The Case for Outsourced Help Desks

Managed IT services providers (MSPs) are in the business of offering proactive and reactive technology support to their clients. Through remote monitoring and management (RMM) tools, MSPs provide maintenance and troubleshooting to ensure smooth and continuous operations of servers, storage, endpoints and applications. While some of this work is automated, many tasks still require human intervention – and today, client-facing interactions are often best handled by a help desk or service desk.

Help Desks serve as the primary point of contact between employees and MSPs, making them not only a critical piece of technology service delivery but also essential to employee support and satisfaction.

Your current IT staff are probably completely comfortable gaining remote access to systems, troubleshooting computing and networking problems, and implementing/updating tools and applications that keep the organization's IT functional and optimized. Challenges can arise, however, when personalized, one-on-one help is needed. Fielding calls, talking through remediation processes, logging tickets and standing ready at all hours can quickly exhaust your IT staff's resources.

Success Factors:

Hold time: How long was it before someone picked up the phone?

Remediation time: How long did it take to resolve an issue?

Quality of resolution: Was the issue resolved correctly?

Technical knowledge: How knowledgable was the help desk technician?

Information conveyed: Was the information exchanged between the tech and client helpful?

Clarity: Was the technican intelligible?

Line quality: Was the phone line loud and clear?

Courtesy and friendliness: Was the technician pleasant?

Unfortunately, help desk challenges today are only increasing. No longer are help desk calls lumped together during business hours, nor are they narrowly focused on desktop applications and connectivity issues. As businesses are increasing their adoption of mobile technologies, virtualization, and a variety of Web and cloud-based applications, clients expect IT support to be available for multiple platforms and span a widening variety of issues – at any time, day or night. Providing broad, expert help desk support on a 24/7 basis is taxing, to say the least.

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When it Comes to Providing Live Support for Customers, There Are a Few Basic But Important Needs.

These include high availability in service hours, with staff working at least 12 hours per day, five days per week (if not 24/7). The help desk mechanisms must be flexible and scalable to accommodate growing multi-faceted services practices.

Moreover, support needs to be handled by trained, qualified technicians who are responsive and able to deliver consistent end-user satisfaction while employing best practices with regard to logging and managing service calls. All of this should be maintained by a centralized help desk system that is under continuous review for improvement and operates by the tenets of recognized process management and quality controls.

Outsourcing: A Smart Alternative

Establishing and maintaining an in-house help desk is a tall order for some companies, particularly for those who lack the trained personnel and management systems required to deliver the kinds of call center experiences today's employees require. The answer for many is to offload this continuous effort and expense to qualified and experienced MSPs that specialize in IT help desk support. Today's help desk outsourcers are often employing services automation, remote management, cloud technologies, software-as-a-service and Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL)-based processes on behalf of their clients.

Help desk outsourcing enables companies to deliver world-class services while concentrating on core business and sales. There are numerous benefits to an organization in outsourcing help desk operations:

Cost Reduction – A primary driver for outsourcing help desk functions is cost. Companies who entrust help and support desk services to an MPS gain significant economies of scale. The help desk outsourcer invests in the tools, personnel, training and ongoing process improvements, and delivers these best-practice-based services for a reasonable recurring monthly fee.

In addition to the hard-cost savings, companies that engage help desk outsourcing typically see substantial soft-cost benefits. Process improvements, employed best practices and access to broader application and infrastructure skills by help desk professionals result in a reduction of repetitive incidents, and expand support capabilities to a larger array of technologies.

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Enhanced Support – Organized support services from a reputable help desk provider rely on standardized processes following industry guidelines such as ITIL and Six Sigma. This ensures services are delivered in a high-quality and consistent manner across all locations and process improvements are built into incident management response. These outsourced services are available across multiple platforms – telephone, Web, chat, e-mail, SMS and other mobile devices.

Increased Scalability & Flexibility – IT needs fluctuate on a daily basis - your workforce doesn't. The capacities of a help desk partner can scale with seasonal changes, incident-driven call volume and client-base growth. With an outsourced service, MSPs can deliver support across the globe at any time and in a variety of languages, amplifying market impact and opening new avenues for expanding sales – without having to worry about hiring additional technicians or support staff.

What to Consider When Outsourcing Help Desk Operations:

In contrast to the benefits detailed above, many of the help desk services provided by MSPs revolve around reactive incident management. The goal of seeking outsourced help desk alternatives should be to transition from a request-and-problem-focused system toward one that focuses on configuration and change management processes – which drive higher levels of employee performance and help reduce overall costs.

Some of the key considerations for companies looking to outsource help desk services are as follows:

Take the Time to Find the Right Partner – Bringing a trusted partner on board to handle the needs of your workforce is neither fast nor easy. Significant documentation detailing how the help desk service will handle calls, what its processes are for logging and elevating calls, and how resolutions will be cataloged are just a few of the items on the pre-outsourcing must-have list. This vital documentation needs to be thorough ,detailed and consider every possible scenario. Its creation can be time-consuming, but it will be time well spent.

Insist on Level 3 expertise – Most service providers can offer Level 1 and 2 support, but more complex issues may arise that require deeper expertise and insight from a Level 3 technician. It is not cost effective for companies to staff their help desks with Level 3 specialists, but the true industry leaders can seamlessly integrate their help desk to a Network Operations Center (NOC) where Level 3 technicians are always available. In this scenario, the service provider is responsible for maintaining a single point of contact which can coordinate all pending Level 3 issues with the NOC – and stay with the open ticket until the problem is resolved to the end user's satisfaction.

A THIRD-PARTY
HELP DESK CAN:

Resolve level 1-2 customer service issues

Free up time for in-house techs to focus on larger issues and long-term business growth

Relieve you from the challenges associated with finding, training and retaining top talent

Fine-tune the Service to Meet Your Needs – Fortunately, help desk services are no longer an all-or-nothing affair. Outsourced help desks can vary from simple call centers to robust IT response systems capable of actual maintenance actions. Additionally, the help desks can be available full time, or for smaller parts of the day, perhaps when your IT team is off duty. If you opt for 24x7x365 coverage, be sure it's actually "live" around-the-clock support. Some providers advertise 24x7, yet clients wind up leaving a message at 2 am with the promise of a call back later. Decide exactly what services are needed, and craft an agreement that best suits your business.

Adapt Processes as Needed – Some companies view help desk outsourcers as vendors who should bend to their will. However, many outsourcers have developed mature, proven processes and best practices through hard-won experience that can benefit the company. MSPs should be willing to adapt to the way clients interact with the help desk to optimize the experience for all.

Investigate Metrics – Find out how many calls and incidents each help desk technician fields in a day. Also, inquire about the tech schedule in terms of hours per shift, nights, weekends, holidays and vacations. In general, it's good to know the outsourcer's maximum phone line capacity and how it is prepared to handle surges in call volume due to events like system disruptions and applications upgrades.

Conclusion

Choosing an appropriate help desk model, be it in-house, outsourced, or some combination thereof depends a great deal on the business plan and the resources of your organization. For those companies who are questioning the sustainability of maintaining an in-house operation, the outsourced help desk delivers compelling advantages, including cost savings, advanced services processes and technologies, and the freedom to refocus your efforts on more strategic internal tasks.

Contact us to learn more about Hilliard Office Solutions at 866-976-2679 or visit hilliardos.com