The entire ticketing database should also be available to help desk staff so that they can review previous issues. A support technician should be able to search the database for tickets created by the same user or other users who have reported similar problems. That way, the technician can avoid reinventing the wheel.

You may be tempted to keep track of your help desk tickets in a home-grown database, perhaps using a database program such as Microsoft Access or a more general program such as Microsoft OneNote. However, you'll soon outgrow the home-grown solution when you discover that it isn't as flexible as you need it to be, isn't very searchable, and doesn't have the features that can make your help desk shine, such as automatic reminders or built-in workflows for delegating or escalating issues.

Fortunately, there is plenty of good software available to help you manage your help desk's trouble tickets. Just do a web search for the keywords *help desk software,* and you'll find dozens of options to choose from.

Deciding How to Communicate with Users

Users must have a reliable and responsive method of communicating with the help desk. Here are some of the best options to consider:

» **Phone:** The most obvious way to communicate is via phone. If your help desk is small, with just a few support technicians, you might simply publish the phone numbers or extensions of each of the technicians. For a larger help desk, you'll want to provide a single number for incoming calls and *not* publish the numbers for individual support technicians.

The advantage of the phone is that the contact is immediate (assuming someone actually answers the phone) and human (assuming the phone is answered by an actual person). The disadvantage is that it's difficult to triage incoming calls. Ideally, a single person should be responsible for answering incoming calls and transferring them to the appropriate technician.

You may want to consider setting up a phone tree, with options such as "Press 1 for help logging on," "Press 2 for help with accounting software," and so on. This is fine, as long as the tree is simple and users are quickly able to get to a real person who can help. If users have to make a bunch of touch-tone selections that ultimately drop them into a voicemail, they'll be frustrated.