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Analytics Plus

6 ways to know if your IT help desk is struggling

Are your technicians struggling with the workload?
Here's a reality check for your help desk.

Introduction

The IT help desk environment is incredibly challenging, mainly because it's the go-to place for end users when anything goes wrong. Another reason is the inherently fast-paced and evolving nature of technology, which requires technicians to juggle a multitude of tasks while also dealing with unforeseen problems that might escalate into full-blown crises if not attended to in time. In other words, the IT help desk is a high-pressure, high-impact, and high-stress environment where technicians are constantly fire-fighting, and are unable to explain their challenges. Understanding the underlying struggles that hinder an IT help desk from offering effective resolutions can help IT leaders address them immediately and put the help desk back on track towards achieving high levels of end-user satisfaction. Here are six ways analytics can help you find out if your IT help desk is struggling:

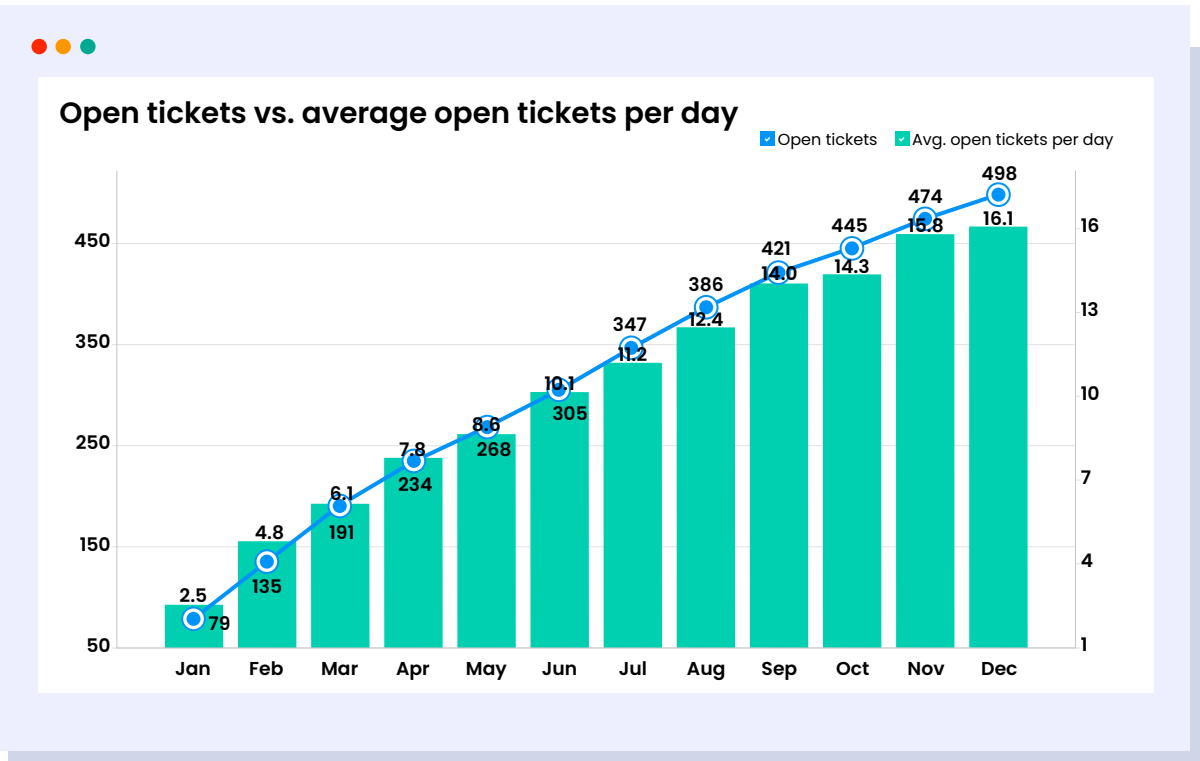
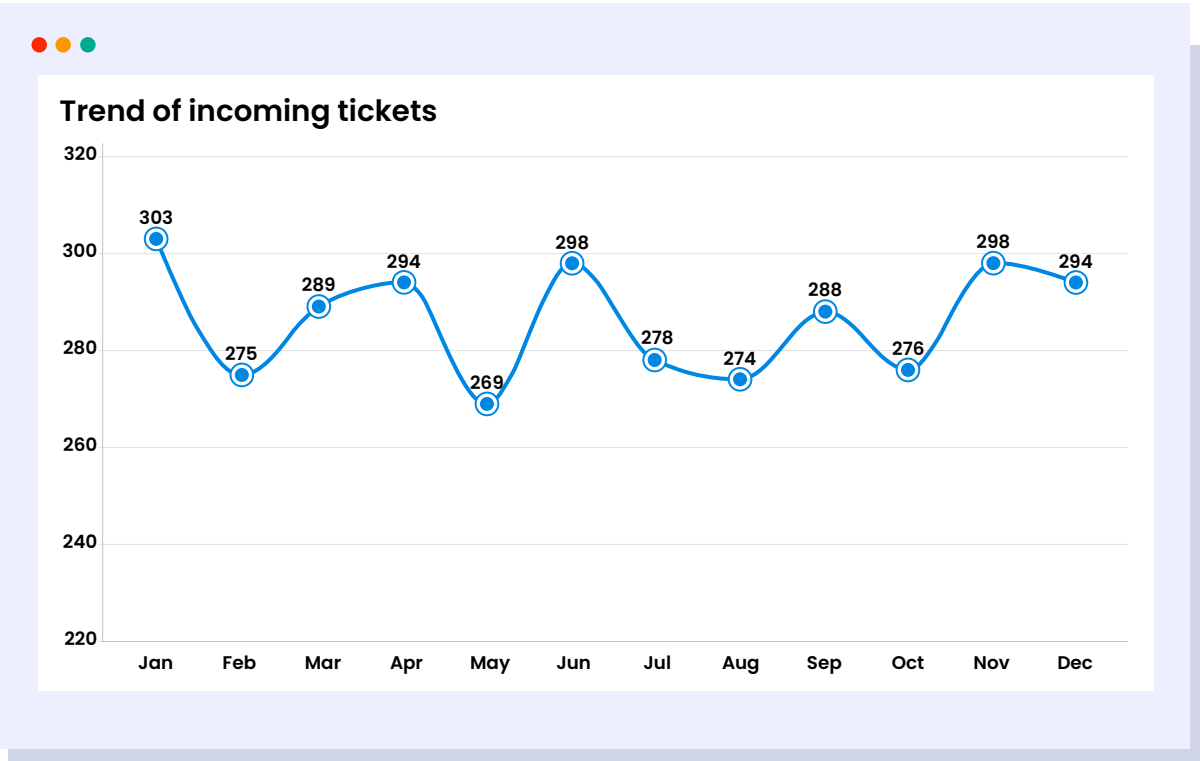
Get a realistic picture of the IT workload

Help desks can quickly become overloaded with work due to factors like technician skill gaps, employee fatigue, growing technological sophistication, and financial constraints, leaving just a handful of help desk technicians handling the entirety of the workload. Because a help desk's workload is unpredictable, it can be difficult to determine if your help desk is really struggling to handle the incoming workload without an in-depth understanding of the actual workload and excess work or backlogs. To uncover if your help desk is overloaded with service tickets, keep tabs on the number of open tickets every month, not just on the number of incoming tickets.

Consider this scenario: Your help desk received 70 tickets in January, of which 30 are still open or unresolved. In February, you got 100 new tickets. Now your help desk has 130 open tickets, 100 from February and 30 tickets carried forward from January. If this trend continues—that is, if your help desk continues to carry forward unresolved tickets each month—then eventually your help desk's overall workload will quickly pile up. Unfortunately, this is rarely noticed because most help desks prefer to track incoming tickets while measuring their overall workload.

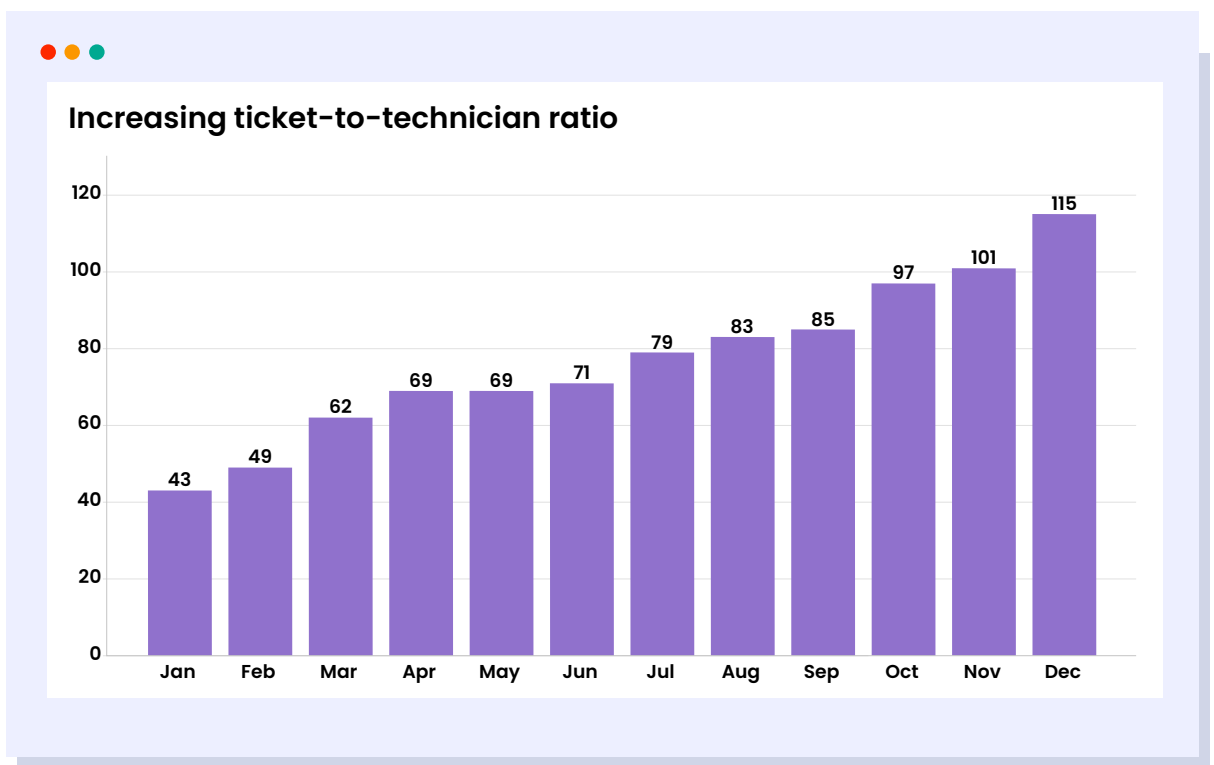
Here's a comparison: The first report shows the trend of incoming tickets for the past year, and the next report shows the trend of open tickets for the past year.

The average open ticket per day in the second report presents a striking comparison of how backlogs increase the average workload per day.



Open tickets in the second report includes only tickets that are newly opened and unresolved tickets from the last month. The average open ticket per day in the shows how backlogs increase the average workload per day.

The reports are a good indicator to verify if your help desk is struggling to handle the workload. Another way is to compare the number of tickets per technician ratio. The industry benchmark ratio is around 70 tickets per technician. The reports below show how this ratio changes with an increase in open ticket volume, hinting that you don't have sufficient technicians working your help desk.

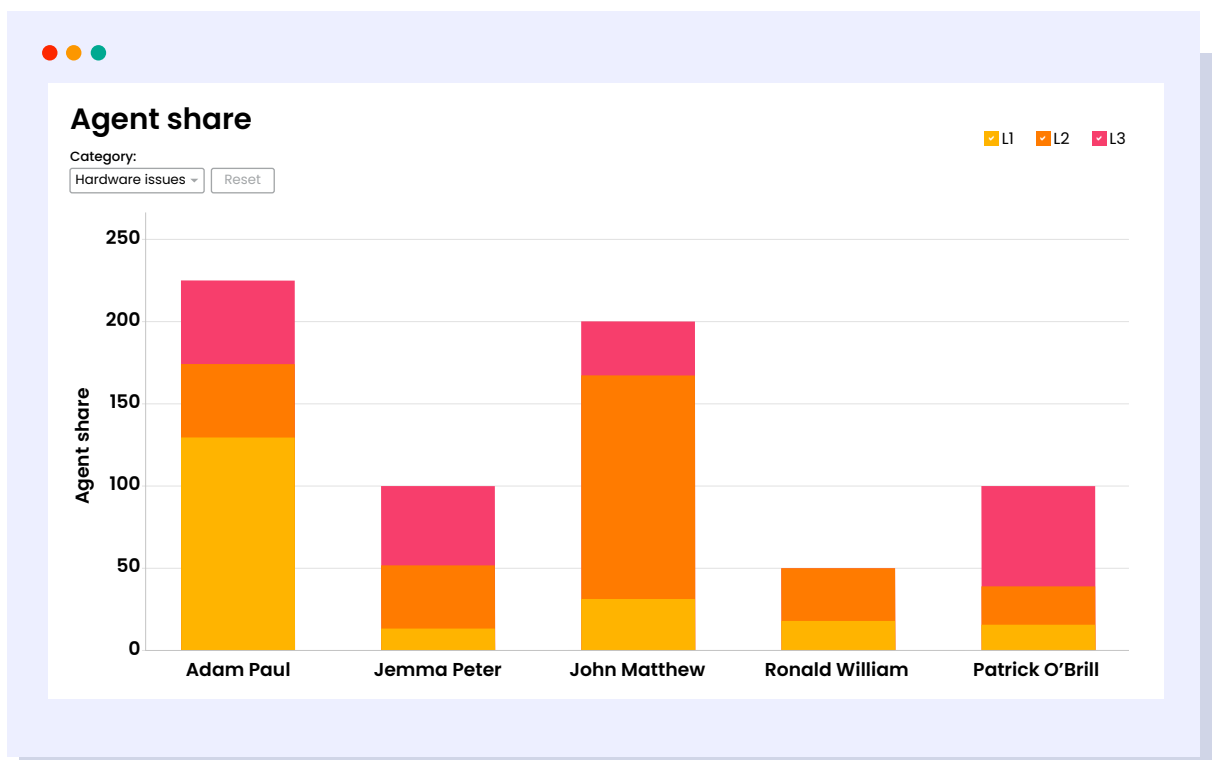


These reports shed light on if your help desk is overwhelmed, and provide IT leaders insights to deal with the increasing help desk workload.

Turn the spotlight on your team

The success of your help desk operations rests solely on your technicians as they are its core pillars. To ensure optimal performance and get a realistic picture of their skill levels, tracking technician workload and **skill gaps**^[1] helps. However, these metrics alone won't tell you if they're struggling with the workload. Looking at the team level and technician's individual performance can let you know if your technicians are overwhelmed with the workload. Agent share is a useful metric that provides a comprehensive view of each technician's performance and contribution toward resolving the tickets. Here's how to calculate agent share:

$$\text{Agent share} = \frac{\text{Tickets by each agent}}{\text{Total tickets}} \times 100$$



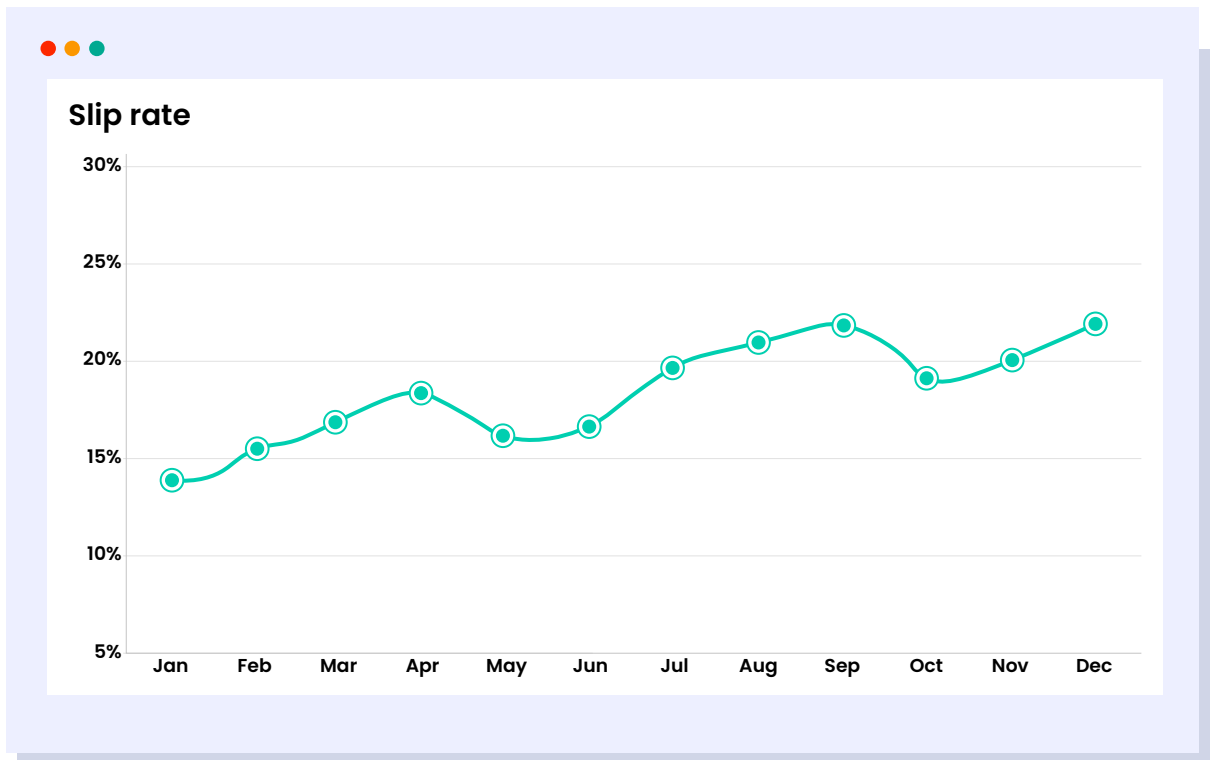
The report above details the workload split amongst technicians based on complexity for hardware-related issues. In the report, Adam resolves more than two-thirds of the total L1 tickets as compared to other technicians, and John resolves more than half of all the L2 tickets. Evidently, Adam is more comfortable with L1 hardware-related tickets, and struggles to handle tickets of greater complexity. Unbalanced sharing of workload among technicians indicates the prevalence of cherry-picking tickets, which is a direct indication of technician efficiency and skill gap.

Similarly, a good way to measure if the help desk is struggling as a whole is to look into slip rate.

$$\text{Slip rate} = \frac{\text{Number of tickets with missed SLAs}}{\text{Total tickets}} \times 100$$

A higher slip rate indicates that your help desk is struggling. This could be a result of several underlying issues ranging from poor ticket assignment rules to unrealistic SLA compliance.

Here's a sample report



Monitoring these metrics enables you to understand if and how much your workforce is struggling with their workload. Such analysis can help quantify and visualize many hidden problems in modern help desks.

03 | Focus on what customers are saying

When measuring efficiency, there's no yardstick better than end-user feedback. Net Promoter Score (NPS) tells you if your end users are happy or unhappy with your services. In fact, NPS is the single reliable metric that tells you where your help desk is struggling. And it is much simpler to collect than others.

All you need to do is ask end users for feedback: "On a scale of 1-10, how happy are you with our services?"

However, first, you need to know how to make sense of the feedback. Because the majority of feedback is based on scores of 1-10, it's important to filter out feedback carefully. Segment users into:

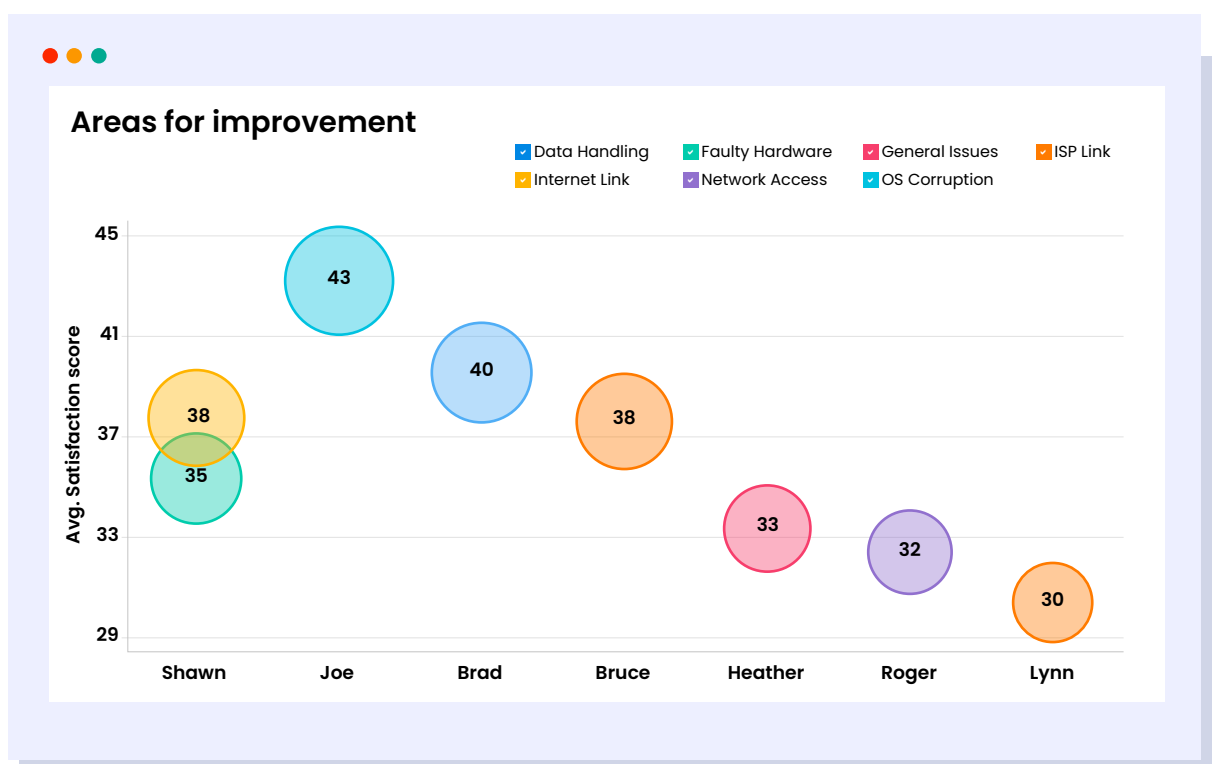
- ☐ Promoters: Happy customers.
- ☐ Passive customers: Unhappy but not willing to express it.
- ☐ Detractors: Unhappy campers who are vocal about it.

Here's an example to explain why you need to segment user feedback. If you've ever bought anything online, you're familiar with user ratings given for each product. On a scale of 1-5, users score products based on their satisfaction levels. However, these scores are averages of both positive and negative feedback. So if one user rated a product 1 and another user rated the product 5, its average is 2.5, which doesn't appear to be too bad of a rating. If you read the comments from both users, you might notice that the user who rated the product 1 used it extensively and found it unsatisfactory, while the user who rated it 5 barely used the product. In such cases, segmenting feedback helps you gain a better perspective into end-user feedback.

For the help desk, we can segment users into the following groups based on their scores:

- Promoters: 9 or 10
- Passive customers: 6-8
- Detractors: 0-5

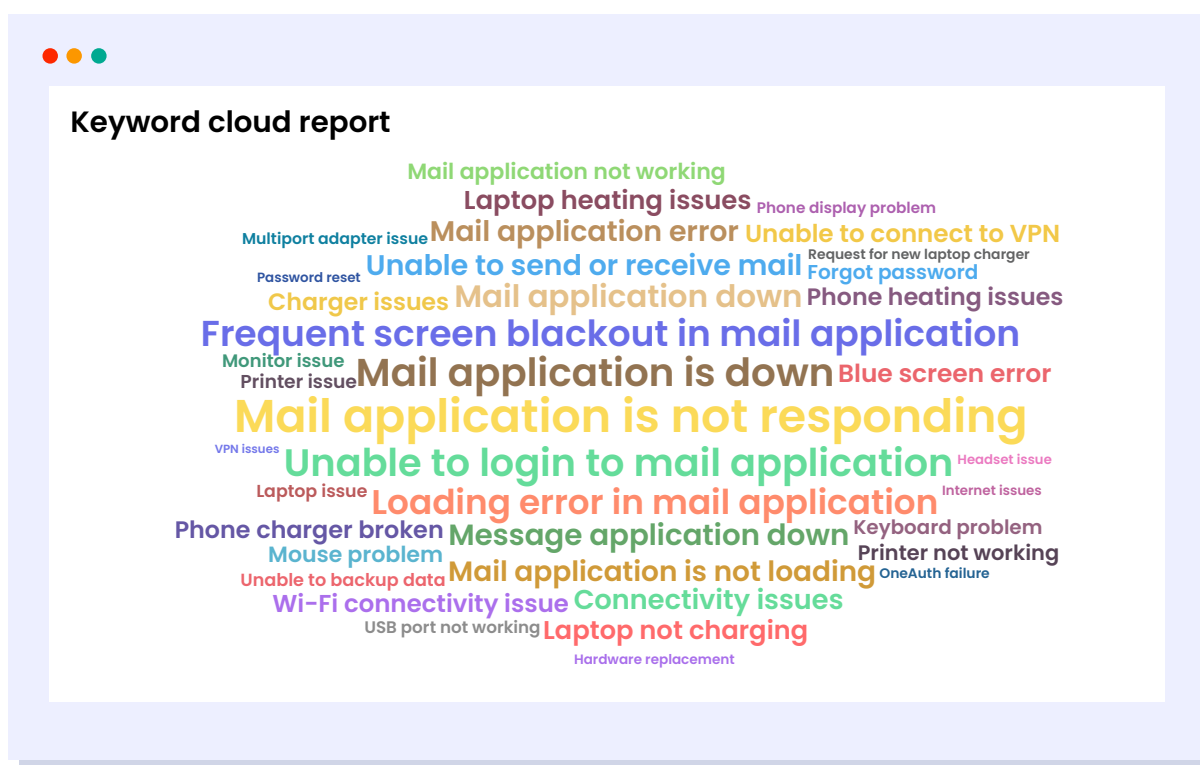
This strategy of segmenting customer feedback is a seamless way to ensure valuable customer feedback does not get drowned in averages. Here's a sample report built on the feedback of detractors on what can be done to improve help desk services.



A similar report can be built on user feedback from passive customers as well. Such reports help provide a realistic picture of areas where your help desk is struggling.

Shed light on your support tickets

Recurring support tickets are a great way to identify whether your help desk is struggling because they show that the underlying problem has not been completely resolved. If a problem keeps recurring, it means that the initial fix may not have been thorough, or there might be a more significant underlying issue that needs to be addressed. For instance, a Skype outage will result in several incidents related to connectivity. Furthermore, recurring tickets may lead to increased frustration and dissatisfaction among end users, which can negatively impact your end-user satisfaction rates. Hence, it's essential to identify recurring tickets and determine the root cause of the issue to prevent it from happening again in the future. A keyword cloud report built using the most common terms used in requests provides clarity into the nature of recurring tickets.

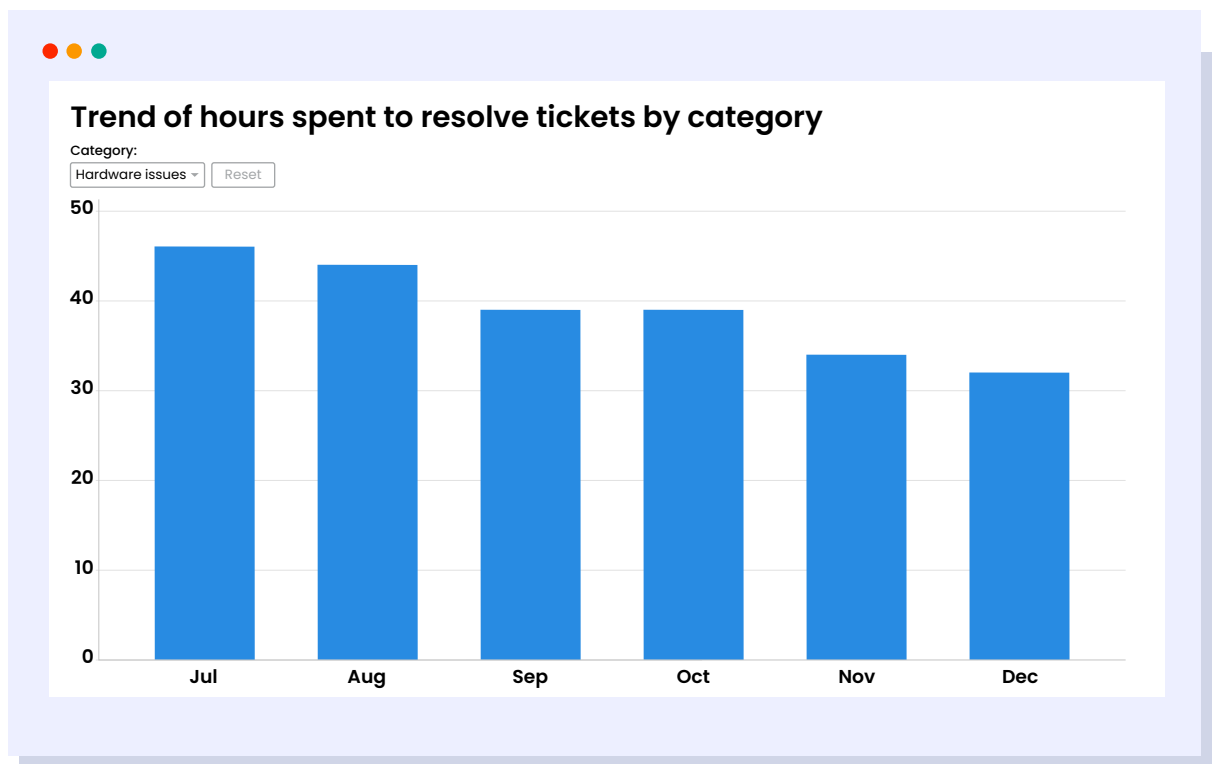


According to the report, incidents related to email applications are more than others, hinting at underlying issue or problem plaguing your help desk.

05 | Measure the value demonstrated to the organization

Measuring the value of IT to the organization in terms of productivity, quality, throughput, predictability, and financials is a good way to determine help desk performance. Consistent improvements in these areas are a positive sign, while stagnation or decline indicate problems.

- **Productivity:** Tracking help desk productivity allows organizations to identify areas for improvement and optimize productivity. Here's a sample report that shows the hours spent to resolve hardware-related tickets for the last six months. The report shows considerable improvement in the time taken to resolve tickets, highlighting that the help desk is highly productive in resolving hardware-related tickets.

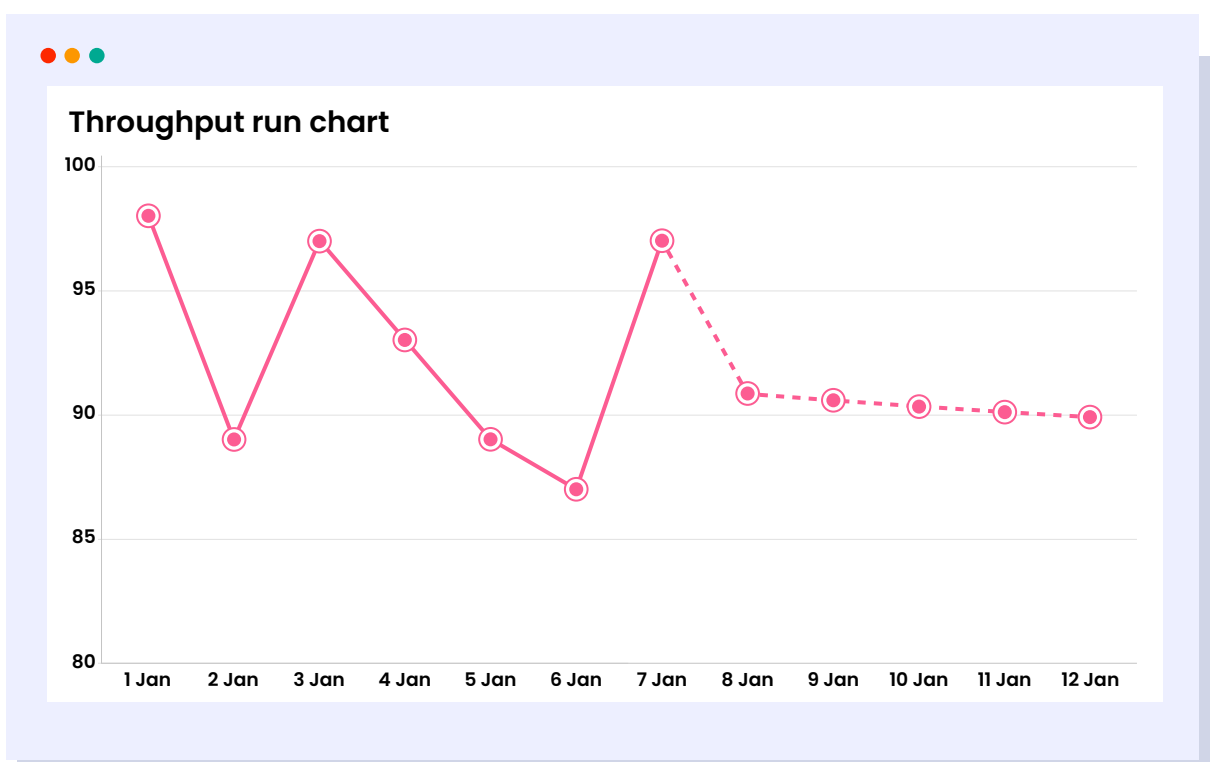


- **Quality:** The quickest way to measure quality of services is too look at customer satisfaction (CSAT) scores. A high CSAT score shows that the help desk is meeting the needs and expectations of the end users, while a low CSAT score indicates that there may be issues that need to be addressed. To improve the CSAT score organizations can focus on improving the quality of service provided by their help desk technicians, reducing response and resolution times, enhancing the knowledge base content, and offering better training and support to technicians.

- **Throughput:** Finding out why your help desk is struggling requires a bird's-eye view of all its operations. **By tracking the throughput trend^[2]**, you can understand how many tasks your help desk team can complete over a certain period and make better forecasts based on historical data. Throughput is the number of tasks completed over a certain period. To calculate the throughput of your help desk:

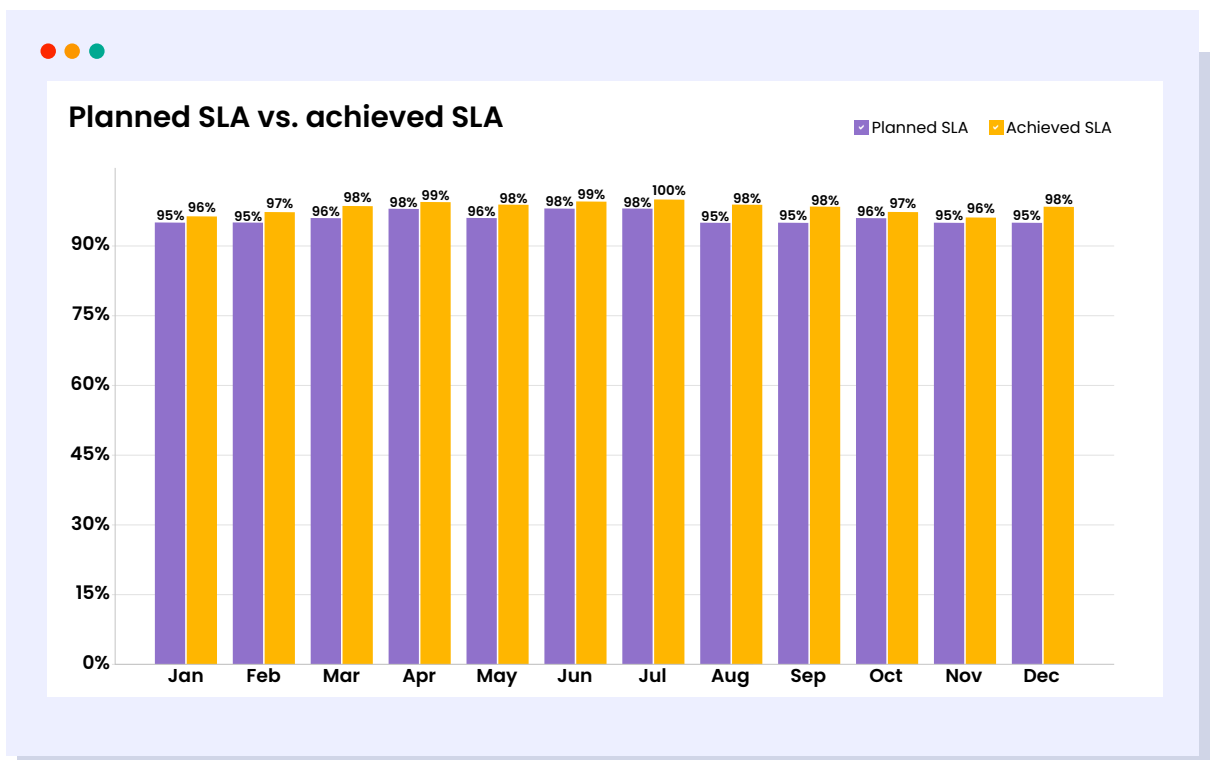
$$\text{Throughput} = \frac{\text{Number of tasks completed}}{\text{Cycle time}}$$

You can also keep tabs on the predicted weekly throughput and the past throughput to compare and understand improvement and where you stand. Here's a sample report throughput run chart:



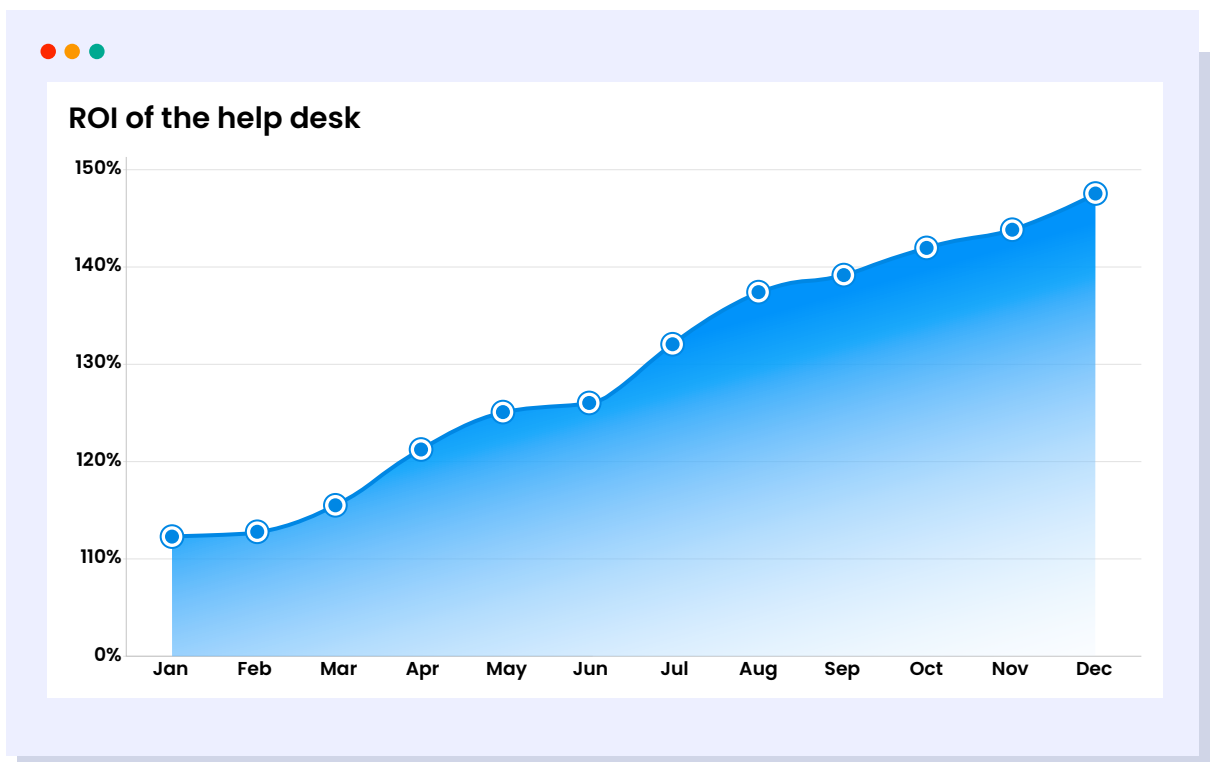
The throughput run chart allows you to visualize how fast work items flow into your system. By representing the average throughput trend, you can understand how many tasks your team can deliver over a period, and make a better forecast based on historical data.

- **Predictability:** One of the simplest ways to differentiate a good service desk from a great one is its ability to handle unexpected tasks. A good help desk can handle hurdles as they arise daily; a great one predicts problems and prepares for them. Predictability is a good measure of how the help desk is able to perform when internal or environmental changes add to its workload. Here's a report that compares the percentage of planned and achieved SLAs for the past year.



Keeping track of the ratio or percentage of planned SLAs to achieved SLAs gives you the ratio of success of your help desk team in meeting SLA targets. A higher percentage means that more SLAs were met than planned, while a lower percentage hints at trouble brewing in the help desk.

- **Financials:** Quantifying the benefits of IT in terms of return on investment (ROI) can help determine if your help desk is struggling. A positive ROI means the help desk is able to deliver value to the organization, while a negative ROI hints that the IT help desk is in serious trouble. Here's a report that shows the month-to-month ROI of a fictional organization:



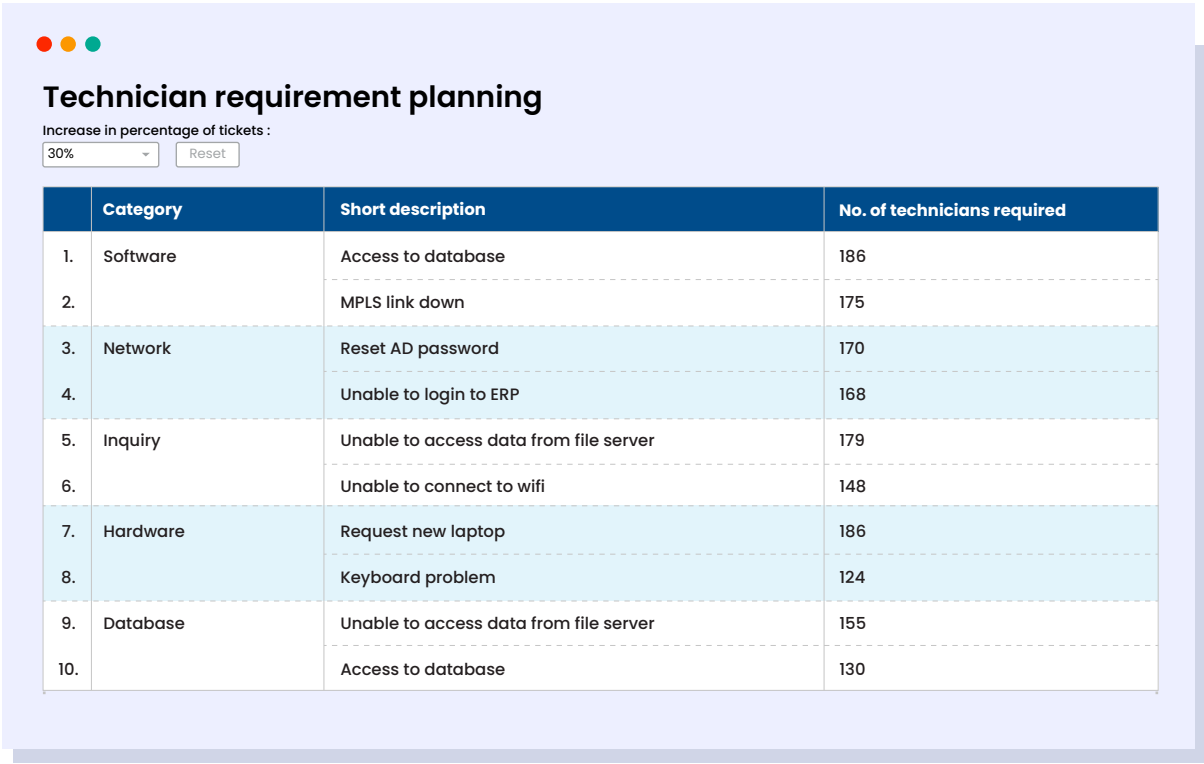
According to the report, the fictional organization gets a positive ROI, which means the help desk is delivering value to the organization.

Ascertain when you need to move to crisis mode

Help desks often operate in the fire-fighting mode, but if they are consistently falling behind, stressed, and making mistakes, it's important to switch to crisis mode. This mode should only be triggered when the number of support tickets exceeds a predefined threshold. By leveraging scenario planning, organizations can ascertain when they need to move to crisis mode. Scenario planning helps organizations anticipate and prepare for potential outcomes before they occur. This proactive approach can help the help desk avoid being caught off guard with an unexpected event.

Scenario planning can help organizations forecast and plan the required number of technicians needed to handle, say, a 10%, 20%, or 30% increase in support tickets while maintaining the SLA. The industry standard ratio is one technician per 70 tickets. By using this ratio along with the boost of scenario planning, organizations can forecast how many technicians are needed to manage an increasing number of support tickets.

The report here shows the number of technicians needed to handle a 30% increase in ticket volume.



Technician requirement planning

Increase in percentage of tickets :

	Category	Short description	No. of technicians required
1.	Software	Access to database	186
2.		MPLS link down	175
3.	Network	Reset AD password	170
4.		Unable to login to ERP	168
5.	Inquiry	Unable to access data from file server	179
6.		Unable to connect to wifi	148
7.	Hardware	Request new laptop	186
8.		Keyboard problem	124
9.	Database	Unable to access data from file server	155
10.		Access to database	130

Conclusion

IT help desk technicians are constantly fire-fighting and unable to voice their challenges. Identifying the underlying struggles paves the way for senior management to acknowledge problems first, and then prompts them to find solutions. In this e-book, we covered six ways to identify if your help desk is struggling. We hope you found these tips helpful.

If you're looking to explore other ways that Analytics Plus can help your help desk improve performance, check out some of our [other resources](#).

Click here to get started with a free, all-inclusive [trial of Analytics Plus](#).

About

ManageEngine Analytics Plus is a self-service business intelligence and IT analytics solution that integrates with several popular IT service management applications, such as ServiceDesk Plus, ServiceNow, Zendesk, Teamwork Desk, BMC, Splunk, SolarWinds, and Ivanti. Analytics Plus also integrates with other IT applications used for network and application management, project management, endpoint security management, and more. Powered by AI, ML, and NLP, Analytics Plus features an AI assistant that can display stunning visual responses to voice and text comments. Analytics Plus can also import data from multiple sources and perform advanced analytical functions, such as data blending and trend forecasting.

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Reference

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