Service Desk **Best Practices**

LabTech™

As an IT service provider, you understand that information can provide a powerful strategic advantage.

In order to ensure the proper mechanisms are in place for information to be collected, analyzed, produced and distributed seamlessly, many IT service providers implement a service desk.

A service desk acts as the main point of contact for any and all IT related questions. Unlike a help desk that clients can call when they are having problems with their IT services, service desk personnel monitor and manage each layer of client service from beginning to end.

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End-to-End IT Management

The service desk is designed to optimize IT service delivery and manage all internal and client IT functions throughout their lifecycle, including:

- **Network Operations:** A service desk remotely monitors all network devices and connections. In addition, the service desk monitors and manages incident reports and traffic, performs network reviews, implements backups, and manages changes on the network. Thus, a service desk ensures your clients' IT infrastructures are optimized to meet their business needs.

- **Systems Operations:** A service desk performs core systems management tasks, including performance monitoring, installation of patches, change management, account management and support for specific platforms (i.e. Windows, Mac, Linux, etc.).

- **Database Operations:** A service desk maintains and optimizes database tasks, including performance monitoring, fault monitoring, log reviews, access management and change control for database software (i.e. Microsoft SQL, Oracle, MYSQL, etc.).

- **Security Management:** A service desk protects clients from external and internal threats by performing vulnerability scans, monitoring IPS logs and mapping this data according to the information security related regulatory mandates.

These functions are delivered by utilizing various types of hardware, software and delivery processes. All the functions must work together in a seamless manner and each has its own lifecycle, which is also managed by the service desk. Thus, when one hardware platform, software package or process needs to be replaced with newer technology or practices, the service desk will manage the transition to ensure maximum data delivery.

Result: Improved Client Satisfaction

By performing the tasks outlined above, a service desk improves client satisfaction by:

- Proactively managing client IT networks to ensure maximum uptime

- Minimizing the business impact when service failures occur

- Resolving incidents and requests with minimal delay

- Communicating with end-users

- Managing the lifecycles of the IT processes and the associated costs

- Eliminating technology worries so clients can focus on their business plan

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A Service Desk is Not a Help Desk

Oftentimes, the terms service desk and help desk are used interchangeably; however, they are quite different. The service desk is a key component in managing the end-to-end process as it relates to the business strategy. The help desk is a component of the end-to-end process that is focused on end-user needs; it is tactically focused and is most concerned with end-user functionality.

Service desks focus on the five Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL®) Core Service Lifecycles:

• **Service Strategy:** Evaluate current services and ensure a plan is in place to modify and implement new and existing services when needed.

• **Service Design:** Evaluate and ensure a new service will meet current and future needs. Ensure a new service can be introduced into the live environment.

• **Service Transition:** Define a plan that ensures no service outages or gaps during a service transition, so the effects to the client are minimal.

• **Service Operation:** Responsible for the ongoing monitoring of a service that is used to deliver services.

• **Continual Service Improvement:** Review and analyze opportunities to improve all IT processes and functions.

3 Which One is Best?

Now for the tough question – should you use a service desk, a help desk or both? To answer this question, let's review the highlights of each function.

A Help Desk is Technically Focused

The help desk fixes problems that are taking place at that instant. For this immediate response to end-user IT needs, the help desk must have employees technically trained in the appropriate technologies. The ultimate goal of the help desk is to offer first contact resolution as often and as quickly as possible.

A Service Desk is Customer and Process Focused

A service desk offers a single point of contact and is focused on managing processes. The service desk is outwardly focused on the client and inwardly focused on the day-to-day processes of the IT services business. The ultimate goal of the service desk is to minimize operating costs by having the appropriate

personnel working on problems, monitoring trends and managing processes.

There are some instances where an IT service provider does not require or is not ready for the processes and service offerings of a service desk. In that instance, a help desk will meet the tactical needs of an IT service provider to minimize client downtime.

The service desk is concerned with the overall IT process and the individual components that function and interact with each other on both a software and process level. One area that is a must in any IT service offering is the ability to manage specific end-user problems and issues. Thus, a service desk either has to have help desk functionality embedded in their service desk infrastructure or have the ability to link into a help desk offering for the end-user.

4 Reaping the Benefits

Having both a service desk and a help desk will provide the most benefit, as they both add value to your IT services business. It is obvious that a help desk is required; when something breaks you need to fix it. However, there are many instances when the help desk is getting a call and it is not of a technical nature. When this occurs, your company is paying premium dollars to a technical resource when one is not required—and that resource could be helping someone with a technical question.

This is where the service desk plays a key role in your business solution. The service desk will assist end-users with issues that are not of a technical nature. This allows technically skilled workers to stay available for the technical problems.

When done according to ITIL v3 standards, the service desk will be the initial point of contact and route the call to the appropriate location for resolution. The service desk owns the call and will follow it through to ensure the customer who called in the problem is satisfied with the resolution. Having this ownership of the call enables:

- **Higher End-User Satisfaction:** The service desk is keeping the end-user well informed.

- **Increased End-User Productivity:** The service desk is tracking the problem, enabling the end-user to continue with their daily work.

- **Better Cost Control:** The service desk ensures the call is being routed to the appropriate center within the IT services business to be resolved.

The service desk also monitors all processes and trends. When the service desk notices problems within the processes or worrisome trends, they make adjustments to fix the problem before it is detected by the end-users, leading to further increases in client satisfaction.

5 Standardizing to Improve Service Delivery

While an internal service desk staff whose responsibilities are to support an internal corporate IT infrastructure may have little or no influence on establishing minimum standards for the devices, operating systems, software applications and services they maintain in order to receive services, outsourced IT service providers are by far more fortunate.

Whenever possible, service desks should strive to establish and maintain minimum standards for service qualification. This helps standardize on hardware, operating systems, software applications and services, allowing the IT service provider to require their service desk staff to maintain proficiencies, skill sets and certifications on a controlled number of supported items, rather than a growing, ever-changing variety of systems and services. The benefits of this philosophy include:

- More efficient and effective maintenance and incident resolution

- Easier end-user or client infrastructure setup and configuration of remote monitoring and management (RMM) tools and professional services automation (PSA) solutions

- Standardized performance metrics and reporting

- Faster onboarding of new clients and end-users

- Speedier training and knowledge transfer by and between new and existing NOC and service desk staff

As a result of these and other benefits, client satisfaction is increased and the job of the IT service provider and the service desk staff are made much easier.

Summary

In order to provide the highest level of service to clients, IT service providers must utilize all of the appropriate tools, as well as have the appropriate resources in place. By implementing a service desk, IT service providers will have a resource in place that is continually working to optimize IT service delivery while managing all internal and client facing operations and processes, as well as ensuring client needs are met. If implemented according to best practices, the IT service provider will enjoy decreased operating costs and increased client satisfaction.

About LabTech Software

LabTech is the only managed services platform for remote monitoring and management with automation developed by a managed service provider (MSP) for MSPs. The affordable, agent-based platform so closely emulates what technicians do in the field that the techs can provide the same support remotely. Because LabTech Software understands how to manage a growing MSP business, they make it easier to procure their software and allow partners to add agents as they grow. For more information, please visit labtechsoftware.com or call 877.522.8323.

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