

# Next Level Service Desk Strategies



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## Introduction

Service Desks today are facing unprecedented challenges in the way that they support customers and employees. They are being asked to support an ever-increasing array of devices and systems – which in itself presents numerous challenges and issues – and are also having to adapt to people’s working patterns and lifestyle by offering increased hours of support and different ways to support customers.

*“This eGuide will look at some of the ways the Service Desk can get a handle on determining what systems and devices they support, and will examine how the Service Desk can be best placed to support customers.”*

- *The Home in the Office Conundrum*
- *The Future of Support*
- *Strategies for Supporting Customers through Technology*
- *Creating a Support Strategy*

This eGuide will look at some of the ways the Service Desk can get a handle on determining what systems and devices they support, and will examine how the Service Desk can be best placed to support customers. In essence, the best way to ensure that the Service Desk remains a core asset and not a hindrance is to manage customer expectations and to involve and consult them. The challenges that Service Desks face are not insurmountable and in fact offer a real opportunity to define service delivery for years to come.

## The Home in the Office Conundrum

Technology is advancing at an exponential rate. Additionally, the proliferation of IT has meant that there are more choices than ever before and competition has meant that prices are keen and affordable. What this means is that users’ systems at home often out perform those that they use at work. Most customers accept this, but what’s more difficult for them to understand is why their IT experiences at home cannot be easily replicated in the office. At home, users can easily install a wide variety of programs and can access any websites and install any hardware that they wish. Additionally, virus software has become more ubiquitous and its incorporation into operating systems has meant that its use is widely accepted, so the security risks can be managed better than ever before.

What we’re seeing is that users are becoming increasingly frustrated that the speed, convenience and ease of use that they’ve become accustomed to at home does not

mirror their office experience. Add into this mix the ease of use of online retail by e-commerce sites such as Amazon, eBay or Play and the frustrations are increased even further. These sites offer a wealth of product information, customer reviews, live chat facilities and expansive self help mechanisms and comprehensive FAQs and knowledge databases that when combined have made retail a pleasurable and efficient experience. This ease of use and community aspect has changed the way that customers think about their interactions with IT.

The other key point to consider is that technical expertise in the home – as a result of the familiarity with technology and systems – is developing the situation that users feel that they know more about their particular PC problems than their Service Desk. Increasingly, they view the IT department as incompetent and slow as they are used to fixing their own problems at home with a minimum of fuss and time. They become frustrated at the loops that they have to jump through to get their issue attended to, and the rules and restrictions that govern what they can and can't do with their work systems.

### **Creating a Support Strategy**

In light of the challenges faced by the Service Desk, there is a pressing need to create a pragmatic and coherent strategy to enable Service Desks to support mobile workers and set clear parameters about what hardware and services that they support. Defining a strategy will be a comprehensive and involved process and needs to focus on consultation with all affected groups and workers and different areas and aspects of the business.

### **What are the Service Desk's Capabilities?**

- **What can we support?** This is a seemingly simple question, but one which will be vital in determining your Service Desk's strategy. Some key areas of focus will be hours of support; the technical and customer service skills of your Service Desk team; and product and business knowledge. You might have people on the desk who are already keen and informed users of Blackberries or iPhones: gauging the knowledge of your desk is a great way to help you decide what they are capable of.
- **What services can we offer now?** Some of the services that are requested by the business or users may already be in operation but are not being utilised or marketed effectively. This is an ideal opportunity to audit your Service Desk and see if current support systems are working effectively, and if they're not then to find out why.
- **Analyse your metrics.** Ideally, any decisions about support services will be informed by metrics to allow you to see the usage for each support service, its effectiveness, and its cost. Knowing which channels of support are most effective and how much they cost to operate will go a long way to helping

your Service Desk make key decisions about existing support services and the impact on service of additional supported devices or support channels.

- **Budget.** Ultimately, many support decisions will come down to whether there is budget available or not, so it's vital that you know exactly what the Service Desk's budget is; how much additional funding is available; and what the extra cost of support would be (if any) of increasing the opening hours of the Service Desk or employing new staff. You'll also need to look at the training budget to see if there is money available for additional training courses.

### What are we being asked to do?

- **Consultation.** This is the core step of the support process. It's important that the Service Desk courts and collects customer and business feedback on its current support operations and what they would like the Service Desk to offer in the future. One way of doing this would be to create a customer 'wish list' whereby all customers of the Service Desk are invited to share 1, 2 or 3 Service Desk 'wishes'. These might include support for Blackberry, increased operating hours; remote support etc. Once these wishes have been collected, the Service Desk can then conduct meetings with customers and key business areas to discuss the wishes and construct a list of top priorities. Involving the business in the consultation process demonstrates that the Service Desk is proactively seeking feedback from its customers and that it is attuned to the needs of the business.
- **Customer Satisfaction.** A large part of creating support strategies is to review current customer feedback. What have been the big areas of success and where has the Service Desk fallen down? Has the consultation process revealed any insights that complement the feedback or have new areas been identified?
- **Benchmarking.** As part of the consultation process, it might be a good idea to benchmark yourself against other Service Desks within your business area by arranging site visits. What type of service do they offer to customers? What devices do they support? What have been their challenges and how have they overcome them? Learning from others is a great way to avoid making the same mistakes and to ensure that you are matching (or indeed exceeding) other desks within the same business sphere.

### How can we achieve these goals?

- **Review.** Once the consultation process and an audit of the Service Desk has been completed then you'll be in a strong position to decide what is and is not possible. It may be the case that none of the customer wishes can be fulfilled or that only some of them can. The key to this stage of the process is communication – if the Service Desk cannot support iPhones or the broadband connection that customers use at home, then let them know why. If it's genuinely something that you're looking to offer support for in the future then let the customers know. Most customers will appreciate that the Service Desk

has considered their wish and have provided good reasons for why it's not possible. Just saying no will not suffice, especially if customers have invested time and effort in thinking about their 'wishes' and putting them forward.

- **What will we support?** The answer to this will come from what customers have identified in the consultation meetings and also what the Service Desk can currently support. There also needs to be a prioritisation process – a company-wide move to a mobile workforce with more people working out of the office might mean that offering remote support is simply non-negotiable. Another issue might be that 95 percent of workers use Blackberries and 5 percent iPhones or other smartphones – how to decide what to support? The decision will come down to the Service Desk's confidence and ability to offer excellent support – they don't want to offer mediocre support simply so they can say 'look we do support iPhones'. When the list of supported workers, hardware and devices has been established it's important that the list is disseminated throughout the organisation so that customers know what they can expect from the Service Desk. Marketing supported devices is a key way of managing expectations and ensuring that customers are not disappointed.
- **Marketing.** Just offering new methods of support and devices is not enough – customers need to know what you are doing. To achieve this it's necessary to market your new list of supported hardware and devices and make sure that customers know if you are offering remote support and extended opening hours. If customers don't know what you support and how you support it then the efforts involved to get to this stage will be in vain.
- **What's the business impact (and value)?** Offering new channels of support and broadening the range of supported devices will have an impact not only on the Service Desk but the business as well, so it's important to assess what the outcome has been. Has the provision of remote support increased productivity and allowed users to work more effectively in remote locations? Has support for mobile devices meant that the business is more agile and versatile? Often it will not be easy to pinpoint any immediate examples of success, but by consistently courting customer feedback they should become apparent. If it's possible to attach a value to these improvements in support (such as improved) then it will provide a very strong business case and will justify future training or spending requirements.

### What has Changed?

- **How has service been impacted?** Supporting additional services, hardware or changing opening hours will have an impact on other areas of service. Therefore it's important to understand what the impact has been and often this will be assessed through metrics. Some of the trends will be easy to see: if call waiting times have increased then it suggests that these new services are putting additional strains on the desk and more resources are needed. In another example, maybe support calls for the new devices you're supporting

are taking a longer time than support for existing devices – this might indicate that extra training is required to help bring this number down. Whatever the changes and impact it's important to understand what's happened so that service is not negatively impacted.

- **What does customer feedback look like now?** One of the key things that you'll want to discover is how changes to service have affected customer feedback – after all a lot of the changes to service will have been driven by customer input. Ideally, customer satisfaction will have increased as result of the changes that have been made. To determine this you could send out the same satisfaction survey that you always do and see if there has been any change. Alternatively, you might want to get specific and ask how things have changed as a result of the new services and hardware that you support.

**Schedule periodic reviews.** Changes to service need to be monitored and assessed at regular intervals to determine the impact. This not only involves looking at and analysing the Service Desk's metrics, but also to see what improvements can be made. Is the remote support channel being utilised on a regular basis? Is it improving the time taken to resolve incidents? How can we improve the service offered? Asking these type of questions on a regular basis will ensure that you can continually improve the service that is offered and delivered and this will contribute to the Service Desk's continual service improvement programme. Identifying where improvements need to be made is a core component of IT service, one that can only be achieved through periodic reviews with all the affected parties.

- **What's the Service Desk's business position?** Hopefully, by listening and responding to customer feedback and 'wishes' the Service Desk will have demonstrated that it is receptive to its customers' needs and those of the business. The task now is to market and share these achievements so that the business at large understands and appreciates what you have done. Marketed correctly, these service improvements should help to elevate the stature of your Service Desk and increase your business alignment. Make sure that a comprehensive marketing plan forms part of your Service Desk strategy.

### **Strategies for Supporting Customers through Technology**

If you've decided what devices you will support and how you will support them, it's time to consider strategies in offering support. New ways of supporting customers (such as remote support, live chat, etc.) come with their own unique challenges that will force you to reconsider how you support customers. Every desk will have a certain process and strategy for interaction by phone (standard greeting; logging the call correctly; ensure that service is professional and courteous, etc.), but what about remote support or live chat? Below are some ways to create a support strategy for different channels and systems of support.

## **Culture**

There will always be users who will adapt to new methods of support much more readily than others. Using remote support and live chat will ultimately be beneficial to customers and the organization, but it is important to remember that the Service Desk has to deliver the service that its customers demand and expect. Good support solutions should always be underpinned by a continuing provision for phone and e-mail support, and it must remain at a high standard. It is important that customers are aware that IT management, remote support and live chat are only two of the possible avenues for support. Cultural acceptance of new support channels will only improve with good customer experiences and will encourage them to spread the message and become an extension of your marketing campaign.

## **Customer service skills**

It is easy to forget that the most important asset of your Service Desk is the customer service skills of your Service Desk team. In a recent SDI webinar, we found that attendees voted customer service skills as the most important attribute they look for in a potential candidate. Customer service skills trumped technical knowledge and other skills and qualifications. What this demonstrates is that despite the variety of support channels that Service Desks offer, customer service is still overwhelmingly the key asset for a support rep to possess – this underlines that we very much exist in a customer service industry.

With this in mind it is important that customer service skills are developed through training and are constantly monitored. Providing training for soft skills will ensure that reps are consistently striving to improve and make sure that they are developing and demonstrating the right habits. Managers should also ensure that they are monitoring reps' support sessions, calls and e-mails on a regular basis to determine if they are meeting the required standards for the desk. By constantly monitoring, managers can determine if there are any areas of weakness and where improvements can be made.

## **Deliver customer service**

It is important to make sure that technology is underpinned by a high level of customer service – the customer needs to feel that they are being dealt with in a human and personal way, even if the interaction is via technology rather than by telephone or face-to-face. This is also true of remote support where it needs to be explained to the customer what the rep is going to do; whether the customer is comfortable with the rep taking control of their machine, and the reason behind offering support in this way. Remote support offers a great opportunity to improve support and enhance the ability for reps to solve user problems and issues. Being able to fix more incidents will improve the impression of the Service Desk and, by extension, enhance the customer experience. What we're saying here is that technology offers a real opportunity to improve customer support, and to deliver better service, but it is vitally important that technological advances do not come at

the expense of reduced customer service. Technology should be leveraged to improve the customer experience, not to replace the human element and customer service aspect of service delivery.

It is important to ensure that whatever the channel of support you are delivering the service that you have agreed (or sold) with your customers. If there are SLAs in place then they need to be adhered to, but additionally Service Desks make promises to customers in terms of customer service and expectations. Through whatever channel an incident is raised, the desk needs to demonstrate ownership and responsibility and keep the customer updated throughout the process. It's important to remember that every channel of support needs to have the same uniform service to ensure that one channel does not slip through the net. This is especially important if Service Desks are introducing new channels for support such as live chat or remote support – one bad experience for the customer might mean that they are dissuaded from using this channel again which will undo all of the work that has been put in to developing it.

Knowing your customers' constraints, their knowledge and level of understanding, their issues and common complaints will put you in tune with their needs and those of the business. The Service Desk must understand who their customers are; how and where they use support; and what you can do to make their lives easier. A sound understanding of the business is vital if the Service Desk wants to be a core business asset and become an integral part of the business. Technology is great, but there really is no substitute for human understanding and awareness.

### **The Future of Support**

In many ways the move towards new methods of support is already happening right now, which is why it is so vital that Service Desks create the correct strategies to ensure that they stay ahead of the curve. Whatever devices you choose to support and the strategy you create, the end goal must be to keep the workforce working. This is the heart of what every Service Desk is designed to do, and the strategy must be built with this ultimate goal in mind. The strategy that we have outlined above will ensure that your customers have the greatest input possible, whilst also allowing the Service Desk the ability to draw a line and state what they do support and what they don't. What we're really saying then is that strategies and future developments will be predicated on one core mechanism – communication. Understanding your customers and allowing them to gain an insight into your trials and challenges will improve the perception of your Service Desk and make your service appear more human and engaging.

Another major advance we're seeing in the IT service sphere is service catalogues. In a nutshell, service catalogues detail all the hardware that the Service Desk support. The most savvy Service Desks include the cost of support in this catalogue, which in turn means that IT users truly are customers of IT. By including the cost of support, customers are forced to make decisions: do I choose the latest and greatest smartphone even though it costs more than a last generation one? Including the cost

of support creates an incredible transparency about the cost of IT and places the ball firmly in the customers' court. Customers then have to justify why they want a particular device or piece of hardware and they can be held responsible for their choices. Calculating the cost of support for each device can be difficult, but if you have a firm grip of the cost of support then it should be possible to calculate it.

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*“The challenges that the Service Desk industry will face should be embraced as opportunities and possibilities.”*

The challenges that the Service Desk industry will face should be embraced as opportunities and possibilities. There are now more ways than ever to support customers and to improve the service that is delivered. The decisions that need to be made now will place the Service Desk in a formidable position at the very heart of the organisation and will demonstrate that they are the perfect conduit between customers and the business.

### **About The Service Desk Institute (SDI)**

Founded in 1988 by Howard Kendall, the Service Desk Institute (SDI) is the leading authority on service desk and IT support related issues, providing specialist information and research about the technologies, tools and trends of the industry. It is Europe's only support network for IT service desk professionals, and its 800 organisation members span numerous industries.

Acting as an independent adviser, SDI captures and disseminates creative and innovative ideas for tomorrow's service desk and support operation. SDI sets the best practice standards for the IT support industry and is the conduit for delivering knowledge and career enhancing skills to the professional community, through membership, training, conferences, events and its publication SupportWorld magazine. It also offers the opportunity for international recognition of the support centre operation through its globally recognised Service Desk Certification audit programme.



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