provider of energy-efficient and sustainable climate solutions for mission-critical processes faced a real dilemma when the Covid-19 pandemic hit. At issue, Munters equipment is installed within essential industries such as pharmaceutical, healthcare, agriculture, and data centers. Quite often Munters’ technicians travel to the customer site, also by airplane. Delivering maintenance and rapid service on mission-critical equipment was nearly impossible since technicians were affected by governmental lockdown regulations would need to self-quarantine for 2 weeks.

Fortunately, Munters had planned to deploy a Merged Reality support solution from IFS and Help Lightning at the start of the outbreak of Covid-19. The pandemic simply accelerated this decision. Up until Covid-19 Munters provided remote telephone support to its field engineers but did not really provide remote telephone support to its customers. Installations, maintenance, and emergency service mainly require an onsite visit. Telephone support had its limitations because of limited interaction possibilities.

## Success Stories, *continued*

Rebranded as Munters Remote Assist, the IFS-Help Lightning solution gives Munters' technicians the ability to collaborate remotely with customers and diagnose issues, suggest corrective fixes and adjustments, identify spare parts, initiate parts delivery, and resolve alarms.

Virtual Expertise through Merged Reality is more than just a panacea to an acute problem, Munters is now using its Remote Assist solution as part of their offering to customers, onboard and train newly hired technicians, perform remote Factory Acceptance Testing, and conduct pre-sales site assessments remotely. The net impact is the Virtual Expertise is helping Munters improve customer experience, increase productivity, reduce costs, and generate a new source of revenue.

### Improve Equipment Update and Customer Service

Leading medical technology company BD (Becton, Dickenson, and Company) is waging a war on COVID-19 through its products that support rapid antigen testing for SARS-CoV2. These products need to be operational all the time. Equipment downtime, failures, and performance issues cannot be tolerated.



BD uses Help Lightning to maintain their laboratory products that support rapid antigen testing for SARS-CoV2.

Before implementing Virtual Expertise, BD call center specialists were burdened with support calls from customers. A great deal of guesswork was involved in attempting to help clients fix the problems. Virtual Expertise technology enabled BD's engineers and support teams to visualize work environments in real-time and provide accurate directions while working directly with engineers and customers. Engineers and support teams can now make more accurate diagnoses and part determinations, then immediately transmit solutions to the worksite.

By utilizing Help Lightning's Virtual Expertise solution, BD was able to achieve several measurable results. First, they were able to improve the dispatch avoidance rate. Second, they were able to make the support process easier for customers by reducing the number of steps involved. Third, engineers were able to eliminate the guesswork involved in identifying spare parts. Fourth, and most importantly, BD was able to track the service resolution progress more regularly and avoid costly rework.

## The Future of Service is Touchless

The world as we know it, pre-COVID-19, has changed. It is highly likely that the business practices that were implemented out of necessity to deal with Covid-19 will continue to remain in effect well after a vaccine is found. This is because businesses appreciate the value these new practices have on their bottom line.

Virtual meetings, work from home, curbside pickup, and touchless delivery is now considered the new normal. These practices will likely remain in place for years to come.

Virtual Expertise is destined to have a similar impact on Field Service. “Field Service Leaders were hesitant about using Virtual Expertise at first. Now they are seeing significant results”, notes Help Lightning’s Marc Guthrie, “the message is that this isn’t going to change anytime soon. FSOs will not return to their old way of doing things”.



“Field Service Leaders were hesitant about using Virtual Expertise, now they are seeing significant results” – Marc Guthrie, COO, Help Lightning

Fortunately, there is truly little upfront preparation involved in rolling out a Virtual Expertise solution. These applications are relatively easy to implement. For example, Cox Communications rolled-out its solution to over 5000 technicians within 2 weeks.

A successful implementation is a function of having the following in place:

1. Executive buy-in
2. A program leader or Champion
3. A compelling message to the workforce about why and how to use the application. They have to know what’s in it for them.
4. Basic training and coaching

There is not a whole lot of technical set-up or integration involved. It is simply a matter of incorporating the tool into the existing service delivery process.

## About the Author

Michael Blumberg is President of Blumberg Advisory Group, Inc., a research, and consulting firm to the Field Service Industry. Michael's firm provides clients with strategic guidance and tactical assistance for improving the overall profitability and quality of field service operations. Mr. Blumberg is a prolific author and frequent speaker at industry events and conferences. He may be reached via email at [michaelblumberg@blumbergadvisor.com](mailto:michaelblumberg@blumbergadvisor.com).



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## About Help Lightning

Service organizations and call centers across a variety of industries rely on Help Lightning's virtual expertise software to improve first-time fix rates, extend their workforce capacity and improve customer satisfaction.

Using Help Lightning on an existing mobile device or web-browser, experts can visually collaborate with a colleague or customer as though they were working side-by-side. With Help Lightning, service experts can show a resolution, not just describe it, even from a thousand miles away.

Learn more at [HelpLightning.com](http://HelpLightning.com)

