How to Improve Service Quality through Service Desk Consolidation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In most organizations, the service desk is the primary (if not the only) point of contact between external customers and the organization. As a result, many customers form their perceptions of your company based entirely on their service desk experience. That makes the service desk a critical factor for business success.

Many companies now have multiple, disparate service desks located throughout their organization. This drives up costs, makes it difficult to deliver excellent customer service, and hampers the ability of these companies to do the following:

- Allocate staff resources to provide consistent service across all service desks
- Share data and knowledge across disconnected teams so service desk staff have the information they need to deliver high-quality service to customers
- Integrate multiple service desk technologies from multiple vendors to facilitate monitoring and management
- Deliver the support quality required while keeping costs in check

This paper discusses why you should consolidate all the service desks across your enterprise into a single, unified, and integrated system, and it includes an approach for how to do it successfully. With consolidation, you’ll no longer have to deal with the inherent problems of multiple service desk technologies from multiple vendors. You’ll reduce the number of service desks, improve the quality of support, and reduce costs.

The business benefits of service desk consolidation provide compelling justification to counter any resistance from groups who might be reluctant to move from current, familiar systems. For example, a worldwide communications equipment manufacturer consolidated 25 service desks into one and achieved efficiencies from this consolidation that led to a $32 million in savings for IT service management.

This paper does the following:

- Examines the fragmented service desk situation found in many organizations today and the resulting problems
- Describes an approach to service desk consolidation that eliminates these problems
- Presents the criteria that an underlying service management technology must meet to enable the approach
- Discusses the resulting business benefits and presents several examples of organizations that have implemented the approach and realized these benefits
EXPANDING ROLE, CUSTOMER BASE, AND CHALLENGES

Today, the service desk is responsible for supporting a growing number of external and internal users, including business partners and customers. In many organizations today, the service desk is also responsible for supporting areas well beyond IT-supplied applications and services. For example, through the service desk, managers can request everything needed to support the onboarding of employees, sales representatives can request marketing collateral, and customers can request information or service upgrades.

The expanding role of the service desk has been accompanied by rapid organizational growth, both organically and through mergers and acquisitions. As a result, today’s service desks are faced with the challenge of supporting large and diverse user constituencies, rapidly increasing call volumes, broader geographical coverage, and a growing array of products and services — all while maintaining high-quality service and containing costs.

The quality of service provided by the service desk helps shape customer satisfaction. However, IT, like other organizations, is under pressure to reduce costs, and this pressure has direct impact on support operations.

In many cases, IT organizations have created multiple service desks across the enterprise to serve different geographies, business units, user constituencies, and products and services. However, multiple service desks create obstacles that hinder the support staff in delivering high-quality, customer-satisfying support that is consistent and cost effective. Having multiple service desks can be inefficient due to the duplication of effort that goes into maintaining the data in all those different service desk applications. Multiple service desk applications usually require multiple CMDB instances and duplicate data entry for service level agreements (SLAs) and knowledge bases, as well as all the customer and support staff information. In addition, multiple service desks can create customer confusion and inconvenience, which can reduce customer satisfaction.

SUPPORT STAFF OBSTACLES

Multiple service desks create several challenges for the support team, as described below.

**Inconsistent Processes** — Many service desk processes are inconsistent across service desks. In addition, processes may involve time-consuming and error-prone manual tasks. The result is low efficiency, high support costs, and inconsistent support quality.

**Disparate Technologies to Purchase, Maintain, and Staff** — Multiple service desks often result in multiple service desk technologies. You have to purchase multiple licenses and numerous support contracts from various vendors. That's costly and it hinders your ability to negotiate volume discounts. You also have to maintain a variety of skillsets for the support staff. That drives up personnel costs and training requirements, and limits your flexibility in adjusting staff allocations to meet changing business requirements.

**Lack of Adequate Integration Across Technologies** — It's extremely difficult to integrate multiple technologies. Poor integration fragments support processes, resulting in an inefficient workflow. Failure to integrate technologies also fragments information, so each service desk has only a partial view of the IT environment. This incomplete view limits the service desk staff member’s understanding of the technical and business ramifications of incidents.

Because the service desk staff cannot see all the physical and logical dependencies of the IT infrastructure components, they cannot quickly determine the scope of incidents. When they cannot see the relationships among the IT infrastructure components and the services they support, they cannot intelligently prioritize incidents based on business impact. This confusion reduces efficiency. And if your staff members see only a portion of incidents and can access only a fraction of the support organization's full knowledge base, they are hindered in their ability to correlate incidents and provide workarounds to users.

Lack of integration also makes it challenging for managers to roll up information across service desks, inhibiting their ability to monitor and manage the overall service desk operation, as well as track the costs. It's also difficult for them to track overall performance metrics and to monitor performance against service level agreements (SLAs). Because they cannot easily get the consolidated information they need, managers are hampered in their ability to maximize service quality while minimizing costs.
**Customer Dissatisfaction** — Imagine how annoying it would be to call a service desk for assistance with a vendor’s product or service, only to be referred to a different telephone number because the desk you called does not support that particular product or service. Are your customers facing similar frustrating situations with your organization’s service desks? When customers call a customer service line, they want results — not a referral to someone else. Customers want one number to call, regardless of their locations or the products or services for which they need assistance.

**MEETING THE CHALLENGE THROUGH SERVICE DESK CONSOLIDATION**

You can meet the challenge to deliver consistent, high-quality customer service and drive down service desk costs by consolidating your service desks. Think of how much simpler this would be for you, the support staff, and your customers if you could consolidate all service desks down to a single system.

You can accomplish this objective by standardizing on a single service the technology for all service desk staff members across your enterprise, regardless of their geographies, their business units, or the types of users they support. (See Figure 1.)

![Consolidated Service Desk Diagram](image)

**Figure 1.** Consolidated service desk

The consolidated service desk should provide several important capabilities, as described below.

**SUPPORT ALL CUSTOMER CONTACTS, INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL**

The service desk must be capable of handling all customer contacts — including internal and external customers — across geographies, throughout different business units, and across product lines. In addition, the service desk needs to effectively manage different types of activities. This includes managing incident and problem reporting, helping customers navigate various user interfaces, fulfilling requests for information such as product brochures and data sheets, and fulfilling requests for services such as provisioning new employees. Be sure to follow guidance from the IT Infrastructure Library® (ITIL®) for approaches to service-desk best practices.
**PROVIDE SERVICE DESK STAFF WITH ACCESS TO COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION**

Multiple service desks result in fragmented information, where staff members have access to only a limited amount of information. Both the service desk staff and their customers suffer. For example, the support staff may spend unnecessary time resolving issues for which people at other service desks have already created workarounds. Customers can become frustrated by the resulting delays.

With a central data repository, your staff members have access to all the information they need to deliver high-quality service, regardless of where that information resides across the enterprise. To be most effective, the repository must provide access to a wide variety of information, including the following:

- **IT infrastructure information**, such as asset configurations, physical topology, logical topology, service topology, and relevant maintenance and support contracts
- **Customer information**, including IT assets owned, products owned, support entitlement, and prior interactions
- **Searchable knowledge base** containing known problems and successful workarounds

In some cases, an organization may want to partition the service desk data so that the service desk staff can access all the information they need but only the information that they are authorized to view. For example, assume that a service desk outsourcer operates service desks for multiple clients. Each client’s assigned service desk staff members should have access to only that client’s information to ensure the confidentiality of other clients’ information.

**IMPLEMENT AND ENFORCE BEST-PRACTICE PROCESSES**

People handling customer issues should operate with consistent processes, based on best practices. A best-practices approach ensures efficient and effective resolution of issues.

Many organizations are adopting the best-practice processes outlined in ITIL, which include guidelines for incident and problem management processes. A service desk technology based on ITIL will help you ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

**INTEGRATE SERVICE DESK PROCESSES ACROSS OTHER I.T. DISCIPLINES**

Service desk personnel need to work closely with other disciplines in the IT organization to ensure that all customer inquiries and requests are resolved in a timely manner. In this way, your service desk staff can be much more productive and integrate service desk processes with those of other IT disciplines.

Here’s an example of the power of integrating service desk processes with change management processes. A service desk staff member determines that a problem resolution requires a change to the IT infrastructure. The staff member initiates a change request right from the service desk. The request is automatically linked to the change-management processes to ensure that the request is implemented properly — with all required approvals and with all required documentation, including an audit trail. The system keeps the service desk personnel up to date on the change status, including notification of successful completion. In addition, the service desk staff members are informed of all planned changes so they can notify affected users in advance.

**CRITERIA FOR A CONSOLIDATED SERVICE DESK SOLUTION**

Any service desk solution should provide a comprehensive feature set that supports best practices service-desk processes. If you are adopting ITIL processes, look for a solution that implements ITIL processes out of the box. That greatly speeds implementation and enables you to achieve faster time-to-value. Look for a vendor that offers solutions certified as ITIL-process compliant, which means the technology is driving true IT process improvements and efficiencies in accordance with ITIL best practices.

The service desk solution should automate processes to eliminate manual steps where possible. Automation helps ensure that best practices processes are followed, and it increases the agents’ productivity. The solution should empower end users to help themselves on requests, such as password resets and access to enterprise applications and data. User self-service takes a huge load off the service desk, freeing up staff members’ valuable time, while at the same time decreasing resolution times and improving customer satisfaction.
For an effective consolidated service desk, you will need additional capabilities, as described below.

**SCALABLE ARCHITECTURE**

The technology platform on which the solution is built must be scalable to accommodate even the largest enterprises with a single instance of the service desk solution, delivering fast performance even under heavy loads. Scaling should never require installation of multiple instances of the solution, because that would increase both costs and management difficulty.

For those organizations that require the service desk information to be partitioned, the architecture should provide a multi-tenancy capability that partitions data, views, reports, and workflows based on such factors as business unit, region, language, and supported client.

**STRONG CONFIGURATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOUNDATION**

Service desk staff must have ready access to all the information they need, including an enterprisewide knowledge base of known successful workarounds. The most cost-effective way to provide this access is through a configuration management system with a federated configuration management database (CMDB). According to ITIL V3, a configuration management system is "A set of tools and databases that are used to manage an IT service provider's configuration data. The CMS also includes information about incidents, problems, known errors, changes, and releases and may contain data about employees, suppliers, locations, business units, customers, and users. The CMS includes tools for collecting, storing, managing, updating, and presenting data about all configuration items and their relationships. The CMS is maintained by configuration management and is used by all IT service management processes."

As illustrated in Figure 2, federation enables access to the needed data without having to move all the data to or replicate it in the CMDB. The CMDB should maintain the relationships of the assets to the services they support. This information allows service desk staff members to understand the business impact of incidents and prioritize their work accordingly.

The configuration management system should include an automatic discovery capability that discovers all assets in the IT infrastructure, their configurations, and their physical and logical topologies. Automatic discovery facilitates initial population of the CMDB and keeps the CMDB up to date on any changes to the infrastructure so the support staff is always working with current and accurate information.

![Figure 2. Federated CMDB foundation](image-url)
INTEGRATION WITH OTHER SERVICE MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

The service desk staff members need to collaborate closely with other IT disciplines. To enable this, the service desk solution should integrate tightly and out of the box with other service management solutions, such as change management, configuration management, asset management, and problem management.

For the most effective integration, select a technology in which all service management solutions, including the service desk solution, run on a single, unified platform that is built on a federated CMDB foundation. (See Figure 3.) Such integration allows you to seamlessly integrate service desk processes with those of other IT disciplines and ensures smooth workflow across disciplines to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.

![Unified Service Management Platform](image)

Figure 3. Integration across service management solutions

RESULTING SUCCESSES

A consolidated service desk provides numerous benefits, including the following:

» Reduces costs by eliminating the multiple licensing, maintenance, and vendor fees that are inherent in supporting multiple service desks, and by eliminating the need to maintain multiple staff skill sets
» Ensures a more predictable and measurable support experience by giving support managers an enterprisewide view of service desk operations so they can better track performance and costs and make more informed decisions
» Increases customer satisfaction by providing customers with a single point of contact for all their service needs, whether that be to solicit help in navigating a website, to report problems, to ask for product information, or to request services
» Enables service desk staff to better serve customers because they have, at their fingertips, comprehensive information that includes the collective knowledge of the entire organization
COMPELLING EXAMPLES

Many organizations are already reaping these benefits.

» A large US-based insurance company consolidated multiple service desks, facilitated adoption of ITIL best practices, and saved $2.5 million by processing the same volume of requests with 20 percent fewer people.

» A global manufacturing company consolidated 40 worldwide service desks into one, created a single point of contact for 17,000 users, provided a centralized view of 15,000 assets, and realized a 50-percent increase in first-call resolution rate.

» A worldwide communications equipment manufacturer consolidated 25 service desks into one, reduced mean-time-to-repair (MTTR) by 30 percent, reduced unplanned downtime by 60 percent, and realized $32 million in savings for IT service management.

» A large regional energy provider consolidated to a single service desk that now handles 1,500 to 2,000 calls per day, lowered average employee costs from $89 to $57 per hour, and realized annual cost savings of $17.5 million — all while increasing support availability to 24x7.

» A major financial services company retired 40 service desk tools, reduced case volume nearly 80 percent, and reduced change-to-incident ratio by 10 percent — all in the first six months.

CONCLUSION

The service desk is now the primary point of contact between an organization and its employees, business partners, and customers. Now more than ever, organizations are relying on their service desk teams to deliver high-quality service, consistently and cost effectively. This is a major challenge if your organization has multiple, disparate service desks.

You can meet the challenge and drive business success by consolidating all your service desks into a single, integrated system that is supported by a single, underlying technology platform. The resulting business advantages more than justify the transition. You’ll improve service quality while lowering costs. You will be able to meet the needs of your internal customers quickly and effectively. And your external customers will reward your superior service with continued loyalty and sales.

For more information on BMC service desk solutions, visit www.bmc.com.

END NOTES

Business runs on IT. IT runs on BMC Software.

Business thrives when IT runs smarter, faster, and stronger. That’s why the most demanding IT organizations in the world rely on BMC Software across both distributed and mainframe environments. Recognized as the leader in Business Service Management, BMC offers a comprehensive approach and unified platform that helps IT organizations cut cost, reduce risk, and drive business profit. For the four fiscal quarters ended March 31, 2009, BMC revenue was approximately $1.87 billion.

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