

6 help desk hacks to reduce your ticket volume





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Introduction

The primary task of any help desk is to ensure a healthy ticket churn. That is, resolve incoming tickets at a steady rate, and make way for fresh tickets. However, despite the help desk maintaining a healthy ticket churn, tickets still tend to pile up. This might be an indicator of underlying problems with the help desk, such as procedural oversight, insufficient technicians, process gaps, skill gaps, unattainable targets, poor ticket tracking, or other common issues.

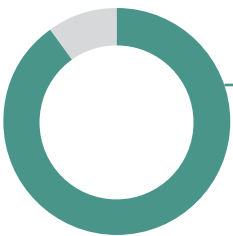
While it's unrealistic to hope for zero open tickets, there are several ways to reduce the volume of IT tickets flooding the help desk. For example, analytics can shed light on the problems in service processes that might be preventing technicians from closing more tickets in less time. In this e-book, we'll cover six proven help desk hacks that help reduce IT ticket volume significantly, speed up services processes, and resolve more tickets faster.

1. Cut down Level 1 service tickets with self service.

Today, most organizations recognize the importance of self-service. It is the foundation of cost-efficiency, agility, as well as high end-user morale and satisfaction. A major benefit help desks can witness soon after implementing self-service is a drastic reduction in IT tickets. For example, posting a visual help guide near the printer area can help users troubleshoot common printer problems, such as paper jams, ink cartridge replacement, connecting to printers from laptops, disposal of waste papers, etc. This can easily reduce the number of printer-related service tickets by 50 percent.

Not all tickets can be resolved using self-service. Self-service has limitations. As technological advancements introduce newer and more sophisticated hardware and software, the complexity of resolving tickets also increases. For example, a user might need a couple of hours to troubleshoot OS-related issues using self-service articles, while the service desk technician can typically resolve the same issue in 15 minutes. Help desks can target level 1 service tickets and aim to reduce them using self-service. Level 1 tickets are defined as taking less than less than 20 percent of the average resolution time. Level 2, 3, and 4 tickets are typically more complex and time-intensive.

Here are some interesting stats that prove implementing self-service can be beneficial for the help desk:



91%^[1]
of end users state they would prefer to use a single, online knowledge base if it were available and tailored to their needs.



Cost-per-ticket^[2] for service teams range from

\$2.93 TO \$49.69



The average cost for resolving a ticket is

\$15.56



Web-based self-service manuals can reduce the **cost-per-ticket** ^[3] by

\$11

From the above stats, it's clear that even if help desks manage to deflect a small portion of their overall ticket volume to self-service, they can drastically cut down incoming ticket volume and hence, the cost to resolve tickets.

Most organizations are still a long way from truly benefiting from the self-service approach to resolving help desk tickets. To see where your help desk stands, you can check your self-service completion rate.

Self service completion rate (%)

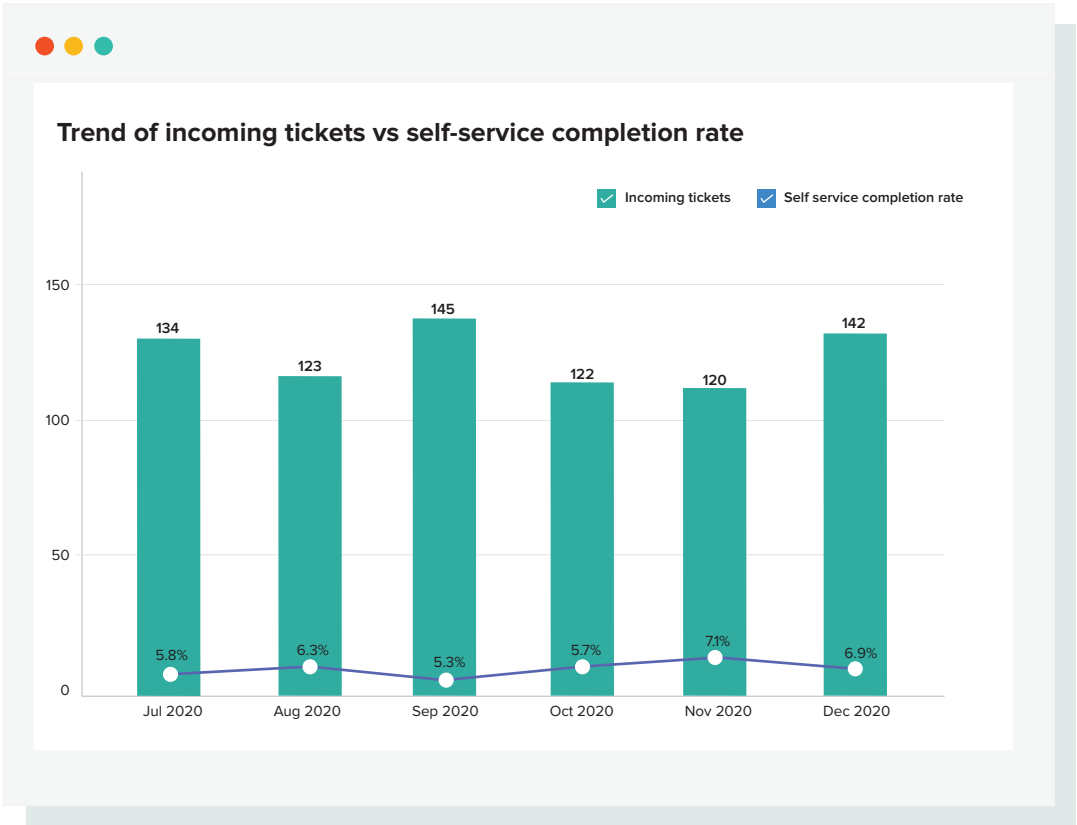
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Tickets resolved by self service

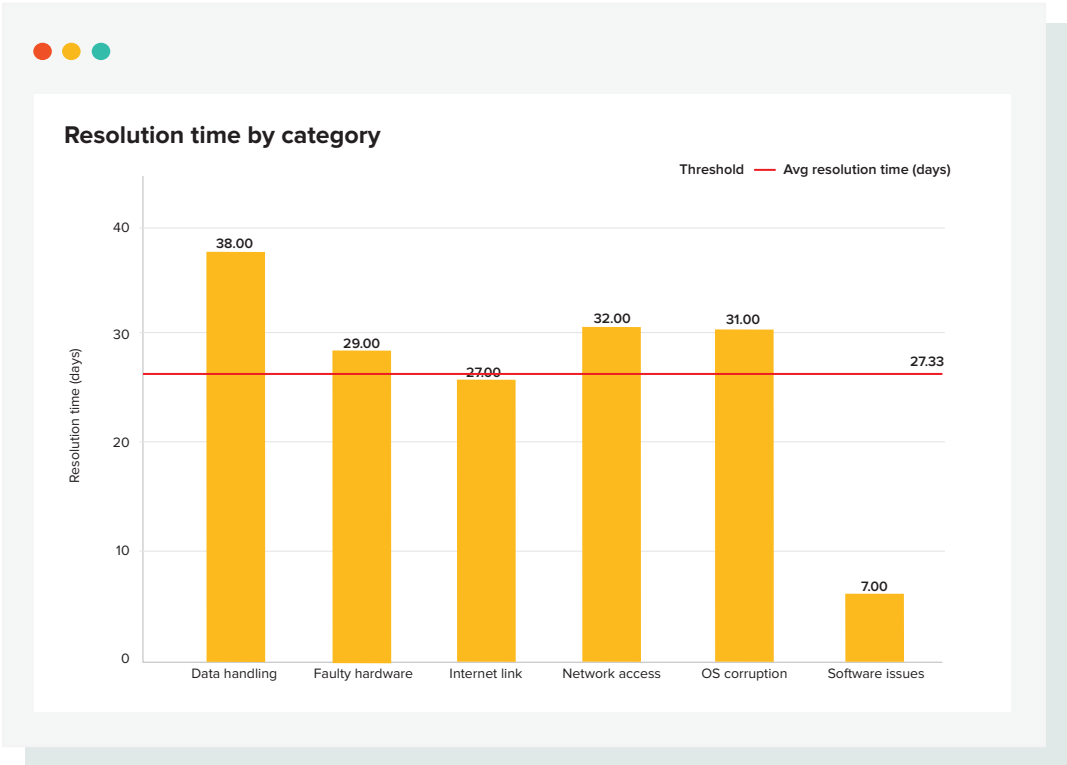
Total tickets

x 100

The graph below shows that the self-service completion rate for a sample help desk is just about 5-7 percent.



It's worth noting that the industry **benchmark** ^[4] for self-service completion rate is 8.9 percent. If our hypothetical help desk aims to increase its self-service completion rate, it should start by creating more solutions for level 1 tickets that take about 20–25 percent of the average resolution time of the help desk.



From the report, you can infer that the resolution time for software-related tickets is less than 25 percent of the average resolution time of the help desk. This indicates that the help desk has a greater scope of reducing software-related tickets using self-service articles

2. Identify and eliminate recurring incidents.

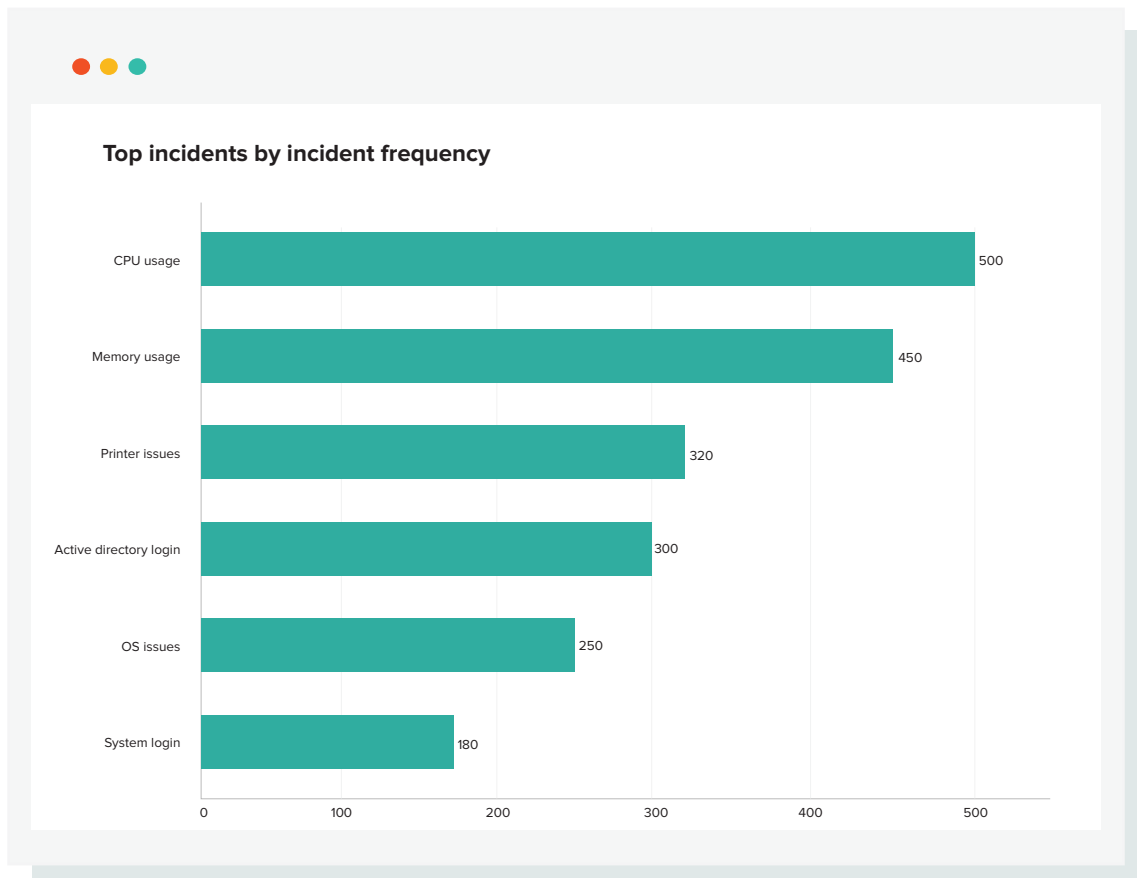
Problems in network and applications trigger an avalanche of tickets from end users. A server with low disk space might trigger many tickets related to application sluggishness. Similarly, a downed server can trigger many tickets about application login issues if that server is hosting several applications. Recurring incidents like these could cause further chaos within the help desk by triggering more and more tickets each time the incident reoccurs, thereby skewing all your help desk metrics.

Practicing strategic incident management is the key to identifying and eliminating recurring incidents so that they do not keep adding to your ticket volume. For this, you need to assess incidents objectively and identify areas that make the biggest impact on your ticket volume.

A notable metric for incident management is incident volume. It's the number of incidents occurring in each category. For example, if we have 100 incidents per month regarding the server, the incident volume is 100. Now, let's add another element to incident volume and call it incident frequency. That is, the number of incidents by the duration for which the incident has been occurring.

$$\text{Incident frequency} = \frac{\text{Number of incidents}}{\text{Number of months since the incident first occurred}}$$

For an incident that's been recurring for 10 months where the total number of incidents is 1,000, the incident frequency is 100. For an incident that's been recurring for two months and the number of incidents is, 1000, the incident frequency is 500. Naturally, you need to focus on incidents with the highest incident frequency because that's where you have the maximum potential to reduce incidents and, in turn, cut down tickets associated with those incidents.



From the graph above, it's clear that incidents related to CPU usage and memory usage have the highest incident frequency. Resolving these recurring incidents can greatly reduce your overall IT ticket volume.

3. Plan changes proactively to prevent change-related incidents.

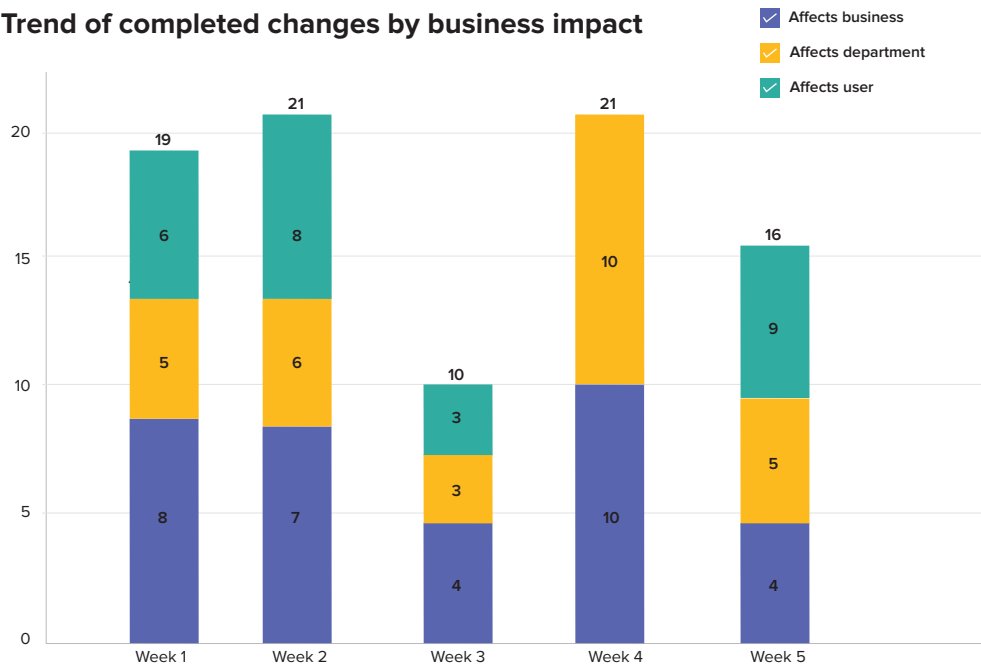
Change implementation is fraught with apprehensions and inhibitions because any change in your applications or processes can potentially create several incidents. For example, a security update can render applications inaccessible to some users, a technology upgrade can lock non-admin users out of their accounts, etc.

However, with meticulous planning, and a thorough understanding of the risks involved, it's possible to reduce the number of change-related incidents. Start by analyzing data from historical changes to see which changes had the most impact on your ticket volume and why. Using this data, you can generate reports, that can provide early warnings about the risks associated with upcoming changes, and highlight ways to cushion the impact of those changes on your ticket volume.

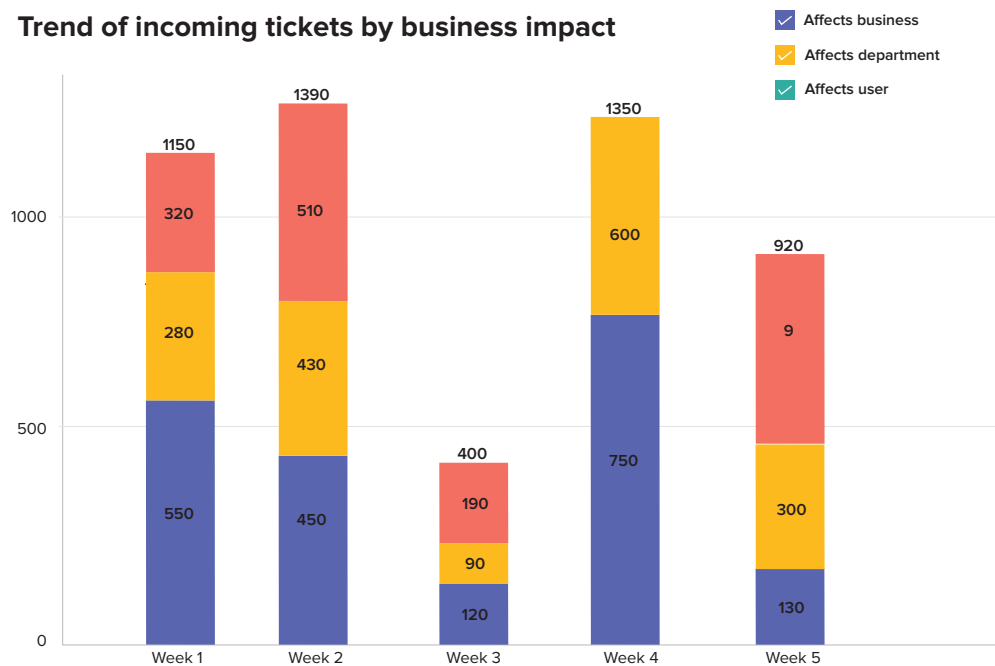
The reports below enable you to compare the trend of successful changes, and the trend of change-related tickets for the past year side by side.



Trend of completed changes by business impact



Trend of incoming tickets by business impact



By comparing the two reports, you can easily infer the following:

- Any time a major change was implemented, there was a corresponding spike in the overall ticket volume.
- Changes earmarked to have a higher impact on end users consequently resulted in an increase in the ticket volume.
- The estimated scale of impact perfectly matches the actual impact, indicating accuracy in the change impact analysis. For example, in cases where the estimate predicted that a particular change would have a higher impact, inevitably resulted in an increase in ticket volume.

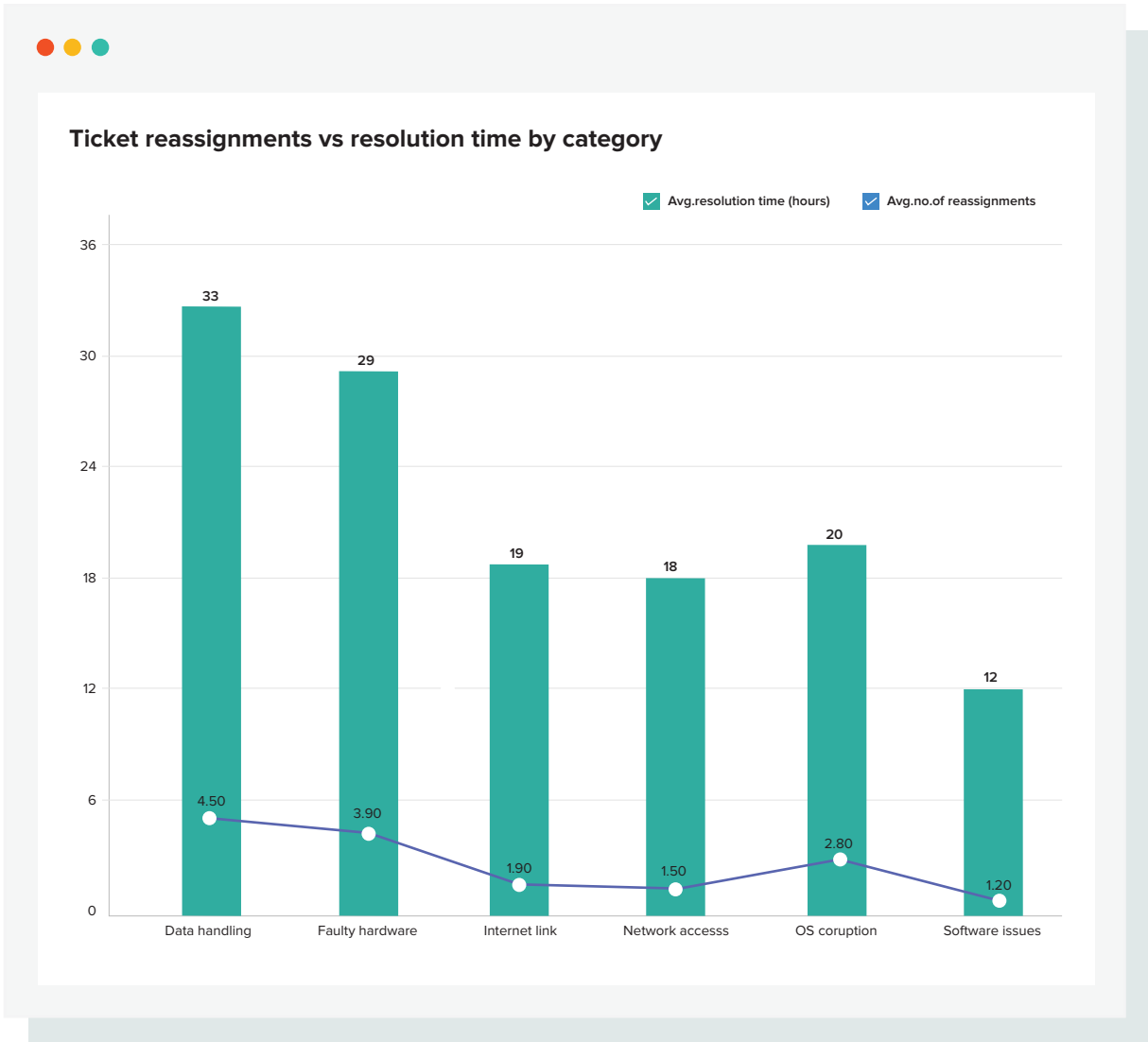
Proactively analyzing the impact of change can prepare you to tackle the challenges involved in change implementation, and make them less painful for your IT help desk. Additionally, it gives you the foresight needed to plan and implement changes to have no or minimal impact on the ticket volume.

4. Fix flaws in ticket assignment rules to eliminate bottlenecks.

Automation is critical to mature IT operations because its benefits range from greater process and service efficiency to increased customer satisfaction, and increased cost efficiency. Any sort of automation introduced into your IT process has tremendous potential to reduce the overall workload for the IT help desk, and provide faster resolutions. Take automatic ticket assignment for example. It prevents technicians from cherry-picking tickets from the ticket queue by assigning tickets to the right technicians based on tools, procedures, existing workload, and skill sets. This can significantly improve the overall ticket resolution time.

While automatic ticket assignment has proven to be helpful in many ways, the rules for automating ticket assignment should be evaluated frequently to ensure that the automation process is truly beneficial. Poor automation rules could result in tickets getting assigned to wrong technicians who have limited skills in certain categories. Then these individual technicians will have to take up the task of reassigning tickets to the right technicians—a process that could take up a lot of time, delay the ticket resolution process, and also create a bottleneck in the ticket queue.

To check whether your ticket assignment rules are contributing to the efficiency of your resolution process, look at the average number of ticket reassignments for each category of tickets compared to their average resolution time. This shows the effectiveness of your current ticket assignment process, and reveals the correlation between ticket assignment rules and the ticket resolution time.



The report above shows that ticket categories that have many reassignments take longer to resolve. This can be fixed by analyzing the nature and the level of complexity of tickets involved in these categories, to see how the current ticket assignment rules can be refined. Fixing flaws in ticket assignment rules will ensure smoother processes, decrease resolution time, remove bottlenecks, and clear up the ticket queue for fresh tickets.

5. Distribute service staff across timezone to prevent backlogs.

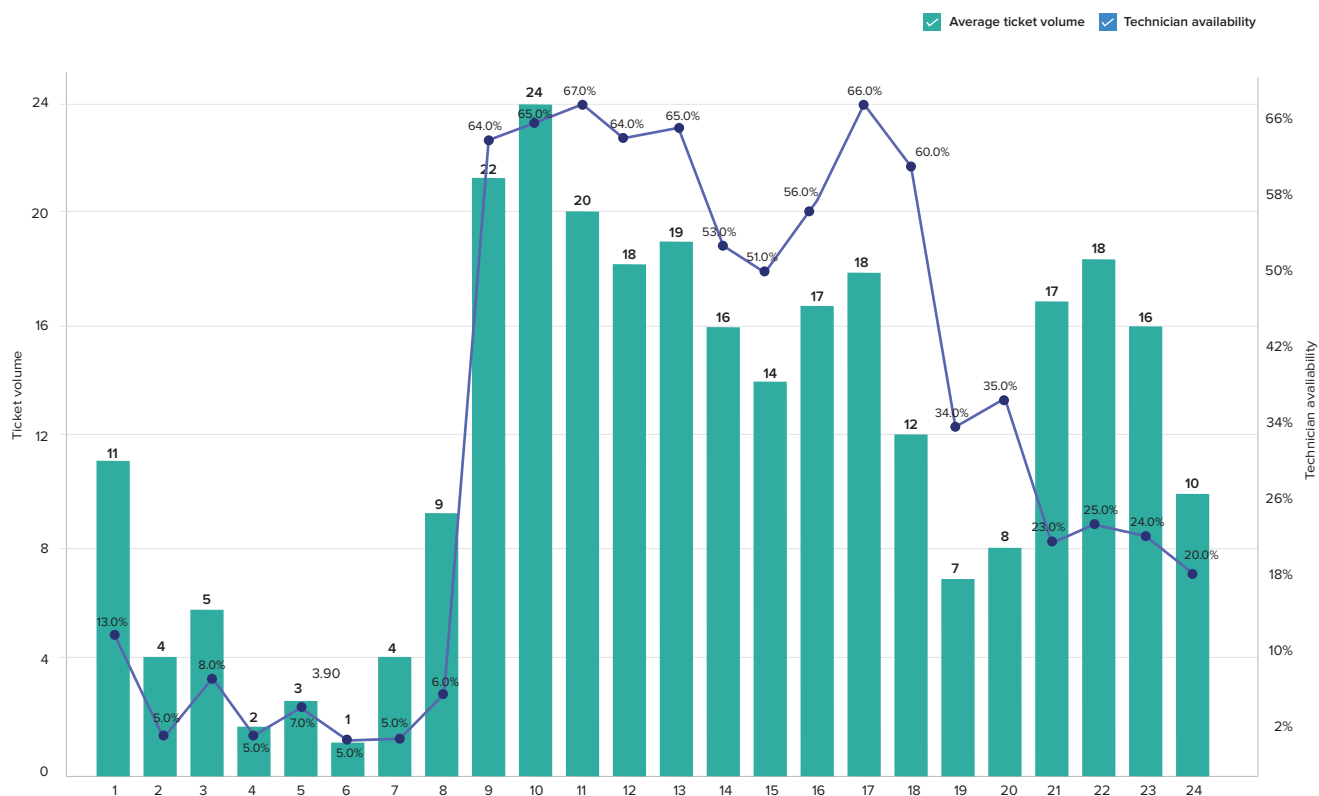
IT help desks seldom experience a steady ticket volume. Often, it's quite erratic. Seasonal factors, introduction of new hardware or software, work hours, geography, and other factors can drastically affect ticket volume. Regardless of these changes, it's important for the IT help desk to ensure technicians are always available to tackle incoming tickets. Otherwise, tickets will pile up.

Analytics can provide visibility into ticket volume trends so IT managers can better understand these changes, and intervene early to avoid ticket build-up. The report below gives you a clear picture of technician availability and the average number of incoming tickets by hour of the day.

$$\text{Technician availability} = \frac{\text{Number of technician available at any given time}}{\text{The Total number of technicians}} \times 100$$



Ticket volume and technician availability by hour of the day



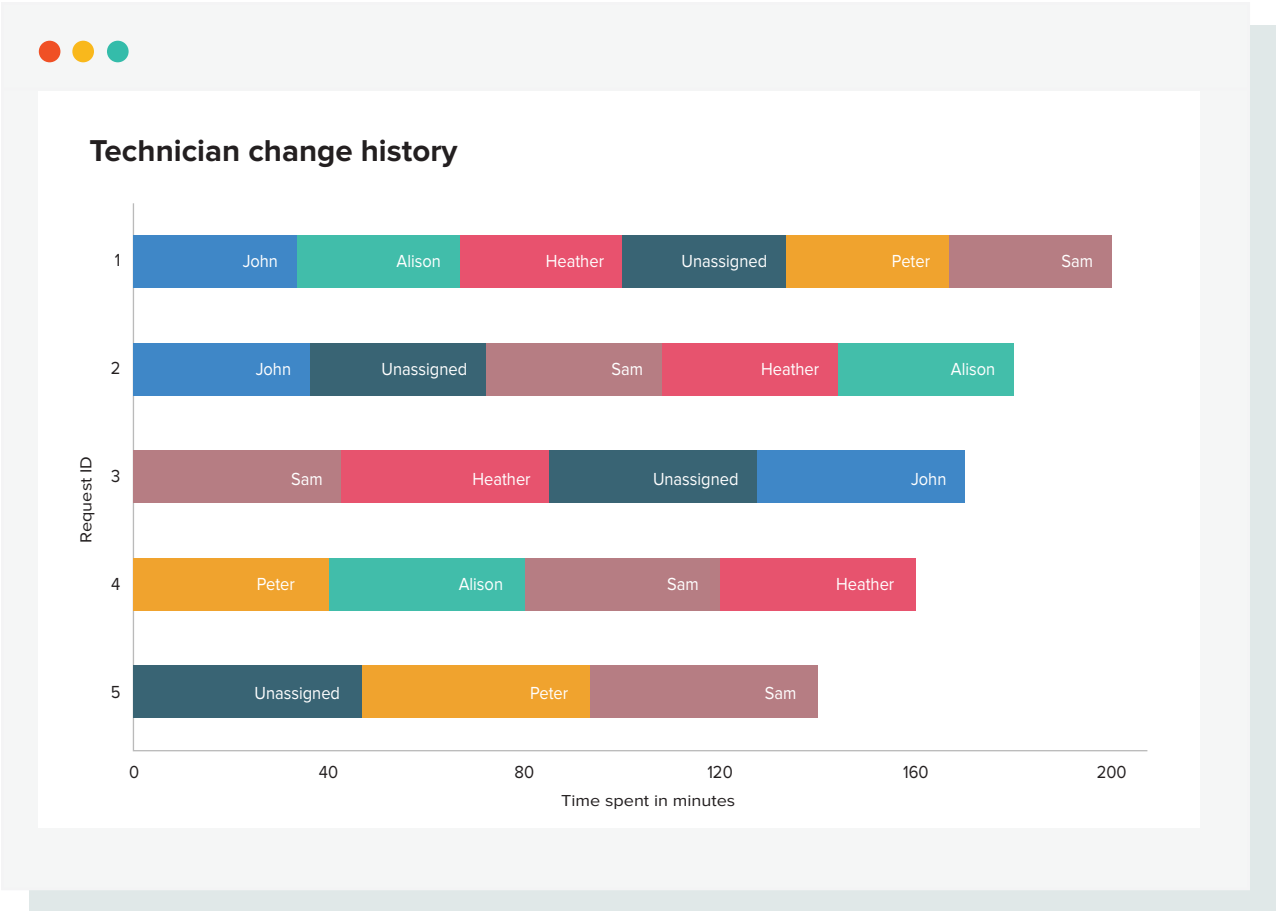
You can see that more technicians are available during typical work hours, i.e., 9am to 7pm, while there are fewer technicians available during off hours. There is also a spike in incoming ticket volume at late hours, i.e., 9pm to 11pm, indicating that employees prefer to work late. So, it might be a good idea to deploy one or two additional technicians during these hours.

6. Eliminate skill-gaps among technicians.

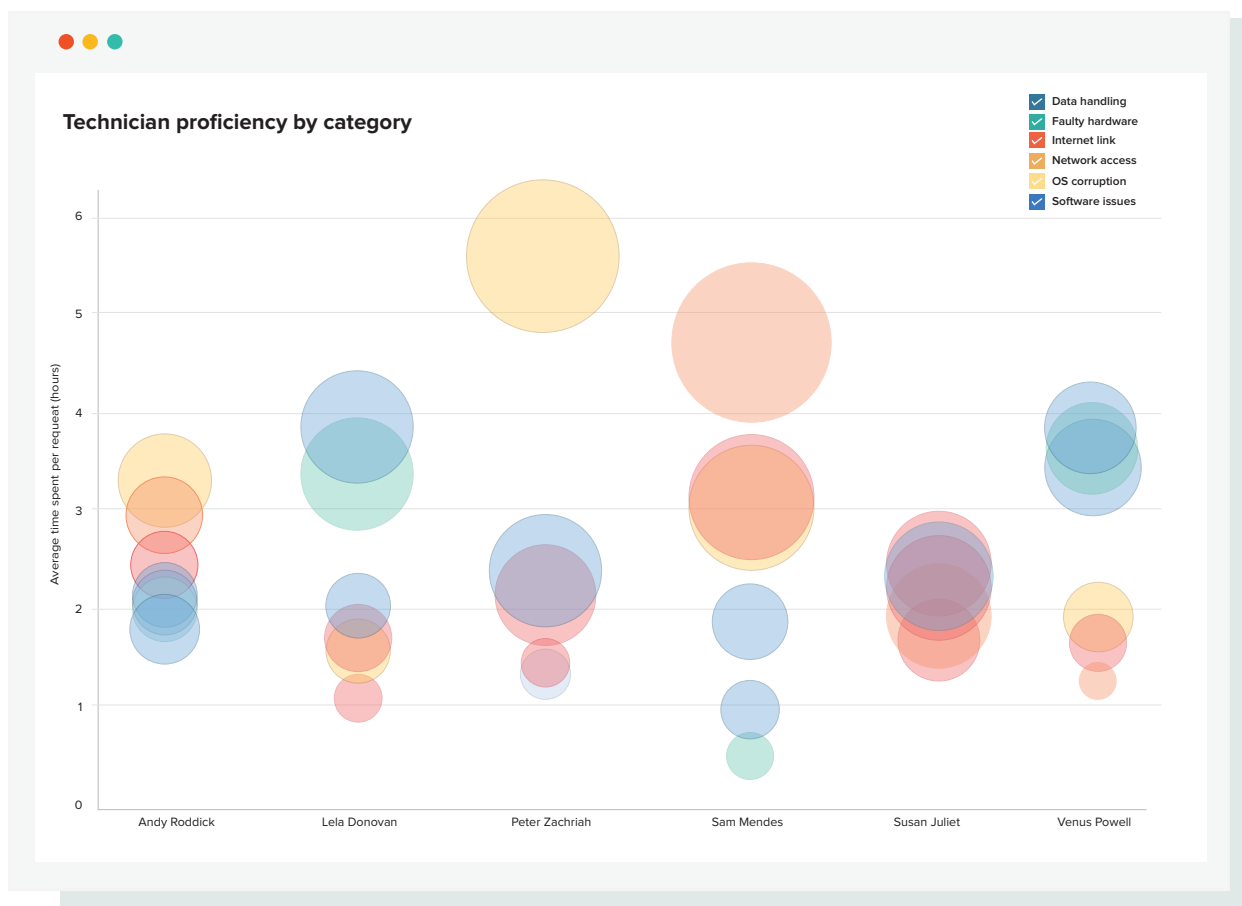
Help desks often face a lot of problems, including backlogs, enormous ticket volumes, longer resolution hours, etc. Upon closer observation, you will find the reason behind many of these issues is the lack of necessary skill sets among technicians to tackle specific issues. For example, a technician might not be equipped to handle network-related issues, while he/she might be an expert in resolving software problems.

While these issues are not directly traceable to the technicians' skill sets, you can identify these obstacles by closely tracking the complete journey of your tickets from start to finish. This will pinpoint areas where tickets are either idle, or are bounced among technicians indicating that the technician assigned the ticket is unable to resolve it, possibly highlighting gaps in the technician's skill sets.

The report below shows that tickets are frequently bounced from Sam to Heather, and from Peter to Sam, which could be an indicator of a skill gap.



To verify this hypothesis, let's look up a report to see technician proficiency across categories.



From the report, it's clear that Sam is not proficient in handling network issues while Peter is not proficient in handling OS-related issues, as indicated by the bigger bubbles which means they take longer to resolve these issues. The next step is to improve their skills in these areas by providing additional audio or video training materials, conducting workshops, or offering knowledge-sharing sessions with other, more experienced technicians.

Conclusion

Too many IT managers tend to think that enormous ticket volumes are part of the IT help desk process, and there's nothing they can do to avoid them. However, with the aid of analytics, it's possible to reduce your ticket volume, albeit not avoid large ticket volume instances entirely, and demonstrate greater benefits to the business, such as lower IT support costs, less downtime, fewer business disruptions, enhanced quality of resolutions, improved productivity, and happy end users.



About

ManageEngine Analytics Plus

ManageEngine Analytics Plus is a self-service business intelligence and IT analytics solution that integrates with several popular help desk application, such as ServiceNow, Zendesk, and ManageEngine ServiceDesk Plus. It also integrates with other IT applications used for network and application management, project management, endpoint security management, and more. Powered by artificial intelligence, machine learning, and natural language processing, Analytics Plus features an AI assistant that can display stunning visual responses to voice and text comments. Analytics Plus also features capabilities such as importing data from multiple sources, data blending, trend forecasting, real-time sharing and collaboration, and advanced computing and analysis.

180K
customers
across the world

18+
years of IT
management experience

90+
products
and free tools

190+
countries
served



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