
Delivering Superior Technical Support

JBoss Inc. Customer Support Study
November 2004



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WEB: www.velocitipartners.com
EMAIL: info@velocitipartners.com

Introduction

Software application and infrastructure vendors too often use the catch phrase “lowest Total Cost of Ownership (TCO)” to differentiate their products. The liberal use of the phrase has desensitized most technology buyers to vendors’ claims, but savvy evaluators understand that choosing a product goes far beyond looking at the features and the upfront costs.

TCO consists of all costs, direct and indirect, incurred throughout the life cycle of an asset, including acquisition, deployment, operation, and support. With promises of lowest TCO, the proliferation of open source software products has been driven by the huge up-front savings, but some of that savings has historically been given back because of the lack of support and services complementing the product.

JBoss Inc. is one vendor that understands the importance of expert technical support services in decreasing the cost of ownership of no-cost open source products. To ensure that their technical support services meet this objective, JBoss Inc. sponsored this study of their support customers and their perceptions.

Methodology

A random sample of JBoss customers having used JBoss Technical Support Services since September 2003 were contacted via email and telephone and asked to complete a survey about their experience with the JBoss support group and one other J2EE application server vendor they are most familiar with. Results found that a large majority of respondents had prior or current experience with support groups from other middleware vendors and were able to rate their experience. 184 JBoss support users, a subset of the organization’s customer base, participated in the study (95 via phone interview and 89 via email or web-based survey).

Participants were given a series of statements and asked to rank each by how much they agreed or disagreed based on the following scale:

- 7. = Completely Agree
- 6. = Mostly Agree
- 5. = Somewhat Agree
- 4. = No Opinion
- 3. = Somewhat Disagree
- 2. = Mostly Disagree
- 1. = Completely Disagree

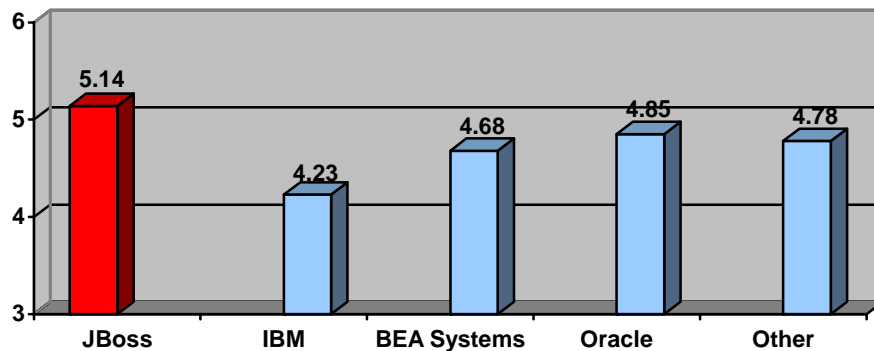
The following section discusses the aggregate rankings for each statement.

Survey Results

Understanding Needs

Understanding the individual needs of each client allows organizations to truly differentiate themselves and move toward a customer-centric strategy. In technically supporting a customer, this is even more important. Understanding information such as system variables, IT environment, contact roles, and project goals allow support teams to more quickly address the problem at hand. In addition, the customer's experience is heightened and a deeper vendor / client relationship is achieved.

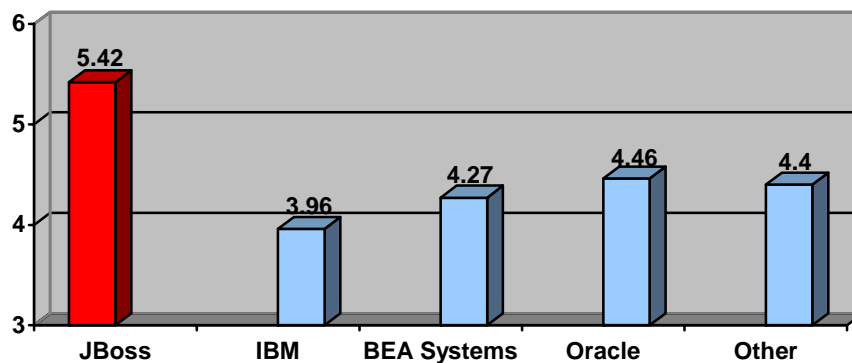
1. *The Vendor understands the needs of my business.*



Meeting SLAs

The fundamental bar by which a vendor's support services can be measured is their ability to meet or exceed service level agreements (SLA). It is now widely accepted that service provision and receipt should be governed by an agreement, and vendors are increasingly willing to commit to a formal agreement to differentiate their support.

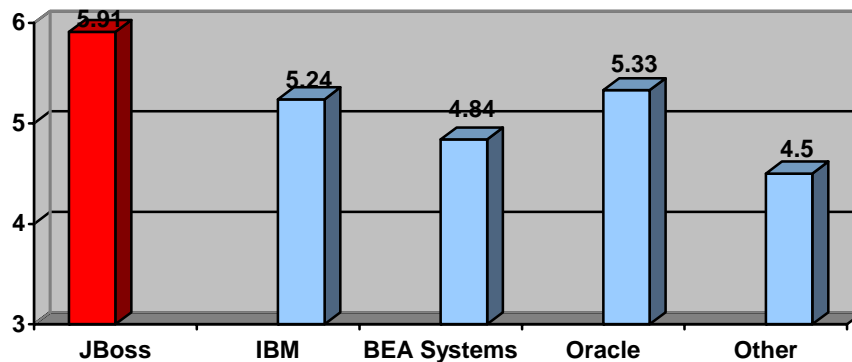
2. *The Vendor consistently meets or exceeds my service level agreements.*



Professional Service

Technical support and service has become a commodity for many organizations and attention to delivering service in a professional and courteous manner is fading. The way in which a client is supported can even have a greater impact than how and when the problem was solved. Superior service organizations must continually reinforce the need to deliver their service in a professional approach because a single bad interaction can spoil the entire customer relationship.

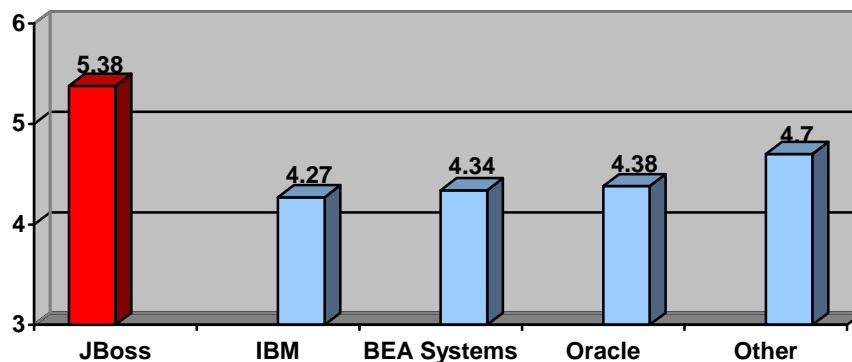
3. The Vendor's support staff provides service in a professional and courteous manner.



Knowledge Transfer

Getting the customer support relationship off on the right foot requires a formal knowledge transfer where the individual needs of the client are discussed and expectations are set. Conducting a knowledge transfer shows the vendor's desire to develop a relationship with their client base and move beyond typical 'low touch' support services.

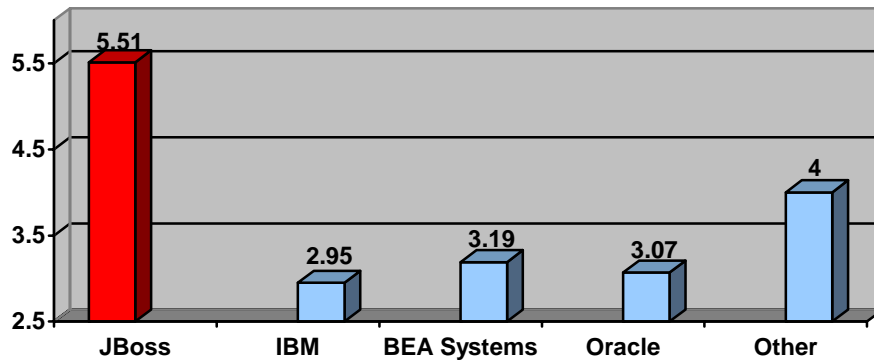
4. The Vendor held a knowledge transfer with my team.



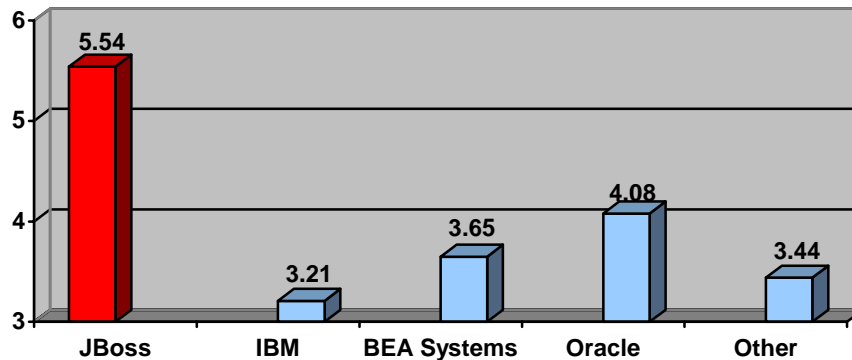
Support Pricing

Almost all software vendors charge their clients for technical support services, and many vendors have different levels of support with different price points to meet the needs of each client. Most software purchasers choose to also acquire support with the licenses because the alternative (having technical problems and no support) could be much more costly. Even more important than the absolute costs involved in purchasing support is the cost-to-value ratio that is realized by the customer.

5. *The Vendor's support pricing is competitive.*



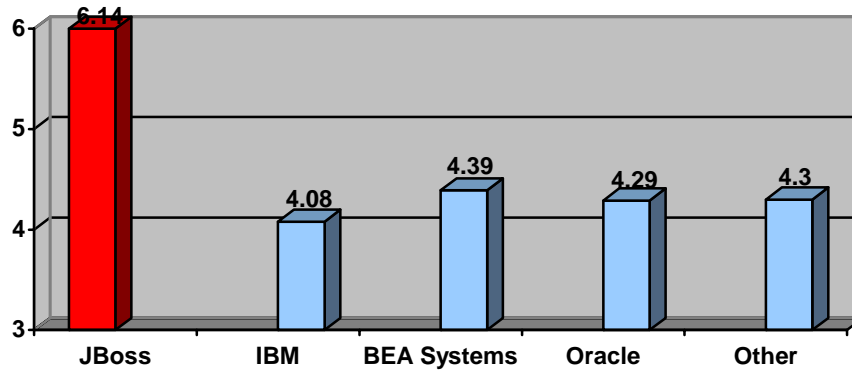
6. *The Vendor provides excellent value for my support services investment.*



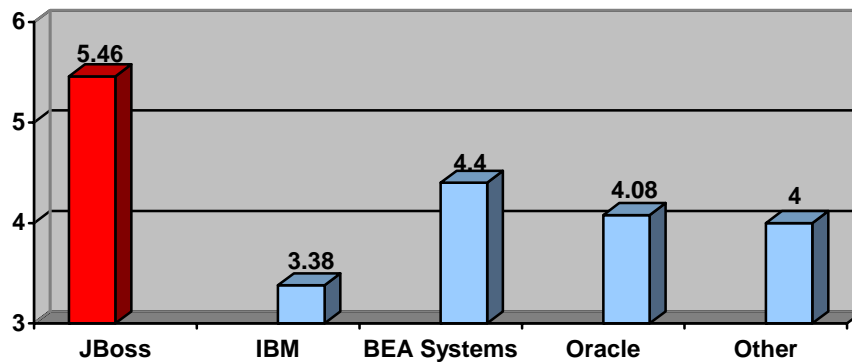
Product Knowledge

The technical aptitude of a vendor's technical support group can vary widely and is a clear differentiator for most. Many vendor support groups understand how a product is supposed to work from a user standpoint and refer to knowledge bases or documentation for more complex solutions. The ability to truly understand root causes of problems or find alternative approaches is too often stuck in the research and development organization. Bringing expert product knowledge to the support group can bring significant value to any customer base.

7. The Vendor's support staff knows their product(s) well.



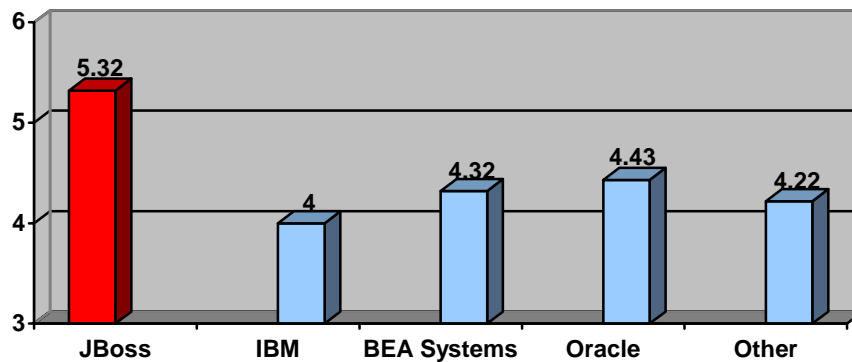
8. The Vendor's support team's knowledge extends beyond just their product(s).



Multi-Channel Access

The ability to support customers through multiple communication channels has become progressively more important over the past several years. Customers want consistent and efficient interaction with support whether it is through email, the Web, or the phone.

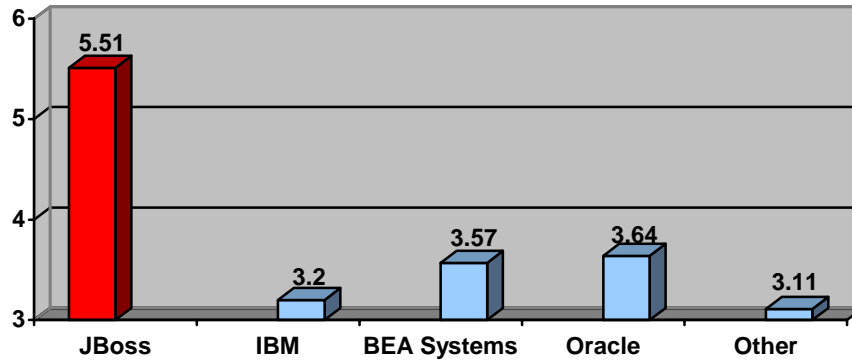
9. The Vendor's support team is easy to reach through multiple channels.



Access to Key Staff

All of us as consumers understand the frustration that can arise from not being able to speak with the right support specialist at the right time. The key support specialist may know the problem details, have the solution, or be a decision maker. Being able to easily reach this individual is of extreme importance when dealing with production environments and critical systems.

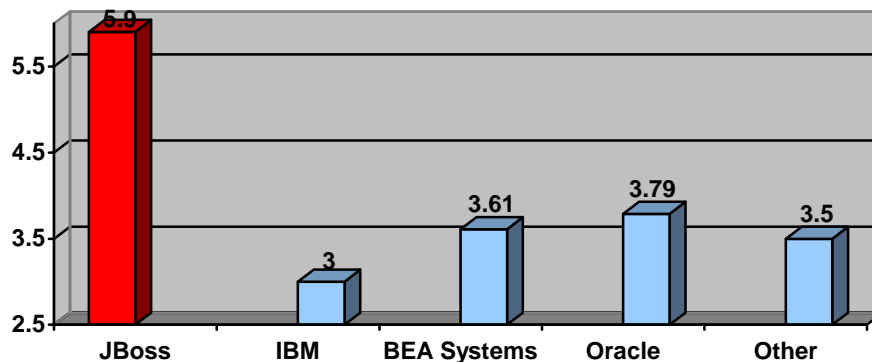
10. I can easily get access to key people at the Vendor.



Customer Loyalty

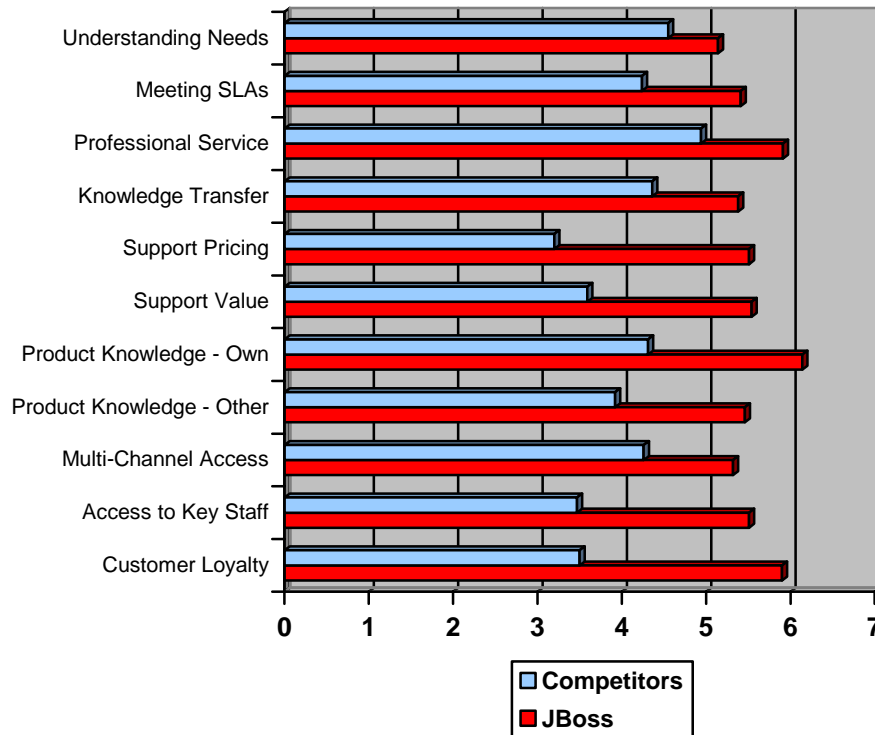
Through excellent products and services, customers naturally develop loyalty to their vendors. A mid level of customer loyalty may be represented by a customer continuing to use a vendor's product even though they have an opportunity to choose others, while a high level of customer loyalty is represented by customers that evangelize the product and company.

11. It is very likely that I would recommend the Vendor to others.



Summary

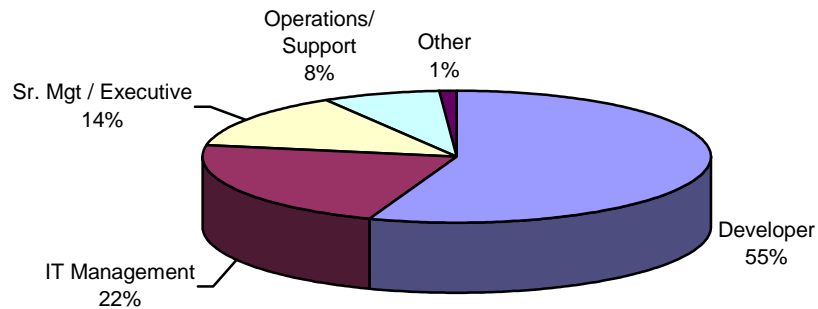
JBoss' mission to provide expert technical support services as a differentiator is clearly being recognized by their client base. This may not come as a surprise since many know the well-being of the company is significantly dependent on the value their customer support services bring. What may come as a surprise is the comprehensive nature by which their service is unsurpassed. Every category that was evaluated resulted in JBoss rating higher than the competition.



As organizations increasingly turning to open source software to lower their total cost of ownership of IT, JBoss Inc. meets their needs with a service organization dedicated to delivering increased savings with faster, more accurate, and more valuable support services. Based on the results of this study, it is our belief that JBoss Technical Support Services should be seen as a strategic lever to increase benefits and decrease costs when using JBoss middleware products.

About the Study Respondents

A random sampling of all JBoss Inc. Technical Support users was contacted to participate in the study. Only users that had direct interaction with JBoss support since September 2003 were asked to provide responses.



The number of individuals providing scores for the each application server follows:

- JBoss – 184
- IBM – 28
- BEA Systems – 86
- Oracle – 14
- Other – 14

About Velociti Partners, Inc.

Velociti Partners is a boutique management consulting and strategic research organization for technology enterprises. Based in Walnut Creek, CA, Velociti Partners provides our clients with strategic services to aid growth, financial performance, and overall success. Velociti Principals and Senior Consultants each have several years of operational experience with leading technology firms and start-up ventures and play active roles in all client engagements. We are a group of tightly knit, talented individuals that maintain a corporate culture of integrity, continual education, and achievement. Above all, we are passionate about delivering results.

Velociti Partners, Inc.
315 Lennon Lane, 2nd Floor
Walnut Creek, CA 94598

Telephone: +1-925-934-4292
Web: www.velocitipartners.com
Email: info@velocitipartners.com



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