Five Trends Impacting the Enterprise IT Help Desk
Introduction

Today’s enterprise IT support organizations and help desks are experiencing a dramatic shift in the way technologies are developed, deployed and consumed. Applications are evolving faster than ever, with new cloud-based solutions emerging almost weekly to replace the stodgy on-premise solutions of generations past. User expectations aren’t far behind; a new generation of tech-savvy users increasingly expects the latest and greatest, including mobile compatibility. The result is a constantly evolving portfolio of applications and technologies that IT organizations must support, while being more responsive and empathetic than ever before—all without increasing costs.

As always, progress is a double-edged sword for IT support. Because IT is responsible for enabling company-wide productivity, it sits squarely under the collective corporate microscope. User satisfaction is now at the forefront as new technologies enable more efficient communication, which is both boon and bane to IT support. Seeking comments and anticipating issues are the keys to effective support, and new technologies are also simplifying the feedback process.

This paper presents five interrelated trends impacting the way IT support organizations operate:

1. Productivity pressures
2. Cloud computing
3. Consumerization of IT
4. Corporate social media
5. Raising the bar on service

The intended audience for this paper includes executives, IT management, software development/QA leadership, and anyone else interested in delivering unsurpassed support.
1. Productivity Pressures

Perhaps no single organization is as vital to company-wide productivity as IT. While most organizations are responsible for their own efficiency, IT ultimately owns that of the entire enterprise. Driving efficiency across an entire organization comes down to two key areas: tools and procedures. IT must effectively select and employ both to keep everyone happy and productive.

Choosing the right software

Ideal applications combine usability and consistency with brisk implementation and low maintenance. The former, usability and consistency, are vital to managing the IT help desk’s workload. Ensuring that users are quickly able to understand the interface and that it works consistently will minimize the number of end-user issues. By keeping implementation times short and maintenance low, IT technicians have more time to focus on resolving existing issues and implementing new productivity-enhancing systems.

Stringent vs. fluid procedures

Many IT support organizations looking to increase efficiency are turning to standardized procedures, such as ITIL®, that dictate how IT deploys and supports software. However, there’s a significant risk of getting bogged down in endless processes, paperwork, and heavyweight technology deployments aimed at optimizing the support experience. The IT help desk must balance the desire to comply with rigid standards and best practices with the reality of needing to provide excellent service to their customers (end users)—right now. Ultimately, successful organizations will use ITIL and related methodologies as a blueprint and let procedures evolve as feedback dictates.

The right support platform

The last piece of the IT help desk puzzle is using a support platform that makes life easier for agents and end users alike. For end users, this means a simple interface for submitting issues and knowledge bases where users can quickly locate answers or discuss issues with the community. For agents, this means a system that increases end-user visibility into ticket status, is able to automate repetitive tasks and helps process feedback. Finding the right blend is vital, since all customer interactions are routed through the customer support platform. (More on this in trend five: Raising the Bar on Customer Service.)
2. Cloud Computing

The C-suite mantra for IT has always been faster, better, cheaper—doing more with less. Software as a service (SaaS or cloud-based software) is now delivering on this promise. Improvements in underlying infrastructure have solved the uptime and scaling issues that plagued SaaS solutions in the early 2000s, turning them into the go-to delivery method for customer relationship management (CRM), marketing automation and customer support. Cloud-based solutions have several benefits over on-premise solutions:

- Simple and inexpensive deployment
- Access to data from anywhere, including mobile devices
- No hardware or maintenance costs
- Fewer data security issues
- Seamless product updates
- Affordable, pay-as-you go pricing

Many large providers are now planning to migrate legacy on-premise solutions to the cloud knowing that IT departments are increasingly willing to outsource data security, upgrades and maintenance to software providers. As cloud becomes the industry standard, help desk staff must be ready to support a diverse set of applications that need less technical day-to-day involvement, but change more often and require them to support these changes.

When things go wrong, the IT help desk is the first line of support, whether these resources and applications reside in the cloud, behind the firewall, or a mixture of both. In fact, there’s a good chance most users won’t know (or care) who owns the resource: all they know is that they need help – right now, and they’re unsympathetic to gaps between data that lives in the cloud and data that resides on-premise.

“Zendesk is easy to use, flexible, we can mold it to shape the needs of our business and we can pinpoint and resolve issues quickly and efficiently. We also love the fact that we don’t have to worry about software maintenance or upgrades and the straightforward billing structure makes reporting the ROI of Zendesk a breeze.”

– C-Y Thew, Kwik Kopy

Zendesk is a robust and powerful, yet easy-to-use, SaaS offering that’s simple to get up and running quickly. Once Zendesk is live, its straightforward integration capabilities make it easy to securely tie your cloud-based support data to other systems, on premise or cloud based, through simple data exports and the Networked Help Desk API standard.
3. Consumerization of IT

Today’s users are reaping the rewards of two rapidly evolving fields, mobile device manufacturing and consumer website development, which are increasing IT expectations in today’s user base.

As mobile devices continue to expand their power, sophistication and reach, users are acclimating to streamlined native application experiences, intuitive interfaces and constant data availability. Further, phones are becoming the center of many peoples’ online lives thanks to robust social apps like Path® and Foursquare®, leaving them unwilling to adopt separate work devices. These high expectations are creating a bring-your-own-device (BYOD) culture where support for multiple platforms is expected.

A recent CIO.com article showed that 60% of respondents are seeing increased support demand for Apple®’s Mac® OS X®¹. This is partly due to the rising popularity of iOS through the iPhone and iPad, but also a sign that Macs are gaining market share at home where employees are skewing the traditional work/life balance. At home, consumer websites, such as Facebook® and Twitter®, are gaining mobile-like elegance and interactivity thanks to advancements in front-end languages, and many of these popular consumer sites also have accompanying mobile apps that allow on-the-go access, which many now desire from their work applications. Even the most progressive IT departments are struggling to adapt responsibly.

These expectations are helping fuel cloud popularity thanks to browser-delivered flexibility. Many cloud apps support multiple operating systems and mobile devices, whereas on-premise solutions have limited compatibility. Cloud applications also benefit from the same front-end programming developments as consumer applications, meaning they have better interfaces that are more easily updated than their on-premise counterparts. Further, some cloud solutions have companion mobile apps that provide secure access to the native experience users crave. From a support perspective, native apps help IT cope with today’s BYOD climate by offloading compatibility and data security to providers.

“Our newest office is in Miami. To ensure that we can provide 12 hours of support per day, we’ve equipped our Miami agents with mobile phones and iPads so they can field calls and log onto Zendesk from anywhere. What other help desk solution offers this blend of power and flexibility?”

– Adrian Meier, coresystems ag

Zendesk offers easy-to-use, intuitive, and secure applications on popular mobile devices such as iPhone®, iPad®, Android®, BlackBerry® and Windows Phone®. The tandem of Zendesk and mobile devices means that users have complete, secure access to all of their information and application functionality. For example, it’s easy to create a support ticket on a mobile device and update it later through a browser – or vice versa.
4. Corporate Social Media

For many employees, social-networking platforms (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) are at the heart of their personal online experiences. Given their reliance on these tools, companies are turning to analogous corporate social media tools, such as Yammer®, to help fuel collaboration across divisions.

Unsurprisingly, employees are using these channels to seek assistance and/or vent about IT-related issues, making it an important channel for harnessing feedback and even deflecting issues. The help desk should monitor these channels for relevant conversations and interject when necessary by pointing users to relevant knowledge base articles or asking them to submit tickets for further help. By participating in the conversation, support looks proactive and can raise awareness about self-service resources—the latter of which may help deflect issues that would otherwise result in issues.

Further, corporate social media enables faster feedback and collaboration through polls and groups. What once took weeks of coordination can now be accomplished in a matter of hours by polling users or setting up a small task force to discuss an issue. In short,
corporate social media can fuel productivity for IT departments the same way it does across the rest of the organization.

5. Raising the Bar on Service

IT is and always will be a service organization that’s goal is to create a safe, productive environment for employees. For too long, IT organizations have focused on technology rather than users, but the tide is turning. Today’s IT organizations are being encouraged to adopt a customer service view of IT support where customer satisfaction is the new measuring stick.

This is partly driven by IT’s desire for continual process improvement, and partly driven by more demanding users. In an effort to align operations with the business and provide better service to this customer base, many IT teams are actively implementing industry standard best practices, including IT service management (ITSM) process-improvement methodologies.

Regardless of the exact name, these IT best practices recommend visualizing the interaction experience from the perspective of the customer (i.e. the user). This treats the delivery of all IT benefits as services, which is very different than traditional technology-centric viewpoints of IT and its offerings.

User requirements for the speed and quality of IT support are now much higher than ever before. IT organizations must adjust their focus towards their primary mission: delivering speedy, high-quality services that will be consumed by people, rather than spending excessive time tending to the underlying support technology that helps deliver these services. To ensure that they’re on the right track and delivering the best possible service, it’s essential for the IT team to continually seek feedback from their customers using surveys and other quantitative methods.

Self-service

Support organizations are learning that it’s no longer possible to dictate how users will receive service. Self-service has become an increasingly common part of daily life, and users expect resources that help them answer their own questions. Providing online forums, FAQs and knowledge bases are simple ways to provide the 24-hour support users crave, and many customer support solutions include this functionality.
Conclusion

Coping with today’s rapidly changing IT environment requires an agile team that’s willing to adopt new technologies and take measured risks to better serve their internal customers. Cloud-based software is one of the best ways to cope with increased productivity pressures and device compatibility issues, making it a must on every CIO’s list for future upgrades. As the cloud lessens maintenance concerns, support organizations must be ready to stay vigilant and improve documentation in order to better serve users at scale, while simultaneously harnessing feedback to adapt and improve processes and foresee issues. Lastly, progressive IT organizations will need to balance adherence to strict procedures with the need to keep internal customers happy.

Zendesk helps the IT support organization flourish in today’s challenging climate. Visit Zendesk to sign up for a free 30-day trial at www.zendesk.com/signup. Contact Zendesk to get started at +1 (415) 418-7506 or email sales@zendesk.com.

About Zendesk

Zendesk is the proven cloud-based help desk software that is the fastest way to enable great customer service in rapidly growing companies. More than 15,000 organizations including Adobe, MSNBC, Sony, and Groupon, trust Zendesk with their most valuable asset: their customers. Now, organizations can deliver exceptional support across the Web, email, and social media. Founded in 2007, Zendesk is funded by Charles River Ventures, Benchmark Capital and Matrix Partners. Learn more at www.zendesk.com.
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