AI-Powered ERP Support: Invisible, Proactive, and Accelerated

[00:00:00] **Jens:** The future of ERP from an ERP customer support perspective, there are three things I would call out. Support in the classical sense of problem-solving will be invisible. That's the future. The second part is proactiveness. You know me. You know everything I did with you over so many years. You know my challenges, you see what is happening in my industry. I want you to be proactive. And in the third part, there will still be problem-solving required. Will be a massive acceleration, AI-based, data-based, the recommendations will be much faster, much better. They will be curated, and it will be ensured that they are going in the right direction.

[00:00:46] **Richard:** Hello, I'm Richard Howells, and this is the future of ERP. A podcast where we discuss hot topics, best practices, and the latest innovations in today's global business. And as ever, I'm joined by my wonderful co-host [00:01:00] Oyku.

[00:01:00] **Oyku:** Hi everyone. I'm Oyku Ilgar, a marketer, podcaster, and blogger in the ERP and supply chain space at SAP. In today's episode, we are joined by SAP Jens Bernotat to talk about the role of ERP customer support. Jens, lovely to have you here today. Could you please introduce yourself and your role at SAP?

[00:01:18] **Jens:** Sure. So my name is Jens Bernotat, and I am running strategy portfolio and ecosystem management for SAP's support. So all support offerings, all maintenance offerings, and everything around that with partners, with customers, is on my plate.

[00:01:40] **Oyku:** Great. From your experience, what were some of the biggest challenges with manual and reactive support in ERP systems before automation, like these high-volume tickets, response times, and all of that stuff? How have things changed since then?

[00:01:56] **Jens:** There are two main elements that we need to discuss here. [00:02:00] One is the whole issue of automation, and the other is the whole aspect of proactive and preventive action. Let me go through two of them. The automation piece is an important change because, in the past, we were waiting for tickets from customers to come in. That was the nature of the old support game. You have a challenge, you have a question, you reach out, and the support organization reacts to that. Now, with automation, we have two opportunities. One is that we can deliver very powerful self-service capabilities

to customers. So they don't even have to reach out with tickets or other legacy means to SAP anymore. They just find solutions themselves. And the second opportunity is we can become proactive because with automation, with an observation on how they run their systems, [00:03:00] especially in the cloud, with monitoring capabilities, we can detect issues before they occur. So they hear from us before we hear from them. And that is a major change and shift in the experience that customers have with support.

[00:03:19] **Richard:** I love the concept of moving from a reactive and waiting for the issue to happen to being proactive. And many of our customers are looking to do exactly the same with their customers.

[00:03:29] **Jens:** Exactly. Yeah.

[00:03:29] **Richard:** Are there any examples that you can share where proactive support prevented a critical ERP and business system outage or saved a customer? Significant cost savings and time.

[00:03:41] **Jens:** We had piloted in 2024 and have again adopted it in 2025, something that we are calling a holiday program. That is especially in the meantime, this is a worldwide thing. It came from the US many years ago and now everybody on the whole planet has a Black [00:04:00] Friday and a Cyber Monday and all this kind of stuff. So we all know that retailers and online shopping portals and so on will face enormous pressure on their websites, especially in this high peak time, which is at the same time exactly the time in the year where you cannot fail. Because that's, I don't know how many revenues they make, partially 10, 15, 20% of a year's revenue coming in there. Long story short, we developed a program where we are proactively and preventively monitoring selected retailers that were joining the program to see in which issues they may go to preventively, resolve issues before they occur. And the results were pretty strong here. We were driving a 100% uptime, and there were zero escalations. And that is a very good example of a very practical case. Where we are driving a lot of business value out of this [00:05:00] preventive observation and monitoring with practical direct impact to customers.

[00:05:05] **Oyku:** You talk about this Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and how retailers face this enormous pressure, and they use the data to enable this, right? So what role does data play in enabling this proactive customer support for ERP systems?

[00:05:20] **Jens:** Yes, that is a very good question and also a very long-lasting question in the industry. I mean, you know, that data is the new currency of

success, especially in technology and in our case and technology products of services is an, is a long tooth, but we are just experiencing this more and more. So what we are doing is we are collecting a rich set of data from our customers. Usage data, technical data, transactional data, peak times in usage in the system technical stuff like memory consumptions, potential [00:06:00] issues that are arising. So we collect all this data and bring it together to identify patterns and create insights of potential issues and opportunities. So the role of data is twofold, I would say. One is the data itself. A very rich observation base gives you more opportunity to see things. And the second important element than on data is you can apply powerful AI based analytics on top to detect patterns. Patterns you may not even have seen yourself, which is a big difference to the old world where you had to design every analytics you wanted to drive yourself. You have data, you design what analytics you need. The analysis doesn't help you develop the next one. Here you have AI agents and we are just starting with this, like everybody, you have AI agents that identify correlations, patterns, [00:07:00] opportunities that you may not even have been able to come up with yourself. And , this combination of a very rich data set and a powerful AI based analytics to trigger all kinds of recommendations. That is the winning formula.

[00:07:18] **Richard:** Having all of this data and all of these new tools like AI are great, but some people are resistant to new technologies, new tools. So let's talk about the change management involved as you bring these new approaches your team and to our customers. Are there any organizational or cultural changes that you can consider as a must in support teams? To make sure that we leverage and maximize the use of all of these technologies.

[00:07:47] **Jens:** That is a very good question to raise. A very good point. That obviously hits us. The history and the evolution of the overall technology industry is a history of fast [00:08:00] change. If you go five years back, 10 years back, and you look at the trends, it has always been tremendously different. 10, 15 years ago, there was no cloud. Right now, we are not even doing coding in many areas anymore because of AI. So there is a constant change in our industry, which is a certain opportunity because, on average, the people that you have in such organizations, like our experts, are used to that change. They change all the time. Yeah. That said, this change needs to be managed as always, especially here, because the focus and the opportunity, let me put it that way, for employees and for experts will change. There is, as always, a certain element of redundant, standardized, simple things that may go away. Yeah, because an AI [00:09:00] agent will be able to resolve simple questions to SAP in this case, faster and easier than a human being could and should. So the change that we need to drive is to show people the path from such simple ways to two important future areas. One is. We allocate more time to work on the truly complex topics. And that is the nature, especially of SAP,

we are running mission-critical systems in the cloud, many of them being the biggest in the industry. Our customers can accept not a lot, but not that their systems fall down, that they have latencies. We talked about the Black Friday thing. Often. This is complex stuff. And for that, our experts. Ideal and the best choice the customer can get to help them solve problems. So if we relieve them from simple [00:10:00] stuff, they can focus stronger and preventively on the other parts. And the other thing is, maybe, I don't know if we come back to that later, but just to put it on the table already, AI is only as good as the quality management you put behind it. So right, there's this famous, this famous old saying in our industry, garbage in, garbage out. That is a way here as well. If you don't curate data, if you don't ensure that the answers are correct, if you don't coach and train the ai, if you don't make it better over time. It'll not help, right? It is not done with just put data in a data lake and then let an LLM create some answers. Who may be 80% right? Sounds great, 80% is good, but not in mission-critical software. It would be that every fifth customer would fall down. We cannot [00:11:00] accept that. So we have an opportunity for these experts to transform from solving problems after the fact to precluding, so to speak, problems before they occur and coach and train and curate the AI to deliver better results. And for that, you need these experts. No AI can train itself, at least not now. So let's see how the development will go. But these are two very important change paths we can very credibly show to everybody who is part of that game. But yes, admittedly, there is change, and that needs continuous communication and conviction of people that this is the path to go.

[00:11:42] **Oyku:** Earlier, you gave a really interesting uptime percentage of 100%. Are there any KPIs or metrics that you can share with us, understanding the success in proactive versus reactive support?

[00:11:56] **Jens:** Yep. There are two parts to this answer as well. I mean, one is [00:12:00], there are ever two KPIs that you want to measure to understand if a support function is practically functioning. That is things like what we call the customer effort score. We measure this internally. right? That is a measurement and an industry standard to see how easy or complex it is for a customer to engage. With the company from which they get support. Such measures will continue to be in place because in a complex environment, there will never be no tickets. There will be fewer cases, as the best case is a case you don't open. But there will still be cases because things are still complex. So you continue to have these KP KPIs in place. Customer effort score is a proxy for customer satisfaction. And then a lot of other internal technical measures that we take. How fast do you resolve an escalation and things like that? But the most important [00:13:00] addition, the more you, what we call this, the more you shift left from after the fact to before the fact. From reactive to proactive and preventive, ideally, the more you want to start measuring more leading

indicators. One example is customer health, which is something we are looking into to measure how good is the customer set up technically, but also from the consumption perspective of the software, where the lines between the support function in itself and the product and the product usage is blurring because at the end of the day. The value for a cloud software company like SAP is not only that we are great in answering cases if they come or deliver preventive value or even have a great effort score. The value at the end of the day is that customers adopt the solution. They use it, they expand, [00:14:00] they create the value scenarios they want to create. That is not all fully. On the plate of support, but support plays an important role for that. So you need to tie it to these elements as well. That is a development I believe we will see in the whole industry to start measuring broader aspects like that.

[00:14:22] **Richard:** We covered a lot of topics around some of the challenges, whether it's change management, whether it's the availability and accuracy of data and the amount of data we now have available. And you really did bring me back to my college days, which was a long time ago when you talked about garbage in, garbage out, because I think that's one of the first things we learned in a computer science course. But what are some of the risks and pitfalls that companies should be looking out for? What lessons have you learned when implementing this automotive and proactive support system?

[00:14:57] **Jens:** The biggest risk is not to [00:15:00] start. That is what I know. That that is what I mean with that is the biggest risk is be too careful, analyze too long, have two big mistrust in technology. You need to start experimenting. You need to start to try out things. It makes no sense to take two years to develop the one golden bullet use case that kills it all. Shoot five things out. Two may not deliver what you want, you make them better, or you skip them. But get started for two reasons. One is: you are starting to get results. And two is you learn on the way. There's a famous saying that I'm citating here and that fits for this part as well. That is also, by the way, then a risk for our people. There's this famous saying where somebody said, it is, in many cases, it is not that AI will put your job at risk. It is a person using AI [00:16:00] better than you do. Who will put your job potentially at risk, and that's the same story. Get started, try it out. You need to understand what's possible, what's not possible, how you can manage quality and so on. But the biggest risk for me is just being too slow in getting it moved.

[00:16:20] **Richard:** That's good advice. It's better to do something if you stand still, the competition is getting further ahead of you all the time.

[00:16:25] **Jens:** Exactly.

[00:16:26] **Oyku:** All of the quotes are accepted here and. Since we talk about this risks and pitfalls, maybe the next question you can imagine, I would like to ask about the advices that you can give to companies. So for organizations beginning of their journey to toward this proactive ERP support, what would you advise as the first three steps?

[00:16:48] **Jens:** A set of relatively simple use cases, the complex use cases you can get to, but that will take some time. You need to have some quick wins also to prove [00:17:00] that the whole thing is working. I give you two or three examples that we did that is not what everybody needs to do, but just what did we do. We started years ago with a concept where if a customer enters a case, we started to put a second window on the screen. And while typing, we were starting to give AI based feedback. Right. Okay. Well, after the first two things not, but yeah, it starts to get better. Oh, this is what it is. Here are some things people looked at that It's relatively simple, but it is a relatively powerful means. So you start, your people get used to it. You start the customers getting used to it. Small things like that, that is what I would start. Some things take a long time. You're not building a data lake overnight. You are not building a powerful AI agent that can answer automatically 90% of inquiries overnight. Of course not. You need to start the long-term projects, but you need to also start some initial [00:18:00] fast test balloons, so to speak, or simpler things that create acceptance in your organization and with your customers. So get started of that. The second thing is and I'm just brainstorming a bit, but that is tied to what I said in the other question, let your team, let your organization start, play with, and experiment with ai that is so important, right? This is not somebody builds tools for me as a support expert, I have no clue what this is all about, but it delivers great answers to me. You need to experience it yourself. Try it out, try and fail. It can be also in your private life. It is just so important. Yeah. Use it for summarizing text. Use it for getting recommendations, whatever your people need to start emerging deeper emerging deeper into this AI world so that they have a better understanding what AI can do. So small first steps. Bring AI as a natural [00:19:00] habit in the organization with this thinking of some things may fail. This is not the 100% perfection game. And the third part is that is probably more the structural part. You need to put a transformation program on the line in your company and in your organization where you can show how you want over a certain set of months or years, two years, probably stronger. You can not look forward how you want to invest, what benefits you want to capture in your organization and how this goes. And that is important because you want to talk not only about efficiency things. You want to talk about business opportunities for your customers. How can we improve the value for customers? How can we increase health? How can we prevent to make their transformations into our new products better? If you don't do anything like that you will have pressure from the outside who don't [00:20:00] understand what support is

because they will see it just as an efficiency game. Isn't that great, right? AI will take all that today is done by people. What a great saving, but that is jumping far too short. But it is your opportunity and your responsibility and support, I believe, to put the plan of the on the table for the expanded benefits, right? Yes. Standardized cases go away. This is how we redeploy. This is what we will reach with it. That is the third part. I would say, so you need to have a midterm transformation plan. That will change always, as always, but it is so important. Don't allow others to tell you what AI should be about for you. Tell them what opportunities it can bring for the whole company, not just for you in support.

[00:20:51] **Richard:** And share those opportunities with your teammates as well, because they can leverage the same things that you are learning.

[00:20:56] **Jens:** Exactly.

[00:20:57] **Richard:** Jens, we're coming to the end of the podcast. I [00:21:00] just wanted to, I ask the final question, was there anything that we've missed that you'd like to have covered?

[00:21:04] **Jens:** Whew, certainly. But I think we have a good round of topics. Everybody's invited to take a look what SAP is doing in all these areas. Look at our portal pages and so on to get a bit more learning. We speak externally about this quite a lot not only on our events, also on, external events, like with analysts. Just take a look.

[00:21:23] **Richard:** And we'll provide some links in the show notes as well where people can learn more. But I have one final question that I ask all of our, guests. it'll be slightly from a different perspective with your answer, I would assume, but in a sentence or two, specifically from a support perspective, what's the future of ERP?

[00:21:39] **Jens:** The future of ERP from an ERP customer support perspective, there are three things I would call out. Support in the classical sense problem solving will be invisible. That's the future. We're preventing, we're detecting things before they occur. We resolve them and so on. And the [00:22:00] challenge you then have is how can you make sure your customers still understand that on that part you are there. Because the good news is they don't see anything. So they get used to everything run smooth. But invisible support is a part of the future. The second part is proactiveness. We cannot do everything without the customer. They need to take decisions. There is a configuration need, there's a transformation need on their side. But they should hear from us because they will say, you know me. You know everything I did

with you over so many years. You know my challenges, you see what is happening in my industry. I want you to be proactive. So the second part will be proactivity. And the third part there will still be problem solving required. Will be a massive acceleration, AI based, data based, the recommendations will be much faster, much better. They will be curated, it will be ensured that they are going in the right direction. But these would be [00:23:00] probably the three things I would pull out in the classical customer support space.

[00:23:05] **Richard:** Jens, this has been really interesting. I've learned a lot about it, it's not the support system that I used to know. It's a completely new, proactive world leveraging technology. It's been great to hear.

[00:23:18] **Jens:** Thank you. We're excited as well. We're fired up to drive this forward.

[00:23:22] **Richard:** We'll make sure that we share some links in the show notes so that our listeners can learn more. But until next time, from Jens, Oyku and I, thanks for discussing the future of ERP.