The Future of the Proactive Service Desk

When you look at the future of the service desk, what do you see? Efficiency and automation are only part of the picture. What can you *do*?

Article Reprint

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With events like Pink Elephant's Pink14 focusing on the very best in service, IT professionals have service management in mind. But when you look ahead two, three or even ten years, what will your service desk look like?

Yes, it will be more efficient and consistent in service and performance, but those are just parts of what will happen; overall, the service desk will become more proactive. How do we get to that point?

Let's first start where any good service management starts: identifying an issue. Most service desks run on a reactive service model–a user encounters a problem, lets the service desk know about it, the service desk requests a ticket, the system creates a ticket, then IT fixes the issue. Why is this a problem?

Even if your methods work miracles, there's always room to improve–whether that means being more efficient or maybe even becoming a profit center. That's what proactive service management means. Rather than working on a problem when a user creates a ticket, the service desk should take charge of the situation before things get out of hand. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Let's look at how we can do this better.

Use tools you have, like reports and analytics. A proactive service desk will identify issues within the system by using trustworthy metrics. Some examples might be using business data to see if systems are running efficiently, or watching app usage data to see who is using certain applications. Maybe it's as simple as using HR reports to see who needs access to certain data. These metrics tell your people what they need to know so they will have a clear picture of what issues exist and how to best deal with them before users ask.

Empower your technicians to solve the problem. If someone has been with the service desk for a while, he or she will know how to fix a problem. A proactive service desk won't just use that knowledge, but will encourage its people to apply themselves. That might mean giving each individual privileges beyond what they currently have, or it might mean giving them different applications or hardware to work with. One person shouldn't have all the responsibility. When a manager encourages people to deal with IT issues and gives them the tools to do it, those people are more likely to find and fix small problems before they become big ones.

Keep connected with users. Right now, users only think of the service desk when they have a problem. They submit a work request and want the issue fixed. But what if you could take care of users before they ever had a problem? What if the service desk was the one issuing service tickets, and not users? Communicating with users will make your life a lot easier. Whether you do it through intranet, social media, text messages or in person, you should talk to users so everyone knows what's going on.

The key to this is to communicate wisely. Otherwise, users tend to feel over-informed and will avoid reading messages from the service desk. Contractors in marketing aren't going to need communications about the engineering system undergoing maintenance. Accountants don't need the latest news about the router in HR being down. When the connection between the service desk and users gets smarter, users get the information they need, and nothing they don't—subsequently, users will pay more attention to messages from the service desk.

Lastly, once you've freed up time for the service desk by doing some of these things, it might be good for one of your people to roam the floor. One of the best ways to be proactive is to go to users and ask them "Are you doing okay? Do you need anything?" Most service desks get bogged down in service tickets, but having a scheduled time for someone to go around and check on users will help the environment stay well tuned, and will also help users get to know people at the service desk so they can work together more efficiently. Plus, that technician might spot an issue before it even makes it to the service desk.

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Without the right set of products and know-how, these three things might seem like reaching for the moon. But with the right mix, organizations will be able to adapt as things change. Soon, the service desk will be issuing tickets to users for problems the user didn't know existed.

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