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BRUNEL: Welcome to another episode of, Getting the Most Out of IBM U2. I'm Kenny Brunel, and I'm your host for today's episode. Today's topic is Premium Support, a new offering from IBM U2. And with me to discuss this today, I have two guests in the studio. First of all, Simon Caddick. Simon is the senior manager for U2 support worldwide, and Simon has been with IBM U2 for over 11 years. Hello, Simon.

CADDICK: Hello, Kenny. Good to be back.

BRUNEL: My next guest is Ehab AbuShmais. Ehab is the Worldwide U2 Premium Support Delivery Manager, and he's been with IBM U2 for over 13 years. Ehab, thanks for joining me today.

ABUSHMAIS: Thanks for having me, Kenny.

BRUNEL: So, first of all, Simon, let's start with you. Perhaps you can give us a description of what premium support is.

CADDICK: Certainly, Kenny, but perhaps I'll take as a start point what standard support is. Standard support is what you purchase when you go on maintenance with our product, and we've talked about that on a previous podcast. In essence, standard support is the model that we're all

familiar with, that of the traditional break-fix model.

Customers find a problem or a possible bug with the product, they call in, and we supply them with advice and give them fixes or work arounds. That's the standard model, pretty limited in scope.

But our business environment is changing, and increasingly we find our customers need focused, technical expertise in specific areas outside of that traditional model. And premium support gives access to that expertise.

BRUNEL: And Simon, standard support has been in place since the beginning, really. Why is it that premium support is something that you're offering now?

CADDICK: Essentially, we've identified the need for service that goes beyond that traditional model, but isn't such a big commitment as engaging in app services. This is all the more relevant as we have a number of pretty exciting products rolling out, things such as U2 .NET and SB/XA.

BRUNEL: Ehab, Simon mentioned the gap between lab services and our current standard support offering. As the premium support delivery manager, perhaps you can expand on the need a little bit more.

ABUSHMAIS: Absolutely Kenny. First of all, I want to express our enthusiasm about this offering. And let me put it this way: the gap that Simon is talking about that we kept feeling from our customers is that there is no place for them to go when there is a small, mini project such as a how-to, to develop a specific functionality.

That's where premium support came in the picture. If you imagine two banks of a river, premium support is that link between two banks -- meaning, on each side there is...one side is standard support and on the other side is lab services. Standard support covers the normal, it's a remote assistant governed by the support agreement. And you access general knowledge of broad ranges, and assist our customers with bug fixes and enhancement.

Lab services, it's on-site, it's contractual, minimum of 24 hours, you get access as a customer to indepth experience of a broad range of technologies. And they can assist our customer with software installation, upgrades, migrations, structural design, application design.

And here comes premium support that bridges the gap between both. We do provide remote assistance, we are required by contract, and we require a minimum of eight hours. But as a customer, you get indepth experience and relevant technologies based on your needs, such as file fixing, code

planning, and how-to's, upgrade and rehosting.

BRUNEL: Simon, now that we've identified what premium support is, who would benefit from this? Who would want premium support, and is available to everyone?

CADDICK: Well, Ehab gave a pretty good overview of what premium support is, and I guess you could summarize it, who would need it? Anybody who needs flexible access to the specialized knowledge residing in U2 support. And typically, they're looking to use that knowledge to supplement their own staff's skills. Think of it as a mini consultancy.

How can I make this come alive? Well, let's look at a couple of scenarios. Anybody who's had experience of application development -- and I talk from my own painful experience here -- knows that a disproportionate amount of time can be spent in those odd programming roadblocks that come up because you're not that familiar with the technology or perhaps the concept you're trying to implement. And it doesn't matter how much documentation you read or articles you Google online. Sometimes just 15 minutes talking to live expert saves hours of private research.

Another scenario might be that of a system administrator who's fluent with the fundamentals of the U2 data servers,

but could do with extra help in understanding say, file sizing or the use of file fixing tools. So those are the kind of typical examples of where we envisage premium support being of use to our customers.

So, who can actually buy premium support? Basically it's the usual suspects: it's our partners providing support, it's our master VARs, system integrators, direct end users.

If you're not sure if you're eligible, just call in and we'll let you know.

BRUNEL: Well, now let's move into learning how customers can get the most out of it. And again, Ehab, you're the premium support delivery manager, this is your specialty. Perhaps you could take this one.

ABUSHMAIS: Absolutely. I mean, for our customers to get the most out of it, they have to be aware of what's available for them. This is not just another offering; this is really three offerings in one. So, when you get premium support, you get help in three major categories.

We defined them as options, and those options are, first of all option for developer support; option two is for upgrade and installation option three for administrative support. Let me give an example of each one of them. So if a customer purchased premium support and decided to use option one,

then they would utilize this for developing, reviewing code, for, for example, SB/XA.

As Simon mentioned, this is a brand-new product that we have with not much experience out in the marketplace on it. XAML code, WPF, custom controls. They would take advantage of developer support on any custom coding, debugging, customer code and relationship of the U2 product. And any assistance with client API developing U2 products.

What would option two offer? Upgrade and installation. If you're not sure, you have a critical system, you want to plan an engineer to be with you over a weekend while you do an upgrade, we will cover this under premium support. If you would like us to review your plans for upgrade or rehosting, we will review those plans and give you a recommendation.

Option three is administrative support. This will cover any file fixing for UniVerse and UniData issues, that's within business hours. We'll do any file check up, any configuration assessment, resize and recommendation for UniVerse and UniData.

BRUNEL: Simon, is premium support available after hours?

CADDICK: Well, Kenny, unless agreed otherwise, services are provided during the normal working week -- i.e., Monday through Friday from eight a.m. to five p.m. local time excluding, you know, national holidays and weekends et cetera.

However, we can provide support outside of normal working hours, as Ehab indicated, if, say, we were doing installation support, and the partner wanted to do an installation on a weekend to minimize business disruption and wanted to have access to experts during that time.

So we can do it outside of normal hours, but usually we plan for that. The one thing of course nobody can plan is the unexpected incident, such as a file corruption. Now, normally, if you have a system down that is handled within your regular support contract, whenever it happens, seven by 24. However with file corruption, you may want to engage us to fix those files.

If you haven't already got a premium support contract in place, you'll be able to obtain one, but it's more expensive than if you planned ahead and got a contract in place. If you already have a contract in place, then we can use that time which you've bought for that purpose. And as I say, obviously, that is at the time of when the corruption happens, not something you can plan for ahead of time.

BRUNEL: Ehab, let's say I'm a customer, and I've decided that premium support is going to work for me. Can you give us some more information on how it works?

ABUSHMAIS: Absolutely, Kenny. A key point to remember here is that premium support customers have to be on an active support maintenance. Once we establish this first criteria, the rest should be very smooth.

A customer purchases a block of hours on a prepaid basis. The invoice will be considered pre-payment on an account for future services. As hours are delivered, they're deducted from the total hours purchased.

Let me give you an example for this. Let's say the customer purchased 40 hours, and the contract is done. Now they come to the delivery manager and we have this code requirement, we need this technology help, discuss it through a statement of work. We agree on the deliverable.

And let's say we agree on, it's going to take us 10 hours to give you this deliverable. Once we give the customer these pieces of code, or example, or service, then this 10 hours gets deducted from that 40 hours. Now we leave you 30 hours that you have 12 months to use.

BRUNEL: And so, I'm sold on it. How do I go about getting it?

CADDICK: Couldn't be easier Kenny. Just give us a call and speak to any U2 support analysts. Just call in on the regular support number or e-mail us at u2supp@us.ibm.com. Or you can go to the TechConnect Web page and look for premium support in the support programs section.

BRUNEL: Simon, Ehab, thank you for joining me today.

CADDICK: Thank you.

ABUSHMAIS: Thanks for having me.

BRUNEL: And for our listeners, transcripts of today's podcast, which include all the relevant links, are available on our Web site by following the U2 podcast link from the main page.

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