

Higher States of Operational Efficiency – Seeking Utopia

Competitive pressures and rapid technology changes are driving managed service providers (MSPs) to seek greater efficiencies in IT service delivery to their small and medium-sized business (SMBs) customers. In fact, increasing operational efficiency is not only the number one challenge cited by IT resellers, but also the most difficult to achieve when adopting managed services, according to a recent CompTia survey.

There are multiple dimensions to operational efficiency. For some IT firms newer to the managed services model, simply moving beyond “break/fix” and leveraging remote monitoring and management (RMM) software can produce immediate productivity gains. Indeed the ability to automate routine tasks can go a long way toward reducing onsite calls and coping with the daunting task of monitoring hundreds of server alerts.

However, the advantages offered by RMM software also present new challenges and responsibilities that stretch an MSP’s time and resources such as:



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- Keeping servers, software and infrastructure consistently up and running and ensuring support staff is available 24/7
- Analyzing server alerts and identifying steps to resolution
- Performing remote maintenance on desktops and servers; deploying patches and antivirus updates is only part of the task as testing, troubleshooting failed patches goes beyond the capabilities of a software application
- Providing onsite data backup and offsite replication for disaster recovery

In addition, provisioning a server can be complicated when determining what exactly to monitor, what policies and thresholds to set, which alerts are real and which ones are false positives. This is an ongoing maintenance task due to new error codes that are distributed along with periodic vendor releases.

Leveraging a more robust RMM platform that includes a 24/7 Network Operations Center (NOC) is arguably the most important critical element for MSPs who are seeking higher states of operational efficiency. Armed with the engineering expertise of a NOC, MSPs have significant advantages over a software only approach. Just one example can be illustrated in the following workflow:

RMM software only approach	Integrated RMM and NOC platform
Multiple alerts are triggered based on server and device event logs and performance issues	Multiple alerts are triggered based on server and device event logs and performance issues
Multiple alerts are sent to the MSP	Using business rules, the RMM platform and NOC intelligently correlate and filter thousands of alerts; 80%-90% of alerts are resolved remotely without MSP involvement
MSP filters through alerts and determines if the alerts are caused by the same issue	A single ticket is issued to the MSP that explains the actions taken by the NOC to resolve issues
MSP researches the alerts to find the root cause of the problem	If the MSP decides to resolve problems themselves, they receive detailed step-by-step instructions on how to resolve issues
MSP attempts to resolve the issue based on knowledge gained from research	

With NOC assistance, server issues that typically take hours to resolve with a software only approach (as illustrated above) are resolved in minutes with an integrated NOC and RMM platform. MSPs can be more productive on multiple fronts with faster problem resolution and a “first fix/right fix” advantage. In addition, tapping into the resources and expertise of a NOC means that MSPs can offload many mundane tasks such as routine server and desktop maintenance and testing/correcting failed patches before deploying them across a network.

It all adds up to a higher state of operational efficiency: MSPs who have moved up the managed services value chain report that incident resolution time is reduced by 40% and technician workload can be increased by 30%.

While a NOC can help deliver tremendous efficiency gains, it is important for MSPs to perform their due diligence and ask:

- Is the NOC tightly integrated with the RMM platform or does the NOC operate as a separate entity?
- If the NOC is a separate entity, ask how will Information get transferred? If the process flow in the software isn't operationally sound, how much control does the network operations and monitoring teams have over the development and workflow of the software tool itself?
- What type of history and track record does the NOC have resolving system issues? Does the NOC leverage a vast knowledgebase that allows for optimized remediation of server, software and operating systems issues? Such a knowledgebase takes years to build and requires a methodology for codifying NOC expertise into business rules that are used to intelligently remediate system issues.

For MSPs seeking higher states of operational efficiency and looking to scale their business without scaling their costs, drawing on the best practices of an experienced NOC that is tightly integrated with an RMM platform has become a must have.

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