

A well-run service desk

Why happy end users mean good business **Interviewed by Steve Trusty**

It's all about customer service. Today's expectation of IT organizations is that customer support will be friendlier, faster and more thorough, with the technology available to restore service quickly to prevent loss of productivity.

"The focus should be on what the customers' needs are and ensuring that you have the knowledge and right tool sets for supporting them," says Sandy Barr, ITIL, Service Center Manager for Houston-based DYONYX. "When the IT organization has a solid understanding of the customers' needs and they work together to define their service levels, this develops a strong relationship and creates actual, documented measurements of success."

Smart Business talked with Barr for further insight into a well-run service desk and how this impacts overall operations.

Why is new technology alone not the answer to improved productivity?

New technology is inevitable and does provide efficiencies that we didn't have 20 years ago, but along with new technology comes new support issues. New technologies may give us an edge and/or provide us with direct, constant communication, allowing us to quickly respond to customers, co-workers or other key people. Technology does fail from time to time. Having a professional and highly skilled service desk up to speed with such technologies can alleviate loss of productivity by restoring service immediately. Training your service desk staff members and keeping them on the technology fast-track is key. The more knowledge they have, the quicker, better, more accurate service is provided to the customer. In addition, the service desk, while providing restoration of service, can educate the customers to empower them with the knowledge, as well.

How do you reduce costs?

Providing a single point of contact for first-call resolution is a good start. By streamlining support staff and arming your service desk with today's technological resources, such as remote control



Sandy Barr, ITIL
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capability, software distribution and a robust ticketing and asset management system with a dynamic knowledge base, the 'single point of contact' takes on a whole new meaning. Within this environment, you suddenly realize that your more technical resources that typically get tapped for assistance are now able to focus on true problem management and root cause analysis. With a strong service desk, you're building the most valuable information repository for your organization. You're able to identify, track and document known issues and their resolutions. This increases the first-call resolution rate of the service desk and, if made available to the customers, allows them to diagnose their own issues and lessen the call volume, thus reducing costs and decreasing downtime.

How do you avoid the challenges with the battle of 'business versus IT'?

Keeping the business and IT organization in sync requires frequent communication regarding the company's standards for desktop hardware, software and PDAs or other devices. The IT organization has a responsibility to keep the standards cur-

rent with technology and not only identify where there is business justification for change but also that the technology has been thoroughly tested and will not cause a drop in productivity. It is the responsibility of the IT organization to educate the business users for proper synergy. The key is in the promotion of the culture from the top level down to promote acceptance of standards without the organization feeling as if the standards have been mandated without business consideration.

Another key factor is to ensure that the IT organization is not just a nameless, faceless voice on the phone. It's important to rotate support roles so that the business users can always put a name with a face. This helps to promote comfort and familiarity and develops strong relationships and trust with the IT organization. While the trend over the years to reduce costs has been to offshore support to India or China, that strategy has not proven to be a true 'service-minded' approach. Providing a higher quality of support with a stronger focus on customer service is preferable.

What is ITIL and is it the best standards-based approach?

ITIL stands for information technology infrastructure library, developed in the late 1980s in the U.K. Before ITIL, IT organizations were more internally concentrated on technical issues and less on providing quality service and developing customer relations. ITIL provides the framework for IT organizations with a methodology that will enable them to align their focus on service delivery and service support. There are basically three levels for a central point of contact. They are a call center, a help desk and a service desk. The natural evolution for most call centers and help desks is to become a service desk that allows business processes to be integrated into the service management organization. <<

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