FIVE WAYS TO PROVIDE A WORLD CLASS SERVICE DESK EXPERIENCE

This

blog is the first in our five-part series on "Delivering a World Class Service Desk." In subsequent blogs we'll explore key elements of success including providing hiring the best candidates, measuring the right things, knowing when to outsource and offshore, and managing capacity. Today, we'll begin with a discussion of five ways you can provide the world-class service desk experience your users demand and expect—and your business success depends on.

The service desk has always been a critical element of IT, but in this era of digital business, helping users maintain peak productivity takes on truly strategic importance. And it's also harder than ever to do so. As enterprise environments become more complex, users and their tools become more sophisticated, and business pressures become more intense, you've got to raise your game to meet the challenge. The first step is to make sure the experience your service desk provides meets users' expectations while showcasing the responsiveness, skill, and professionalism of your IT organization. Here are five ways to achieve that goal.

1. **Put people and relationships first**

The service desk revolves around personal interactions, and their dynamics make a big difference in its effectiveness. An adversarial or remote relationship can make users less likely to seek the help they need, or erode morale among service desk personnel who feel unappreciated by their customers. To ensure a harmonious and productive relationship, it's essential to invest in both your team and your customers. You can think about it in terms of these three Cs:

- **Care** – Pay attention to the work environment and education you provide for your help desk staff. When they feel comfortable, confident, and empowered, they'll project that positive outlook to customers.
- **Culture** – Wow customers with the attitudes and behaviors you cultivate. Customer advocacy is critical—your staff should take pride in representing the interests of users. Make sure continual improvement is woven into your DNA.
- **Community** – Keep expertise and advice flowing freely among users and staff through forums, social and crowdsourcing tools, blogs, posts, and comments—better communication can drive better results.

2. **Have a strategy**

This sounds obvious, but it's easy to get caught up in day-to-day operations and lose sight of the big picture. To be as effective as possible, you need to:

- **Know your customers, know your demand** – Learn your customer's critical business processes. Full awareness of the impact of an issue is critical for timely escalation and engagement of essential resources.
- **Define success and align processes** – Know how to measure performance using the right metrics, KPIs, and critical success factors aligned to business outcomes. We'll talk more about this in a future blog.
- **Manage business value, not just cost** – Understand where you're driving the most value so you can align investments and resources based on true impact, not just dollars and cents.

3. **Enable the right kinds of self-service**

A consumerized workforce is fertile ground for self-service—as long as you go about it in the right way. Self-service is most suitable for high-volume, well defined, and pre-authorized service request

fulfillment. You can also apply self-service to certain high-volume incidents, but the priority for a world-class service desk should really be to reduce and eliminate incidents like these through problem management.

How much is too much self-service? We've all had experiences with complicated problems where we clearly needed personal attention from a helpful representative—but instead had to comb through search results, navigate verbose IVRs, and interact with over-scripted chat-bots. Self-service should be a value-add, not a barrier to live help. No one should ever have to keep yelling "representative!" in desperation.

Training videos can be excellent self-service tools if they are well-produced, informative, and digestible in reasonable chunks. You don't want to belabor simple concepts with overly long videos; similarly, you don't want to burn people out with documentary-length productions that cover too much ground on complicated topics. Bite-sized segments make for the most effective and efficient learning experiences.

Your knowledge base can be a tremendous resource for users and help divert many Level 1 calls. Make sure your QA team publishes known errors and workarounds for new systems before they're deployed into production so the answers are ready when users need them. Articles should be of consistent quality and actually solve the problem—or, if no solution is available, acknowledge the issue and provide a timeframe for resolution. The search function is mission-critical; it doesn't matter how good your content is if people can't get accurate results quickly and easily.

4. **Use the best technology**

ITSM tools have evolved rapidly in recent years—and your service desk genuinely needs those next-generation features to get the job done. Self-service portals and social capabilities can help users meet their own needs, while geographic awareness capabilities, mobile apps, and remote control tools enable your staff to deliver service wherever it's needed. Communications channels should encompass IVR, CTI, live chat, and video conferencing; for major deployments and incidents, you should be ready to provide information and assistance at scale via email, SMS, and intranet.

5. **Bring the future to the now**

Your service desk should be every bit as innovative as the business it supports. Adopt a digital business model to empower your help desk to provide better service. Use predictive analytics to anticipate and meet dynamic needs more effectively. Self-healing services and self-aware systems can improve uptime and performance for the systems your staff relies on. Skills development should be an ongoing process to keep up with dynamic enterprise technologies and ever-changing business and user needs. Continually review and adjust metrics so you're always aligning effort with impact. And always, always stay close to your customers so you can understand what they need now, what they'll need tomorrow, and how you can better provide the world class help desk experience they deserve.

Many of the tools and innovations I've mentioned here have already been implemented and recognized as best of breed in the BMC ITSM platforms.   For my next blog, we'll explore hiring practices for a world class service desk.