Help Desk
Best Practices

LabTech™

As an IT service provider, you know the key to maintaining customer satisfaction is keeping IT functions running smoothly for your clients.

While it isn't possible to have 100% operational up time, it is possible to be prepared when issues arise so the business impact to your clients is minimal. To accomplish this, many IT service providers implement a help desk to deliver first contact resolution for issues that are currently disrupting a client's IT infrastructure.

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Critical For Your IT Services Business

A help desk is a *vital* resource for any IT services business. The help desk is designed to provide clients with an immediate point of contact when they experience problems with their IT services. The ultimate goal of the help desk is to offer first contact resolution as often and as quickly as possible.

Help desks employ knowledgeable personnel to assist with IT issues utilizing a multi-tiered support model. Implementation of this multi-tiered support varies widely among IT service providers. In one IT business, it may be one technician available via mobile device. In another, it may be several people who perform some of the support in-house and several people from another company that are contracted for additional support when needed. Whichever support model is chosen, a help desk must have knowledgeable employees trained in the appropriate technologies in order to deliver an immediate response to end-user IT needs.

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2 Running a Best-Practice Help Desk: The Standards to Live By

When implementing a help desk, the most strategic method to follow is the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) best practices. An ITIL best practice help desk must provide:

- Single point of contact for IT interruptions

- Computer or software consultations

- Tracking capabilities of all incoming problems

- Problem escalation procedures

- Problem resolution

Implementation of best practices for help desk services is outlined in the service management best practices section of ITIL version 3. These areas include:

- **Knowledge Management:** A help desk needs a system that improves operational efficiencies by reducing the time spent to rediscover previous incidents or problems.

- **Problem Management:** A help desk should have a system that gathers information during incident management to help spot problems. This system will identify the root cause of frequent recurring incidents by capturing information in a knowledge base.

- **Access Management:** A help desk should act as the keepers of the user accounts along with password resets. Single ownership by the help desk will ensure quicker response time for end-users with username or password problems.

- **Service Catalog:** A help desk should have a published service catalog, ideally with pricing information and detailed service descriptions included.

3 Focusing on the End-User

A help desk fixes problems that are taking place at that instant and is most concerned with end-user functionality. One way of implementing a help desk is for the IT service provider to establish and meet minimum requirements to get an end-user back in service once an incident is reported. However, a best practice help desk utilizes processes and software to minimize IT service interruptions both reactively and proactively.

A help desk provides incident management to ensure clients' problems are resolved in a timely fashion. A best practice help desk utilizes software to track incidents – making sure that nothing gets lost. The help desk manages a database that keeps track of IT assets, enabling access (on a real-time basis) to information about software and configuration of each client's IT system. The help desk has the ability to create monthly and annual reports on the number of issues, the time to respond to issues and the time to fix issues – all which might feed into a service level agreement (SLA).

Additional tasks supported by the help desk include:

- Computer or software consultations

- Change and configuration management

- Problem escalation procedures

- Problem resolution

- Service level agreements

- Tracking capabilities of all incoming problems

Most importantly, a help desk meets the most essential needs of the end-user – it gets them operational as quickly as possible.

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4 Roles and Responsibilities

Within a help desk, there are different levels of responsibilities. From a management standpoint, the help desk manager determines the daily duties of the help desk staff. It is the manager's responsibility to oversee the help desk and ensure the proper identification, prioritization and assignment of all alerts/service requests and proactive maintenance duties to the appropriate queue, tier or resource.

Industry best practices dictates there be a minimum of three levels of support within the help desk:

1st Level Support
The responsibility of 1st level support is to register and classify received incidents and to undertake an immediate effort to restore a failed IT service as quickly as possible.

- If no ad-hoc solution can be achieved, 1st level support will transfer the incident to expert technical support groups (2nd level support)

- 1st level support also processes service requests and keeps users informed about their incident status at agreed upon intervals

2nd Level Support
The role of 2nd level support is to take over incidents that cannot be solved quickly by 1st level support.

- If necessary, 2nd level support will request external support (e.g. from software or hardware manufacturers)

- The aim is to restore a failed IT service as quickly as possible

- If no solution can be found, 2nd level support passes the incident to problem management

3rd Level Support
3rd level support is typically based on-location at hardware or software manufacturers.

- 3rd level services are requested by 2nd level support personnel if needed to solve an incident

- The aim is to restore a failed IT service as quickly as possible

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5 What Should a Help Desk Support?

Besides acting as the first point of contact for IT-related questions and issues, many help desks rely on their remote monitoring and management (RMM) tool to proactively monitor client IT systems, alert on any identified issues and generate service requests in their professional services automation (PSA) solution. This ensures proactive and efficient IT service delivery, as well as proper documentation and tracking of IT issues.

A fully-functional help desk should also perform the following support tasks:

- Review RMM monitoring reports to identify issues or trends that may impact service or business process continuity for clients or end-users in order to address them in advance of potential interruption; or for capacity planning purposes

- Script or manually deliver required hardware, operating system, application software or service updates, patches and hotfixes

- Assist in new client onboarding activities

- Customize, produce and deliver performance reports to internal NOC management

- Modify and tune alerting and thresholds on monitored devices, operating systems, application software and services to improve effectiveness and efficiency

- Manage, maintain and update internal, client and end-user infrastructure documentation, processes and procedures in the PSA solution

Summary

A help desk is critical to the operations of an IT services business. As a centralized intake location for technical issues, it allows for a responsive and timely solution to get clients and their staff back to business as usual. In addition to handling immediate IT issues, a help desk performs several proactive tasks to ensure clients' IT systems remain operational and downtime is minimized. Thus, utilizing a help desk and following best practices can improve the productivity, efficiency and satisfaction of both clients and the IT service provider.

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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Source: Gibson, Kevin and Southmayd, Vernon. IT Service Excellence Toolkit: How to meet and exceed customer expectations to ensure customer retention. 2012.