

Is it Time to Modernize Your Service Desk?

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When you pick a program to record on your DVR, purchase an ebook online, or choose a song to download, you're making a choice. You get the services you want, where and when you need them. IT needs to think of the services we deliver to our customers in the same way. Instead of saying, "Here are your IT services," IT must go further and ask, "Where, when, and how would you like your services?" This is how IT goes beyond aligning with the business and demonstrates its value.

In most organizations, the service desk is the primary channel of interaction between business users and IT. For many users, it's the only channel—the face of IT to the business. Through the service desk, IT can develop strong, productive relationships with business users. To fully exploit the capability of the service desk and meet the needs of today's business users, you need to transition your service desk from an infrastructure- and technology-centric focus to one that's oriented to the needs of the customer.

This transition places stringent requirements on the underlying service desk technology. That technology must be capable of capturing and communicating metrics that are meaningful to business users. In addition, today's business users are accustomed to interacting with technology in a much more consumer-like, social manner such as through Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. They expect their interactions with IT at work to mimic the same kind of intuitive interactions they have in their personal lives. The service desk technology must be capable of delivering that experience.

Is your service desk solution modern enough to meet these requirements? Maybe your system was homegrown, for example, and it requires considerable effort to keep up with new business needs as you try to add new capabilities that business users require. The system may have met your requirements at the time it was built, but it may be a struggle when you try to stretch it to meet new demands. It's like trying to hang on to a car that is way past its prime. At some point, it's time to buy a new car.



Perhaps you have a commercial product that is overly customized and difficult to upgrade. The tailoring that you do to the service desk should be focused on configuration, not customization. Here are some questions to ask to help you decide if it's time to replace your service desk with one that can meet your needs now and in the future.

ARE YOU CREATING A SOCIAL, COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT?

Traditionally, communicating with the service desk has been a one-way proposition and very technology focused. Users call in to the service desk to report problems. The service desk then initiates a workflow, oftentimes manual, to address the problems. This is not a highly interactive environment and does not provide much opportunity for developing relationships with users.

Modern users are technically savvy and are accustomed to communicating in a much more social and interactive way. Consequently, the modern service desk should facilitate two-way communication. It is through this communication that IT can develop strong, collaborative relationships with users.

Users are more likely to be looking for help from their smartphones or tablets than from their desktop computers. They want to communicate with IT in the same way, using the same devices as they use in their personal lives—a familiar phenomenon known as the consumerization of IT.

Does your current service desk solution enable users to interact with the service desk in the way they prefer? If not, users may turn for help to other sources outside of IT. In that case, IT needs to improve how it demonstrates value to users.

Consequently, the service desk solution should support social communication channels such as chat. It should permit users to communicate via the devices they prefer, which may include their personal smartphones or tablets. The more communication channels you are willing to engage with, the greater your visibility is into the needs of your user population.

ARE YOU CAPTURING AND REPORTING THE RIGHT DATA?

Traditional service desk solutions may track only transactional incident activity, such as call volumes, call waiting times, incident closure times, and the percentage of incidents closed on the first call. Many IT organizations rely on this information to measure the effectiveness of their service desks. But measuring success based on activity rather than business value can be misleading. For example, taking comfort in the fact that incident activity has remained relatively constant may be ill advised. This constancy may indicate lack of progress in improving service, and continuous improvement should be a fundamental objective of all IT organizations.

It's also important to examine the reports you send to the business. How are you ensuring that the data you are sharing is relevant to the business? Are you reporting on the same metrics that you reported on in the past? If so, this could be an indication that you have not evolved your dialogue with the business. As a result, the metrics you are tracking may not provide sufficient information to demonstrate business value, such as improvements in availability that directly result in increased revenue.

What's required is a solution that captures business-oriented metrics in addition to activity metrics. The solution should also be capable of dynamically accessing data from other systems, such as enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, to complement the data it captures. In addition, it should have built-in analytics, including predictive analytics that permit IT to identify trends and take proactive action. Finally, the solution should present the information in reports and dashboards that are meaningful to business users and that provide a balanced view of the value provided by IT.

CAN YOU EASILY PERSONALIZE THE USER EXPERIENCE?

You have to accommodate a wide variety of users. Think about your team, the service desk staff of level 1, level 2, and level 3 technicians, and the administrators who manage the solution. There are also internal business users in various organizations and there may also be external customers who are looking for help.

Each of these user types interacts with the service desk solution for different purposes. A level 3 support technician, for example, will have different requirements than a level 1 technician. Therefore, you need to be able to personalize the user experience for each type of user. Personalization should be simple and straightforward, such as by drag-and-drop operations. In no case should programming be required.

The service desk should deliver customized views to meet user needs—for example, creating a portal that is specific to the service department with their branding, even a specific color scheme; displaying content that they are interested in from the service catalog; trending knowledge base solutions; and adding a request with fields relevant to their work. As another example, an overall change calendar might be targeted for each change manager to include a list of requests specifically waiting for their approval. End users should also be able to modify their view into the service desk to personalize the experience by updating the layout, adding shortcut buttons, and hiding or including items that they use most often.

CAN YOU AUTOMATE IT PROCESSES START TO FINISH?

It's important to automate processes wherever possible to streamline workload, more tightly adhere to process, and expedite resolution. The right service desk solution enables you to automate not only service desk processes, but also broader IT processes that extend beyond the service desk. Here's an example:

A user requests an application from a service catalog. In response, the service desk solution automatically checks with the software asset management solution to see if a license is available for that application. If one is available, the service desk solution automatically generates a change request to the change management solution. The change management solution automatically gathers the necessary approvals and triggers the solution to deploy the application to the requesting user's device. It also tracks all pertinent activities from request to approval to change to deployment, ensuring the creation of a full audit trail.

This high degree of automation frees up valuable service desk personnel time, permitting the service desk staff to pursue more strategic work that contributes business value. It reduces risk by eliminating error-prone manual processes. Automation also helps you manage software license entitlements, adhere to corporate policies and external regulations, and generate an audit trail that can be used to demonstrate compliance.

End-to-end process automation requires a service desk solution that empowers users through self-service. It also requires a solution that is a key component of a larger IT service management (ITSM) suite, which includes such components as change and configuration management, asset management, and software license management. All of these components must integrate out of the box.

CAN YOU AUTOMATE THE BUSINESS PROCESSES OF OTHER DEPARTMENTS?

There is marked similarity between IT processes and the business processes of other departments. For example, the user self-service process just described consists of accepting a request, gathering the required approvals, fulfilling the request, and creating an audit trail. This request and fulfillment process is common to other departments, such as when the facilities department receives a request from the human resources (HR) department to provide office space, furniture, telephone, and IT equipment to a newly hired employee.

Consequently, if your service desk solution provides a robust process automation capability, you can leverage that capability to automate business processes in other departments, such as HR and facilities. That not only increases return on investment for the service desk solution but also increases the value of IT to the business.

Business process automation requires a solution that allows non-technical business users to easily define, manage, change, and update automated business processes. Programming, scripting, or pseudo coding are not required. The solution should permit multi-tenancy; that is, the ability to give each department its own private, secure workspace to ensure that sensitive data is protected and it should not require database partitioning.

IS YOUR CURRENT SOLUTION UP TO THE TASK?

Some organizations have developed their own home-grown service desk system. These systems are typically born out of a need to address specific issues but are then adapted over time to meet the changing needs of the business. The problem is that these systems are not typically scalable or sustainable in the longer term.

Consequently, many of these home-grown systems have been stretched to the limit. It would be extremely difficult to further extend the capabilities of these systems to meet the requirements of the modern service desk. Capturing additional needed data, for example, may require extensions to the database, and that would impact several other parts of the system, such as input forms and reports. Another problem is that the developers of these systems may no longer be available to modify them.

Other organizations have implemented commercial service desk solutions. These organizations have usually had to customize the solutions to meet their specific needs. In many cases, this customization has required expensive professional services engagements. Many of these products are older versions and cannot be easily updated because of the heavy customization. Adding the capabilities required by the modern service desk would be difficult and might require additional professional services engagements.

If your current solution is no longer scalable and sustainable, it may be time to replace it. If so, be sure to replace it with a solution that meets the requirements of the modern service desk—and one that can be implemented quickly for fast time to value. That requires a solution that delivers best-practice processes right out of the box. Moreover, it should be easy to tailor these processes to meet your specific requirements through simple configuration, using straightforward drag-and-drop operations. And any tailoring you do should be preserved when updating the solution to the latest version.

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH MODERNIZATION

Modernizing your service desk enables you to dramatically change the way IT interacts with business users as you move toward a more customer-centric business orientation. That increase in productivity and ease of use helps add value to the business today and as you grow.

BMC Footprints meets the needs of the modern service desk. For more information, visit <http://www.bmc.com/products/footprints>.

About the author

Michele McFadden is the senior director of product management for IT service management solutions from BMC Software, including BMC FootPrints, BMC Remedy ITSM Suite, and Remedy OnDemand. She and her team work with customers, sales, marketing, development, and prospects to gather and prioritize requirements and define product vision to provide the best customer experience for service management.

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