Service Desk Success:
An Opportunity for Differentiation

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Table of Contents

Turning Your Service Desk into a Competitive Advantage

In a world of multi-media and globalization, it is a constant struggle for organizations to stand out in a saturated marketplace. Whether you work for a financial, educational, private, health or not-for-profit organization, the need to positively differentiate your products and services from competitors is essential to your survival.

Promoting a culture of service management, both internally and externally, is the key to being more relevant to customers within any market vertical. This allows an organization to shape its products and services based on the specific requirements of its customers and encourages business confidence by providing more reliable service and support.

Internally, IT service management encourages a clear understanding of actual IT capabilities and promotes IT service continuity. In most cases, the largest percentage of the IT spend is on the day-to-day support costs, and these costs can be significantly reduced by an effective service management process.

Service management ensures IT resources are aligned with business requirements and allows the IT department to appropriately identify points of flexibility and adaptability within the services they provide. This ensures service issues and change requirements are handled efficiently and effectively to keep organizations running at an optimum level.

Achieving Service Desk Success

The point in service management where people, processes and technology meet to deliver a business service is typically at the service desk, where the essential daily contact between customers, users, IT services and third-party support organizations takes place. The main objective of the service desk is to drive and improve service support to—and on behalf of—an organization.

This customer-facing support service is a single point of contact that provides advice, guidance and rapid restoration of normal services to its customers and users. It handles incidents, problems, service, and change requests. More than this, it also manages maintenance contracts, software licenses, and provides service level management and configuration management. The customer experience (CX) includes a smart self-service component for knowledge transfer, proposed solutions and self provisioning.

The successful implementation of a service desk results in a more professional service that builds business confidence and provides greater customer satisfaction. This is a result of the professional service that is positioned to provide a consolidated and fiscally positive business activity that impacts all aspects of service beyond the IT department. The key to service desk success is the employment of professional people, well-defined and repeatable processes and good tools, which in turn makes the product or service being supported, to some degree, immaterial.

Customer Loyalty

To differentiate from the competition and make a business more critical to its customers, an organization can use customer feedback accessed through service and support to shape the company and its product/service direction. By responding consistently and appropriately to customer requests, a loyal customer base is established. This enables the business to succeed through the sale of related products and services to existing customers.

New business can also be won through the ongoing referrals from satisfied customers, and the research and development process for new products and services can be enhanced by a greater understanding of customer wants and needs.

To be successful at this endeavor, organizations can use technology to enhance the business process by harnessing IT to deliver improved customer satisfaction. Businesses can employ service management best practices and measure service results in an effort to promote an environment of continual improvement, build trust and maintain customer loyalty.

Employee Satisfaction

A service management culture also motivates staff and engenders job satisfaction through a better understanding of capability and improved management of expectations.

An investment in IT service management illustrates that organizations value their people as more than just tangible assets, as it uses technology to support—and not just monitor—employee performance. This investment also allows staff to be hired and trained relative to their capabilities, which is relevant across all areas of an organization and allows employee rewards to be linked to performance.

Employee satisfaction is also linked to customer satisfaction, which in turn fosters loyalty, profitability and accelerated business growth.

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Investment  ▶  Internal      ▶  Education    ▶  Value for  ▶  Customer     ▶  Customer
               Services          Satisfaction    Customers     Satisfaction     Loyalty
               Quality

            Employee Retention                                              Revenue Growth
            Employee Productivity                                          Profitability
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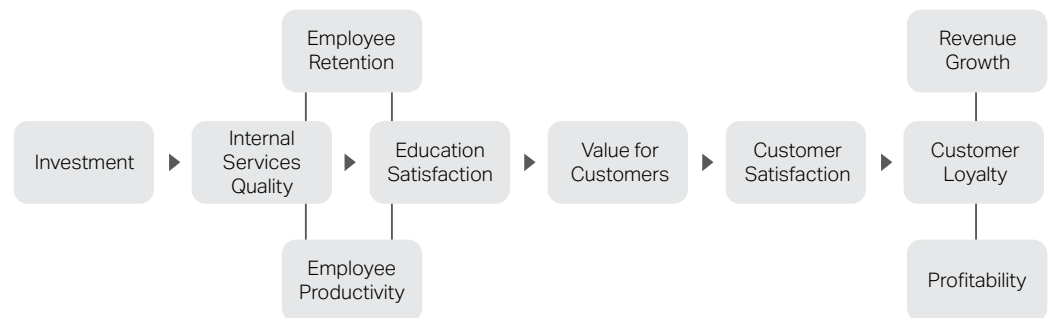
Figure 1. The service-profit chain model show how organizations can convert service desk investments into increased customer loyalty, revenue growth and profitability.

ITIL and Service Management

Service management is a generic concept and the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) provides guidelines for organizations to readily improve their IT operations and business processes. Although it makes no sense on its own, ITIL helps businesses to focus on the things that matter by aligning IT infrastructure with business services.

ITIL guidelines are scaleable and therefore relevant to any size organization, and they can be applied to distributed or centralized systems. ITIL's standards-based approach allows enterprise-specific controls to be developed and implemented in an effort to promote a culture of continuous improvement. This approach saves money when IT service management is an important piece of the organization's operations—but still falls outside organization's core business.

Improved Service Support

At the point organizations are judged based on the quality of their service support, they need to assess how their IT services meet customer and business requirements. Where a support service already exists, an organization needs to ask the following questions:

- Does our support team log and understand the technical nature of the customer's difficulty at first point of contact?
- Do they respond appropriately, prioritizing based on the degree of urgency indicated by the customer?
- Do they have the needed tools to respond to the customer's requests?

For an organization within any market, high quality and predictable IT service is required to drive increased business and revenue. However, this requires the IT service support process to move from an ad-hoc, chaotic process to an ideal of value-added service..

Achieving Service Support

To build a service support culture that underpins the success of an organization, strong leadership and vision are required. To develop a business based on service, an organization must:

1. Understand its current position. Is the service offering chaotic reactive, proactive or value based?
2. Set a goal to reach the level of service management needed to best support the business.
3. Set personal performance metrics and rewards that will encourage staff to reach beyond a reactive "fire-fighting" support mode.
4. Dedicate time and training to document repeatable processes and become proficient at their execution.
5. Continually review service levels to maintain a predictable service quality.

The implementation of formalized processes leads to more cost effective and consistent IT services, which allows organizations to handle service requests and change in an efficient way with minimal disruption to customers. Such improvements to the quality of service and support allow IT service to become a true business asset.

Selecting a Service Desk Application

Many service desk tools are available to capture and manage the service support processes for configuration, incident, problem, change and service level management. With so much variety, thought must be given to what works best for the business. The following questions can be asked regarding possible tools of choice. Which tool:

- Offers the degree of control required for your business, so continual improvement adjustments can be made easily?
- Ensures that the organization can implement best practices when it comes to service support processes?
- Allows the organization to easily map the desired workflows for each of the processes and adjust as required?
- Allows the service manager to effectively monitor the service desk performance against service agreements?

> Smart service management decisions and the right kind of service management technology can lead directly to higher revenues and increased profits.

- Provides tight integration between the change management process and configuration management—to the extent that data can be drawn from an asset management discovery tool and automatically create a change request before being entered into the CMDB?
- Is so easy to use that it requires minimal training for customers and users alike?
- Does not require a full time administrator?
- Capitalizes on the organization's current infrastructure?
- Includes reporting capabilities to monitor performance against service agreements?

Other questions to be considered include:

- How is the tool configured? Is it possible to customize the solution through the user interface or only through the back-end?
- Is the application fully accessible from anywhere?
- Can the application's functionality be extended using other programs or web services?
- Does the application provide an intuitive customer/user experience (CX/UX)?

Conclusion

The implementation of service support standards provides organizations with the opportunity to differentiate their business and service offerings from their competitors. To be successful, an organization must make an honest assessment of its current position and use this as the basis for planning its future achievements.

To successfully provide predictable, high-quality service, businesses must develop formalized processes that are constantly monitored and reviewed. In order to achieve this, the service desk application adopted by the organization must tightly integrate incident, problem and change Management with an easy-to-use workflow engine and the service level management process.

To ensure the cost effectiveness of the IT infrastructure, an embedded CMDB must be easily accessible to the change management team.

To guarantee the service desk is running at an optimum level and meeting its service targets, reports should be easy to generate and readily distributed to the relevant parties. And as customer communication is paramount for maintaining satisfaction, this should be provided through multiple channels, including e-mail and a customer portal. A central port of knowledge should also be readily accessible to re-cycle useful information and solutions and empower customers to provide their own fixes.

The change process required to implement a culture of service and support requires support across the organization as a whole. A standards-based approach such as ITIL provides the guidelines for making the change, which result in the alignment of business objectives and customer needs with IT infrastructure that provides benefits across all facets of the organization and ultimately to the bottom line.

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