

Service Desk 2010: The Coming Revolution in End-User Support

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Not too many years ago computer problems were fixed by the tech support person down the hall. If you were experiencing an issue with your hardware, applications, or network connection, you would simply call a tech support person, who would stop by your desk to help. The tech support person was likely armed with his own experience, a handful of manuals, training he'd been through, and information gleaned from calls placed to technology vendors. If you were fortunate, the tech support person would resolve the issue on the spot.

That was then. Now, if the IT function of a large organization serviced technology this way, it would be eaten alive by exorbitant costs, rising technology failures, dissatisfied and unproductive end-users, and senior management questioning the value of IT.

Today, most IT organizations have at least one service desk in place to handle end-user calls for IT support. However, to keep pace with escalating end-user demands and increasing cost pressures, the service desk must become a sophisticated technology trouble-shooting hub, capable of supporting end-users around the globe. For those organizations who are leading the way, the service desk of 2010 will look radically different than it does today.

Why the Service Desk Model Has to Change

More and more CEOs are asking the IT function to provide greater value because day-to-day operations are far more dependent on technology, and because they recognize the opportunity to differentiate through technology. IT is increasingly expected to lead dramatic technology-enabled improvements for business processes. However, with IT departments immersed in fixing technology problems, the ability to focus on improving business processes that increasingly depend on that technology is compromised.

And while executives are placing greater demands on IT, so are the end-users. During the past five years, end-user dependency on technology has spiraled, as have the requirements for IT support. A recent Unisys end-user services study of more than 250 organizations found that in about three-quarters of large organizations (with revenue of at least \$1 billion), 90% of employees use computers or other digital devices. In nearly two-thirds of the organizations, employees spend at least 50% more of their work day using computers or other computing devices than they did 5 years ago. In almost a third of the organizations surveyed, employees' usage of computers has at least doubled.

IT is caught in the cross-fire: add more value than simply repairing technology, but repair more technology than ever before – faster and more cost-efficiently. To combat the service desk crisis, end-user services groups must become more sophisticated from a number of dimensions:

- **Resource Allocation:** With explosive demand for end-user services and constrained resources to meet that demand, effectively allocating resources is critical. That means determining what people, jobs, and functions require the most support and tailoring support to various end-user groups accordingly. In any large organization, some business functions (and even employees within each function) have far more impact on generating daily revenue than others, and depend far more on technology than others. Segmenting the end-user base significantly improves organizational effectiveness by giving higher-priority support to those areas of greatest impact.
- **Capital Investment:** Creating world-class operations in IT and business processes is not accomplished overnight. It takes years of experience, training, and investing in specialized assets. Technologies such as remote diagnostic software can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of end-user services by shifting support to lower-cost and faster solutions. Such technology also makes end-user services professionals more knowledgeable and effective. But such technologies require significant capital investment. Acquiring and mastering the right technologies must be a core investment and core competence of end-user services groups that want to stay on top of their game.
- **Sourcing Decisions:** With all the demands placed upon them, leading IT organizations have difficulty mastering and funding the management practices, processes, technologies, and skills required to excel in all areas. More than ever, organizations need an effective sourcing strategy to focus internal IT investments and resources in areas that can markedly differentiate their organizations and source more routine operations and non-core competencies externally. End-user services groups that outsource some or all of their support services can free themselves up to focus on improving the productivity of the organization's most critical end-users.

Implications for the Service Desk: What the 2010 Service Desk Must Be Able to Do

In a future where IT organizations must build more sophisticated end-user services operations, the service desk will be dramatically different than it is today. Having solved the resource allocation issue through segmenting the end-user base, investing in support technologies, and building the right sourcing model, the end-user services organization will depend far more heavily on the service desk to be the command and control center for IT service.

By 2010, the service desk will be:

- **Handling far more problems without escalation**
The greater number of problems that can be resolved without a field technician or other intervention, the lower the cost of providing service. Technology is critical to shifting technology repair from the field to centralized remote support. Assuming these investments have been made (and 91% of those organizations in our study providing superior support already do remote diagnostics of end-user technology), the service desk will be handling far more service incidents without escalating them to specialized support groups. Any repeatable service incident that can be resolved without field service intervention will be a candidate for service desk resolution.

As the scope of problems that a service desk handles broadens, its professionals must possess far greater technical knowledge, analytical abilities, and problem-solving skills to competently resolve technology problems. Service desk agents will receive significant technical training and will be conversant in the knowledge bases and support systems they use.

Thorough documentation of service incidents into integrated knowledge management systems will be part of the service desk's daily routine. Information including details about end-users (who they are, what they do, what devices they have, what software and network connections they have), service incidents, techniques that have solved those incidents in the past, technical specifications, information access rights, and security information will provide a rich database for the service desk team to resolve a greater number of issues.

Regardless of how many service desks an organization has globally, they will function as one process and share knowledge across geographic and business unit boundaries. An incident resolved by a service desk in Eastern Europe will be instantly accessible by an agent in the U.S. who encounters a similar problem.

Services desks will also integrate knowledge management systems into the service delivery process when they must escalate problems to advanced support teams. By providing the service desk staff with service tickets that contain detailed data on the end-user, including devices, past repair history, and how other technicians solved the problem at hand, they have a far better chance of doing their job well.

- **Proactively managing service and infrastructure needs**

Support technologies will not only enable more remote diagnosis and repair. They will let the service desk be much more proactive in supporting the infrastructure. Given that many technology problems can be handled remotely, the service desk will have greater responsibility for the daily management of the organization's technology assets. It will have to be skilled at pre-empting potential service incidents and sending new releases, patches, and other software to employees as they need it.

- **Providing customer-centric services**

By 2010, end-user services organizations will have segmented end-user bases into customer segments of varying organizational importance. They will have structured end-user services to deliver higher levels of support, varying services, and higher priority support to those with greatest organizational impact. This is the basic customer relationship management (CRM) principle used for many years in other industries to enable resources to focus where the greatest return on investment potential resides. In end-user services, CRM will go beyond simply setting different service levels for different end-user groups. The end-user services organization will have a portfolio of services, service methods, and response times tailored to the needs of various customer segments. For the service desk, this means having systems that quickly identify internal customers and their service plan.

For service desk personnel, this means having the versatility to handle both high-touch, highly urgent service needs, and routine requests.

All employees are more dependent on technology and thus more demanding of service today. They will be even more so in the future. So despite the diversity of service support provided from end-user to end-user, service desk representatives must adopt new, customer-focused mindsets. They must make superior customer service a top priority in each service incident. Service desk agents will have greater interpersonal savvy and openness to being challenged by technically literate end-users. They will also have the ability to communicate clearly across multiple communications channels – not just telephone. Service desks will be accessible 24/7 by the most critical end-user groups – whether they are in offices or various mobile locations around the world. And service desks will have variable resource models so that peaks and valleys in demand can be easily and cost-effectively handled while maintaining consistent service standards with customers.

- **Continuously improving effectiveness and efficiency**

Pressures on both cost and quality of service will force end-user services organizations to become “well-oiled machines.” Even organizations with highly efficient and effective operations will need continuous improvement methods such as Six Sigma embedded in day-to-day activities. And, having globally standardized processes for managing service support and service delivery will help end-user services groups gain the control they need to be effective and efficient.

To achieve service desk excellence, end-user services groups will need deep knowledge of service desk operations along with knowledge of the industry and the business processes the service desk supports. This context will be increasingly important as they tailor service to customer segments.

The knowledge bases the service desk maintains will provide great intelligence for identifying trends and root causes of technology problems. That will help them to be quickly addressed and pre-empt future service incidents. Having seen the value from ad-hoc and project-specific analytics, a few leading organizations are already staffing business analysts into the service desk team.

By getting the right analytical talent, giving them the right focus and objectives, and conducting analysis and distributing the information across the services organization, service desks can greatly improve their performance.

The service desk of the future will be the pulse of the end-user services organization: the centralized first line of support for end-users; resolvers of the vast majority of service incidents; proactive managers of technology to upgrade capabilities and prevent service issues; the hub for tracking service across an integrated support network; and the keeper of knowledge bases from which service can be improved.

To play these roles, service desk personnel must be highly technically literate, deeply knowledgeable on the business and the technology they support, and able to use all of the knowledge bases and systems at their fingertips for providing support. They will have strong interpersonal skills, strong multi-channel communication skills, and a personal drive to provide superior customer service. By 2010, the service desk must be a far more sophisticated operation to support a far more complex, diverse, and demanding end-user community.

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Printed in US America 11/07



BL100066-100