

ManageEngine 
ServiceDesk Plus

The Brainy Book for Smarter ITSM



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7 Reasons Why ITSM Implementations Fail



1. Failing to convince your senior board members or failing to get them on board
2. Lack of planning and scoping
3. Selecting the wrong resources
4. Working in silos than as an integrated unit
5. Selecting the wrong ITSM tool
6. Wasting time on complex process diagrams or maps
7. Improperly communicating with ITSM team

Implementing IT service management (ITSM) in your organization is no walk in the park. When you plan to implement ITSM, you may have to encounter questions such as where do I start? How do I start? What am I trying to achieve? What information must be obtained from the processes I have, people involved, and the product? If you don't have complete answers to your questions, your ITSM implementation might fail. Here are 7 reasons why an ITSM implementation can fail.

1. Failing to Convince Your Senior Board Members or Failing to Get Them on Board

Your ITSM implementation might fail if your board members refuse to give you the go ahead. You'll need to make them aware of what ITSM is and what it can do for the organization. An experienced ITSM member must explain to the board the benefits of implementing ITSM. You should also explain the goals the company can achieve and the return on investment (ROI).

2. Lack of Planning and Scoping

Improper planning can also lead to failure. You must clearly define the goals and

targets. You need to assess your current infrastructure and then plan on how you can improve the ITSM implementation. The same goes for scoping; unless you define the scope, your implementation can take a hit.

3. Selecting the Wrong Resources

ITSM can't be implemented by just anyone. You need a set of dedicated and skillful people on your team who know the ins and outs of ITSM. It's not just one person; it's about people - process owners, stakeholders, managers, and advisors. They need to dedicate their energy to implement ITSM in your organization. In addition, you need resources like time and ITSM documentation to make the implementation successful.

4. Working in Silos Than As An Integrated Unit

Each individual team can work separately and eventually all of the teams can work together to integrate as one single unit. If you are under the assumption that this would reward you with a successful ITSM implementation, then you are wrong. Instead, you can be consistent, tailor the right process with integrations in mind, and enforce a standardized template for others to learn all of your processes.

5. Selecting the Wrong ITSM Tool

Sometimes selecting the wrong ITSM tool

can also fail the implementation. A quick assessment of tools, focusing on the features of each solution matching with your objectives and requirements, should make the selection process easy. Even if you find the right tool for your implementation, you should also consider other factors such as the vendor's reputation, commitment to long-term development of the tool, degree of support, and implementation success rate.

6. Wasting Time on Complex Process Diagrams or Maps

When you start to implement ITSM, there is a need to produce complex and detailed process diagrams or maps. This consumes valuable time and resources within your organization. However, you can save time during the ITSM implementation phase by creating workflow automations such as escalation rules, priority settings, and automated change workflows.

7. Improperly Communicating With ITSM Team

Mail exchanges and kick-off meetings alone wouldn't ensure success. It requires proper communication within the entire ITSM team, either face-to-face or web meetings and emails. It is important for all those involved in the project to have a say in the entire process. Be creative and get your staff to brainstorm and provide feedback on the best ways to implement ITSM in your organization. ITSM is a people's project supported by tools and processes, not a tool or process project supported by people!

7 Deadly Sins of IT Incident Management



1. Incorrect ticket assignments
2. Prolonged resolution times
3. Fixes not working
4. Frequent violation of SLAs
5. Not closing resolved tickets
6. Lack of a communication strategy
7. Closing your eyes to a problem

IT environments today are boiling cauldrons of complexity triggering incidents that can have major impact on business and user satisfaction, not to mention legal and financial implications. Incident Management teams race against time fire-fighting service disruptions and resolving incidents. In the already challenging and high pressure environment of Incident Management, you'll be wise to stay clear of these seven deadly sins, that if ignored, can send your service desk's reputation tumbling.

1. Incorrect Ticket Assignments

When end users have visibility to the incident assignment process, incorrect and subsequent reassignments (passing the ticket from one support team to another or between individual technicians) can create a negative perception of the IT service desk organization. By the time the incident ticket reaches the right support team, precious resolution time is lost resulting in escalations and frustrated end users. Accurate incident categorization, the implementation of a Service Catalog, and automated routing of tickets that route incidents to the appropriate technician queues as soon as they land in the service desk, help reduce incorrectly assigned tickets.

2. Prolonged Resolution Times

Resolution Time is an essential barometer to judge technicians' troubleshooting skills, technical expertise, and communication skills. A longer time to achieve incident resolution means increased support costs for the IT organization and dissatisfied users who do not see their incidents resolved quickly. Correctly prioritizing incidents can help manage technician workload and give them insight on tickets needing urgent attention. A well-defined SLA mechanism with resolution times and escalation levels can help technicians stay aware of deadlines. In addition, a comprehensive knowledge base of solutions and training collateral (indexed and searchable) can help speed up incident resolution times.

3. Fixes Not Working

When tickets are reopened, most of the time that means they were not resolved right the first time or in other words, never resolved. A high number of reopened incidents suggest a poor quality of solutions provided by the service desk team. Improper closure of tickets without receiving confirmation from the ticket owner can result in reopening of incidents. Effective training and confirmation from the ticket owner can result in reopening of incidents. Effective training and maintenance of a knowledge base help reduce "failed fixes." At the same time the service desk should have a mechanism to

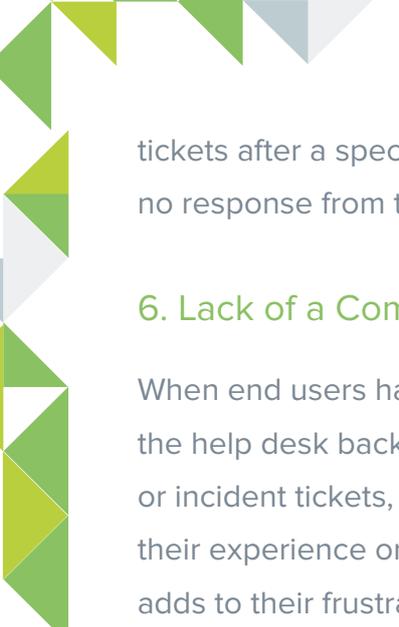
check with the end user if the resolution provided solves the issue.

4. Frequent Violation of SLAs

When incident tickets miss the resolution SLAs, they become overdue and are escalated as a result. A high number of overdue incidents reflects poorly on the service desk's ability to meet incident deadlines. Overdue incidents can be avoided by setting up realistic SLAs, proper notification mechanisms (early warning systems) for technicians, accurate ticket routing, correct prioritization of tickets, and providing technicians the access to a knowledge base for speedy resolution of tickets.

5. Not Closing Resolved Tickets

Closing a ticket is acknowledgement of the efficacy of the technician's solution by the end user. Tickets that may have not been solved but have been set to 'resolved' by technicians can never be addressed until they are forced to closure after confirmation from the user. Non-closure of incidents after they have been resolved will result in skewed metrics data (like Incident Backlog) that is inaccurate and misleading despite efforts put in by the technicians. You must ensure that notifications are sent out to end users when the incident tickets are resolved so that users can check the solution to see if it solves the issue and confirm closure. There should also be a mechanism to automatically close resolved



tickets after a specified time when there is no response from the end user.

6. Lack of a Communication Strategy

When end users have to keep contacting the help desk back for updates on outages or incident tickets, it does little to improve their experience or satisfaction and only adds to their frustration. A strong communication strategy should aim at engaging in timely, informative, proactive, and transparent communication with end users. Be it communicating a service disruption with regular updates along the way or providing a status update on the incident ticket, effective communication builds end user trust on the service desk. With plenty of channels like email, intranet, chat, and social media available, your communication strategy is going to be key to maintaining your end user relationships.

7. Closing Your Eyes to a Problem

When you solve an incident are you fixing just the symptoms or the root cause itself? When you see an increased frequency of repeat incidents it means that the underlying root cause has not been fixed. Though individual incidents raised may be resolved within the SLA time, repeat incidents steal technicians' time away from other important issues reducing productivity and ultimately, the service desk output. To overcome this, you must have a process for an incident to be converted to a problem or linked to one for further analysis and resolution.

All repeat incidents must be able to be linked to the problem if the service desk decides to close the incidents only after the root cause is fixed.

To get your Incident Management in order, it is important that you weed out these seven sins if they appear. When left unattended, they can destroy the smooth running operations of your service desk and show your team in poor light. It sounds like it's time to get kicking into action and give those sins the burial they deserve.

6 Steps to Build an Effective Help Desk Knowledge Base



1. Keep your knowledge base updated
2. Structure your knowledge base
3. Define an approval process
4. Enhance the search capability of your knowledge base
5. Determine who sees what
6. Manage your content effectively

John, the IT help desk manager, has been facing several productivity issues, including longer resolution times, and tickets have been piling up as a result. John thinks implementing an effective knowledge base might improve his team's productivity.

After all, a knowledge base will store resolutions, workarounds, and best practices that help reduce ticket inflows, improve resolution times, increase first call resolution rates, reduce the percentage of repeat incidents, and increase the self-service portal usage.

While John recognizes the value of an effective knowledge base, the day-to-day

pressures of managing a help desk team keeps him from implementing one. He just doesn't have the time. And, after fighting fires all day, he doesn't have the mental energy to step back and think strategically about a knowledge base.

To help John and other IT help desk managers facing the same challenge, we share six simple ideas below for building an effective knowledge base.

1. Keep Your Knowledge Base Updated

Update the knowledge base regularly with new solutions so that it evolves with your IT environment. Here are some best practices that will keep your knowledge base updated:

- Nominate a knowledge base manager from your team. The manager must own the entire life cycle of the knowledge process, from identifying solutions and assigning tickets to regularly updating the knowledge base.
- Include contributions to the knowledge base as a key performance indicator for your technicians.

1. Structure Your Knowledge Base

When the knowledge base content is organized well, it improves usability and end-user adoption. Structure the knowledge base to provide ease of use and navigation to end users by :

- Defining categories and sub-categories that reflect the problem categories in the help desk.
- Establishing templates to provide uniform content across the knowledge base.

2. Define an Approval Process

You can ensure the reliability and quality of the knowledge base content if you could implement the following approval process:

Technician → Domain or Solutions Expert → Knowledge Base Manager

A technician documents the resolution process, along with the solution or work-around, which the domain or solution expert reviews for technical accuracy. The technician can then involve a technical

writer to improve the structure and presentation. Finally, the knowledge base manager can approve the content and include it in the knowledge base.

3. Enhance the Search Capability of Your Knowledge Base

An enhanced search capability makes it easy for end users and technicians to use the knowledge base better. They will get to relevant solutions quickly and this will significantly reduce resolution times. You can enhance the search capability of your knowledge base by:

- Tagging articles with appropriate keywords.
- Providing clear and problem-specific topics to the articles.

4. Determine Who Sees What

Reduce the information overload on your end users by:

- Providing role-based access to knowledge base articles, so only relevant solutions are available to end users.
- Maintaining a knowledge base of advanced technical solutions and articles exclusively for, and limited to technicians.

5. Manage Your Content Effectively

Managing the knowledge base content is as important as keeping it updated by:

- Allowing technicians to update existing articles and revert to earlier versions, if necessary.
- Backing up your knowledge base content at regular intervals.
- Generating timely reports about knowledge base performance and usage.

These six tips will definitely help John create an effective knowledge base manually. And, if he would rather automate the task, he could simply use a help desk software, which does most of these tasks by default.

5 Steps to Successfully Implement an IT SLA



1. Define your SLA scope
2. Set response and resolution times
3. Create ownership and escalation points
4. Monitor performance and measure compliance
5. Establish change control in IT SLA

Every IT manager aspires to improve performance, accelerate incident response times, reduce system downtime, and simultaneously cut service costs in his or her IT support operations. Now, if you are in the pursuit of similar goals, then look no further than an IT SLA.

An IT SLA – or IT service level agreement – is a contract between IT support and an end user within the same organization. Typically, IT SLAs establish a clear understanding of service parameters by defining the services extended, the quality standards that must be adhered to, and the timelines within which the services must be delivered. Operational level agreements (OLAs) and underpinning contracts (UCs) are agreements that the IT support makes

with internal departments and with vendors or partners, respectively. The OLAs and UCs act as constituents of the final SLA that the IT support team draws up with the end users.

IT service level agreements play a crucial role in everyday tasks of IT support. And, they help you allocate the optimum number of resources to manage the service offerings. It's no surprise, then, that the absence of IT SLAs may lead to:

- Lack of clarity between departments about their roles
- Increase in the time taken to communicate, log, and resolve issues
- Lack of service efficiency
- Increased system downtime
- Dissatisfied end users and customers

At InterGlobe Aviation (Indigo), smart SLA management ensures a 30% annual improvement in IT performance and cuts costs by 30%, despite a 60% increase in load. If you'd like to reap similar IT advantages, follow these five steps to draw up a great SLA.

Step 1: Define Your SLA Scope

This defines the exact manner in which services are delivered within the agreed upon time frame. It also outlines the work-flow and assigns roles and responsibilities to IT support and all the other departments/vendors involved.

Step 2: Set Response and Resolution Times

Based on a ticket's priority, you'll need to define the response and resolution times. Priority levels can be categorized into critical, high, medium, and low based on a ticket's level of business impact.

Step 3: Create Ownership and Escalation Points

The agent/technician who makes the initial contact with the end user assumes ownership of the ticket until its resolution. A ticket that remains unresolved past its resolution time needs to be escalated. Therefore, you must clearly map each escalation level with a predefined resolution time and assign responsibility to the right person.

Step 4: Monitor Performance and Measure Compliance

Use appropriate tools to monitor performance and measure SLA compliance by using key performance indicators. Also, generate SLA non-compliance reports periodically to identify gaps. Then, you'll be able to plug these gaps either through training programs or by redefining the SLA.

Step 5: Establish Change Control in IT SLA

Keep your SLAs open to changes and modifications to progress with evolving business and customer needs. Both your IT and end user should agree upon a standardized process to authorize changes to be made and document them in the SLA.

IT service level agreements create a unified vision for your business by getting your IT to work in cohesion with other departments/vendors and ensure the best service delivery to end users. So, set your SLAs on track and be on your way to achieving IT efficiency.

7 Ways to Convince Users to Adopt Your Self-Service Portal



1. Make self-service a “must” rather than an option
2. Keep your knowledge base updated
3. Educate your users on the benefits
4. Explain how calls end up in queues
5. Provide incentives or rewards
6. Provide a better user experience
7. Make your self-service portal gadget friendly

Today’s IT environment is changing rapidly and so are your customers. They are increasingly demanding and are looking for instant resolution of their tickets as well as instant access to information on your services.

Sometimes your service desk might get bombarded with calls when a user faces issues or requires a service to be delivered. This may lead to service desk missed calls or being stuck in the waiting queue.

If you’ve already invested in a self-service portal — or plan to make such an investment — now might be a good time to consider the best ways to encourage its

widespread adoption by your end users. Here are nine different ways to convince your users to use the self-service portal.

1. Make Self Service a “Must” Rather Than an Option

Most users tend to call tech agents for help when any service goes down rather than using the self-service portal. As a result, the number of calls to your service desk increases. This in turn, increases the load on your help desk agents. For your help desk to perform efficiently, it is better to recommend the self-service portal to users and make it clear to them that this is the most preferred method.

2. Keep Your Knowledge Base Updated

Keep the knowledge base updated with the latest how-to's, workarounds and solutions to help users to login to self-service portal and search for solutions before raising a ticket. Make announcements whenever a new solution is added to the knowledge base and invite your users to login into self-service portal and read through the solutions.

3. Educate Your Users on the Benefits

Users may not be aware of what a self-service portal can do for them. Educate your users on the benefits of a self-service portal such as self-tracking the status of any requests or tickets themselves, see pending approvals, announcements etc. With better knowledge on the benefits comes greater value to your end users.

4. Explain How Calls End Up in Queues

Sometimes, due to high call volumes, a tech agent happens to miss a call and the issue remains unresolved. Tech agents will not be able to track those incidents tickets and document the solutions for future use. They can communicate this problem to their users and explain why ticket creation via portal can be a savior.

5. Provide Incentives or Rewards

Providing incentives or rewards to those who use the self-service portal will encourage users to frequently use it rather than call help desk technicians for help. Rewards may not necessarily be monetary benefits but can be a points-based rewards system to encourage users and to maximize the usage of the self-service portal.

6. Provide a Better User Experience

Make it easy for the users to raise incidents or service requests through the self-service portal with custom templates. Have timely conversations to help the users get regular updates on the ticket and to create a great user experience.

7. Make Your Self-Service Portal Gadget Friendly

Having a mobile and tablet optimized self-service portal helps users to submit ticket on the go. Instead of calling techs, users can submit via the mobile/tablet app. Users can track all their requests via the mobile apps anytime, anywhere.

5 Principles of Best-in-Class IT Problem Management



1. Create a focus group to own the problem management process
2. Analyze incident trends
3. Establish well-defined problem management processes
4. Perform a root cause analysis
5. Strive towards problem management maturity

“Houston, we’ve got a problem.” This legendary statement by Commander Jim Lovell of Apollo 13 has transcended exploding oxygen tanks in outer space to everyday life, including IT. How often have you started off dealing with an incident only to realize to your dismay that you have only been dealing with the tip of the iceberg?

Problem management is all about uncovering the unknown, the hidden root cause that is an endless source of tickets to your IT help desk. When you implement an effective problem management process, your IT team can go beyond fire fighting mode to focus on strategic IT objectives. Here are five principles that might help you achieve a best-in-class problem management:

1. Create a Focus Group to Own the Problem Management Process

In many organizations, a change advisory board reviews the change requests and advises the change managers or owners, reducing the business impact. Similarly, having a problem committee (PC) that identifies, prioritizes, and assigns problems can effectively reduce business impact. A PC can be a small, email-connected team with members from each area of the IT department, led by a manager who is responsible for all the tasks of the committee.

2. Analyze Incident Trends

Analyzing incident trends and reviewing

high-impact incidents can help the PC identify problems. Let's consider an example. In an IT environment, multiple users report an application crash, which the IT team resolves by reinstalling the app within the prescribed SLA. However, this issue can reoccur and the only way to solve it will be reinstallation. On the other hand, if the PC could identify the root cause, the IT team won't need to tackle multiple incidents caused by a single problem.

3. Establish Well-Defined Problem Management Processes

Problem management is closely connected to other ITSM processes like incident management, change management, asset management, and CMDB. But still, problem management itself needs a well-documented repeatable process so that it is easier and effective. To make problem management effective, implement a process that is easy and follows a logical sequence of steps.

Firstly, you could record a problem after checking the database for any historical data on the problem. Then, you could see if a solution already exists. If not, the problem owner can classify the problem based on its impact and priority. Finally, you can provide a solution or initiate a change if necessary. Based on an organization's specific needs, the IT team can even tailor -make the problem management process.

4. Perform a Root Cause Analysis

When you institute an effective problem management model in your organization, you will reduce the inflow of multiple tickets for the same incident as well as recurring incidents. To meet this objective, an effective root cause analysis must be done. A root cause is the core of the problem, and removing the root cause ensures that the problem never reoccurs. You could use the simple five-why technique, the fish-bone diagram, or the Pareto method to do this analysis. But you should also continuously strive to improve the root cause analysis.

5. Strive Towards Problem Management Maturity

A truly mature management model is one that is proactive. Proactive problem management involves identifying and resolving problems before incidents occur. Therefore, it must involve activities like investigation of fragile and vulnerable components of the IT environment, an analysis of a new patch, or an upgrade to prevent incidents due to the patch or upgrade.

These five principles of best-in-class problem management will transform your help desk from a fire-fighting mode to a proactive powerhouse, ensuring that the statement "Houston, we've got a problem," is never associated with your IT.

5 Steps That Made Ben a Better Change Manager



1. Validate and authorize change
2. Plan, test, and address the challenges
3. Communicate with the change advisory board
4. Coordinate implementation
5. Review the change and improve

Ben is the new IT administrator of a large production company. Soon after joining, Ben learned that the company used outdated software to manage its payroll and used different applications to track employee absences and travel claims. This resulted in miscalculation of the amount payable by the company to the employee and vice versa. Often, the company paid the employees either more or less than the correct amount, which led to a lot of chaos.

Ben decided to tackle these issues by first implementing new payroll software that came with two integrated modules, an expense module and an HR module. The expense module will track the travel expenses of the employees, and the HR module will track the absences and leave

types, ensuring accuracy in calculating the amount payable to employees.

Regardless of how small or big, change involves managing people, processes, and technology. To ensure a smooth transition, Ben followed the best practices of change management like:

- Validate and authorize change
- Plan, test, and address the challenges
- Communicate with the change advisory board
- Coordinate implementation
- Review the change and improve

Step 1: Validate and Authorize Change

As a change manager, Ben must have a thorough understanding of the change. He asked (and answered too) some of the basic but business-critical questions like:

- What is the value that this change brings?
- What is the impact of this change on the business configuration?
- What is the business priority of the change?
- What could be the budget for the change implementation?
- Will the benefits of this change outweigh the cost?
- If yes, when will the change be implemented and who is responsible?

Considering the implementation of the new payroll software, Ben understood clearly that ruling out financial inaccuracy is the primary value this change would bring in. He sold the values and benefits to the stakeholders to get executive buy-in. Ben analyzed the impact of this change and classified the change accordingly and aligned people, processes, and purpose.

Step 2: Plan, Test, and Address the Challenges

Once the change is authorized, arriving at an accurate rollout plan for the change implementation is a challenge. Ben

assigned a technician (a change owner) to come up with a rollout plan, keeping a tab on minimal business disruption.

Once the plan was ready, Ben created a replica of his payroll environment and tested the rollout plan. During the testing phase, new challenges cropped up that eventually led Ben to fine-tune the rollout plan while he noted down the lessons. He never proceeded to implement the change without a proper backout plan. He ensured that a backout plan was in place to face an emergency and to ensure high availability.

Step 3: Communicate with the Change Advisory Board

Ben sought the recommendations and assistance of the stakeholders, who constitute the change advisory board or CAB. The CAB included the payroll manager, CFO, IT head, and a few executives in the payroll and IT departments. Then the CAB analyzed the change from a business and a technical perspective and collectively shared the analysis with Ben. Based on the feedback and analysis from the CAB, Ben approved the change and passed it on to implementation.

Step 4: Coordinate Implementation

The successful implementation of the change falls not just on the shoulders of an implementer, but on those of the change



manager as well. Therefore, Ben coordinated the execution of the change plan in implementing a new payroll software solution, while ensuring that processes like building, testing, and implementation are carried out in the right order and at the right time as agreed upon.

Step 5: Review the Change and Improve

Similar to step 1, it is also important to ask a few basic and business-critical questions after the change implementation. The following were some of the questions that Ben answered,

- Did the new payroll software achieve its objective?
- Is everyone satisfied with the results?
- Were there any side effects?
- Did the implementation exceed planned costs, resource usage, or downtime?

The answers to these simple questions made Ben to focus on the continual improvement of the change management process.

With these best practices, Ben was able to put the new, streamlined payroll software in place, did accurate payroll calculations quickly, and made the payday a joyful one for the employees.

5 Best Practices to Be a Successful Project Manager



1. Identify scope, budget, and time
2. Breakdown your projects into milestones and tasks
3. Build a collaborative team
4. Choose your project management tool wisely
5. Use data to make better decisions

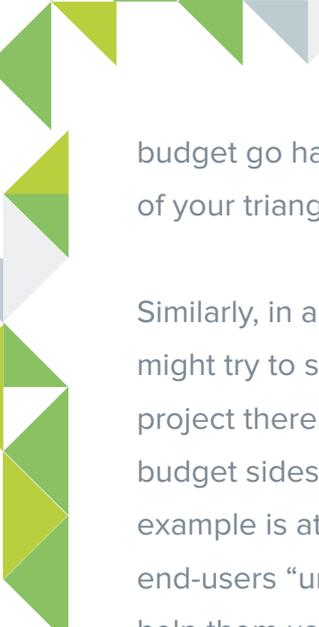
As a project manager who's been around a while you would have experienced a visit to the project guillotine. Perhaps, it was due to a massive schedule slip, budget overrun, or scope creep (or sometimes all three – now that's total chaos). And, as a project manager, you were the first in line at the guillotine!

In retrospect, you (always) get a feeling, "If only I handled the project differently, it could have been a success." Sound familiar? If yes, here are some best practices that you can follow to avoid some expensive project surprises and steer your projects towards success.

1. Identify Scope, Budget, and Time

Your first project check should be to define what you want to accomplish or, in other words, define the project objective. To do this, you should define the three most important and inter-related parameters – scope (overall goal), budget (money), and schedule (time). Consider these three parameters as a triangle. As a project manager, you need to keep the whole triangle from falling apart.

Let's say your IT project involves installing antivirus software across your company. At the start of the project, the costs are controlled very strictly. But time slips away and it takes longer than intended. Now, you decide to allocate more resources to speed up the installation process making the



budget go haywire. Here, the budget side of your triangle is in jeopardy.

Similarly, in a software environment, you might try to scope in more in a particular project thereby compromising the time and budget sides of your triangle. A classic example is attempting to give your end-users “unplanned” features that will help them use your software effectively.

In most projects, one of the three parameters remains fixed, while the others can be changed to fix a problem or to optimize the project. It is for you to make the call on which side of the project triangle is key to your project’s quality and success.

2. Breakdown Your Projects into Milestones and Tasks

Starting work on a project without planning can create confusion, schedule slippage, cost overrun, and resource issues that slim down the chances of project success. To manage your projects effectively, it is best to breakdown your projects into tasks and subtasks, (i.e., work breakdown structure that will help you to keep your projects organized and on track.) Here’s what you can do:

- Gather your team, and identify all the tasks and subtasks for a given project (grab a sticky note and note down the pointers).

- Define the tasks and subtasks, and then prioritize and arrange them.
- Keep adding, changing, and removing the tasks and subtasks until it sounds logical or accurate to proceed.

Now go back to your project management tool, add the tasks and subtasks, and allocate the right resources to each task. You can also set milestones or, in other words, define the date on which a report or deliverable is due or completed. This way, you can gauge how far you are from your milestone, how fast your resources need to work towards achieving it, or how to better manage your resources to deliver on time.

3. Build a Collaborative Team

Within a team, you will find a mixture of different people with different attitudes. The best team culture happens when the team members collaborate with each other, work in tandem, and realize that everyone else has a significant contribution to the success of a project .

If one of your team members lacks cooperation, your IT project can quickly become tangled. This in turn erodes the team morale. As a project manager, you need to stay on top of communications and ensure that the team is motivated.

4. Choose Your Project Management Tool Wisely

There is a dizzying array of project management software in the market. However, you need to have a clear understanding of your business needs and challenges to narrow down the choices and identify the right tool.

5. Use Data to Make Better Decisions

As your project moves along, it will evolve. There will be many changes in terms of the tasks, resources, and time and you need to make decisions at each stage. This is where Gantt charts come into play to get a holistic view of your project's progress and to make better decisions.

Gantt charts will give you a visual timeline from start to finish of each task, show the progress of the individual tasks assigned to your resources, track the utilization of your resources, as well as monitor the progress of the overall project thereby helping you make better decisions.

The use of colors in the Gantt charts will further enhance the look and feel of your project reports. And you'll just love customizing and using it to handle your projects.

These best practices can be an effective starting point. Adopt them and you'll save your head and avoid the chopping block.

7 Tips for an Effective IT Asset Management



1. Build your inventory
2. Map your assets
3. Manage the life cycles of your assets
4. Extend asset management to other ITIL processes
5. Automate alerts and notifications
6. Report and share asset data
7. Take ITAM beyond IT

Today's IT support teams don't just deal with IT and business services. They also manage the physical and virtual asset components. Because those assets are the building blocks of an organization's IT infrastructure, the benefits of IT asset management (ITAM) can't be stressed enough. Many organizations have no knowledge about their IT asset infrastructure while others have limited visibility of their planned and actual asset inventory. Streamlined asset management can bring down IT costs significantly.

ITAM plays a vital role in helping an organization define and control its IT infrastructure by maintaining data about the historical and current state of all assets.

ITAM also supports other ITSM processes by providing accurate information about the assets affected due to an incident, problem, or change. Finally, ITAM helps an organization stay compliant with its software licenses, gear up for audits, and reduce legal as well as security risks.

Here are some tips that will guide you to implement an effective asset management process and help you reap the maximum benefits.

1. Build Your Inventory

Your major goal should be to establish a central asset repository that comprises all of your IT hardware and software components. Based on the operating systems used in your organization, choose from a wide list of available scan and

discovery techniques such as script-based scan, domain-based scan, agent-based scan, and distributed asset-based scan. For example, if you are a Windows user, then an agent-based scan would be ideal. It is best to capture as many asset-related attributes as possible, such as asset type, manufacturer name, status, location, and cost in order to shed more light on your scanned assets and understand them better.

2. Map Your Assets

Having an asset database inventory would be pointless unless you know details such as who uses the asset, what components the asset is connected to, and what services the asset would affect in case of a failure. Now that you have built up your asset inventory database, the next step would be to build your CMDB by creating dependencies between your assets. Build a relationship map using different relationship types to get a bird's-eye view of your IT infrastructure setup. For example, a business service can be mapped to other entities using relationships such as connected to, depends on, runs on, impacts other services, and receives data from.

3. Manage the Life Cycles of Your Assets

All hardware and software assets are bound to be part of a cycle that traverses through various states such as leased, purchased, in-repair, and in-use. These

states help you track the complete life cycle of the assets, resulting in better resource utilization. When these assets move from one state to another, the central asset repository should be updated with the reason, time stamp, and the name of the person who modifies the state. This updated information lets you stay current, have control over your assets, and make effective purchase decisions. For example, a purchase manager can opt to lease or purchase a new asset as a replacement for an existing asset that is in the disposed or in-repair state.

4. Extend Asset Management to Other ITSM Processes

Asset management is not a stand-alone process. It has to be integrated with other ITSM processes to help IT personnel make informed decisions. It enhances the rate at which incidents, problems, and changes are closed by providing detailed information about the assets involved. Here is how asset management supports some of the ITSM processes:

- **Incident management** – Provides key diagnostic information about assets used by the requester and helps access any computer or server via a remote control feature to troubleshoot issues.
- **Problem management** – Provides asset information to identify root cause of problems.



- **Change management** – Helps you to carry out a change with proper planning and ensures minimal business downtime. Furthermore, asset relationships help you understand how planned changes can impact the IT environment.

5. Automate Alerts and Notifications

Asset management usually involves a lot of stakeholders, including end users (who would be affected if an asset fails) and asset managers (who are responsible to track and maintain the assets). It is important to notify these stakeholders about changes in your asset infrastructure via automatic alerts and notifications. By doing so, stakeholders can proactively take steps to avert or reduce the occurrence of incidents. For example, announcing a server failure before it occurs would prevent end users from logging server failure tickets with the help desk tool. Similarly, notifying a purchase manager about a license or contract that will soon expire would allow the manager to purchase extra licenses and stay compliant.

6. Report and Share Asset Data

Creating and sharing detailed asset-related reports frequently gives the decision-makers a regularly updated snapshot of your IT infrastructure. These quantitative asset reports can help them to prepare for audits and formulate financial budgets more precisely. Here are some most

commonly generated reports:

- Unauthorized usage of hardware and software
- Detection of unauthorized configuration items
- Assets identified as the cause of service failures
- Ratio of used licenses to purchased licenses
- Average cost of a license

7. Take ITAM Beyond IT

Often IT asset managers ask themselves, “Should I track all my non-IT assets too?” After setting up a central repository for tracking and maintaining all your IT assets, it is only logical to extend the scope of ITAM to non-IT assets as this would prevent another department from re-inventing the wheel. It is vital to track all your non-IT assets such as generators, air conditioning units, refrigerators, and furniture in order to understand your organization’s financial spending and revise your budget. Non-IT assets can be added into your help desk by importing .csv files or scanning bar codes.

The points described above could be a good starting point for you to implement ITAM in your organization. And that is guaranteed to accelerate performance, compliance, and efficiency in your IT service desk operations.

5 Questions to Ask to Drive a Compelling IT Shopping Experience for Your Customers

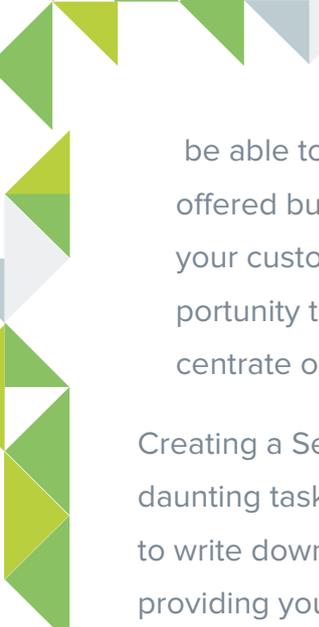


Sometimes being a customer of an IT department is like visiting the worst shop in the world. Imagine that you need a new mobile device but you have only one place to shop for it. You go into the shop and there is no stock on the shelves. Not just stock, but there's no mention of the opening and closing time and no details of how to go about ordering. There's a telephone in the corner and you give a ring to ask whether you can order a mobile device. The customer care person on the other end isn't too sure and has to check with someone else to get back to you. In the outside world this would seem completely crazy and undoubtedly the

business loses many customers. However, this is how many IT departments treat their customers and users every day without having a service catalog in place.

The benefits of having this information collated and immediately available are numerous and we have listed a few below

- Everyone knows where they stand: If the user has the same list of services as the analyst on the end of the phone, then there will be no confusion as to whether the product is available or not, when it will be available, and how much it will cost.
- Processes can be executed quicker: With less time spent working on availability, you can concentrate on actually providing the service quickly
- Less reliance on tribal knowledge: Collectively, we may think we know the answer to a question. But with no data or analysis to back us up when things go wrong, we could be treading on dangerous ground.
- Helps to identify service wastage: By using your Service Catalog and Service Desk Tool together, you should



be able to identify the services that are offered but perhaps not really used by your customers thereby giving the opportunity to free your resources to concentrate on other areas.

Creating a Service Catalog can feel like a daunting task. But in essence, you just have to write down everything that you are providing your customers/users. Even a very basic Service Catalog can help analysts, customers, and users to know where they stand and also to help manage expectations. A good ITSM Service Catalog should contain all the services that are currently available to your customers and end users in a clear concise business language. Chances are that you already have a fair proportion of this somewhere and it just needs collating and sorting. You can start to create your own Service Catalog by asking yourself these simple questions:

- **What:** What is the service you are providing? i.e. Email, Office Applications, Printing
- **Who:** To which users are your services available? It may be that the service is available to all of your users or that only Payroll are allowed access to this particular software
- **When:** Whether the service is available 24/7 or for two hours on a Wednesday morning should be captured in the Service Catalog.

- **Where:** Make it clear what kind of support you can offer to which locations. If a customer has an office in a remote, difficult to get to area you need to be clear about the types of support and timescales they can expect.
- **Why:** Relationship information is key to providing a good support service. Reporting software may not seem that important but once you know it's responsible for providing information to the payroll system that incident at the end of the month becomes much more urgent.
- You can also include a section for cost information if required.

Creating your Service Catalog can be as straightforward as entering the answers to the questions above into a document or a spreadsheet or you may have the functionality within your service desk tool to collate this information. However, once you decide to proceed, it is important that the Service Catalog is used and updated regularly. The very least you should expect to achieve with a Service Catalog is for everyone to know what to expect from the IT department and to realize it when they don't. Communication, as always, is crucial to ensure that this pivotal instrument is used effectively.

Here are some further steps to consider, once your Service Catalog is established:

Service Portfolio

While the Service Catalog contains the currently available services, the Service Portfolio may contain possible future offerings and also the services that have been suspended.

SLA's/OLA's

Now that you have a list of services available, you can start creating Operational Level Agreements among your teams and Service Level Agreements with the business. Now that the Service Catalog is in place, this process will be easier.

Metrics

Using your Call Management System and keywords/categories together with the Service Catalog, you should be able to gain greater insight into the most used services and the costs associated with them (if a cost section has been included). This facilitates better resource allocation and ensures their focus.

7 Simple Ways to Reduce “Cost per Ticket”



1. Maintain a knowledge base
2. Automate repetitive tasks
3. Prioritize and categorize
4. Define SLAs and stick to them
5. Analyze incident–service request ratio
6. Utilize technician skill set effectively
7. Identify and resolve problems

Recently, John, an IT help desk manager, has been noticing a steep increase in IT expenses and, needless to say, is under tremendous pressure to bring them down. All that his team does all day is solve tickets, so he thinks reducing the “cost per ticket” could be a good starting point. To help John in his mission, we decided to tell him a little about this metric and what he could do to achieve a leaner IT help desk.

Why Cost per Ticket?

IT support is considered a cost center in most organizations and usually the first to get a budget cut during a financial downturn. Therefore, IT support must remain efficient even when IT spending is reduced. Cost per ticket is one key

metric that helps the IT support analyze their efficiency in handling tickets within a given budget.

What is Cost per Ticket?

MetricNet defines cost per ticket as “the total monthly operating expense of IT support divided by the monthly ticket volume.” Simple, right? But, the insight provided by the cost per ticket metric can be profound and prolific.

So, here are seven ways in which John and other IT help desk managers can keep their cost per ticket at an optimum level.

1. Maintain a Knowledge Base

According to a research study by MetricNet, the average cost of service

by a Level 1 technician is about \$22 per ticket, and this cost triples each time the ticket is escalated. On the other hand, a repository of best practices, workarounds, and solutions can help end users solve minor incidents without raising a ticket for each issue, allowing technicians to channel their time and effort towards other, high-priority tickets. Moreover, maintaining a knowledge base helps technicians become more productive because they need not reinvent the wheel every time a ticket is raised.

2. Automate Repetitive Tasks

Automating repetitive tasks such as ticket dispatch and password reset can help increase your technician's productivity. Automating ticket dispatch can reduce bottlenecks in the resolution process and eliminate time loss due to routing issues. Automating password reset will reduce the number of calls to the IT help desk, enabling technicians to work on higher priority tickets.

3. Prioritize and Categorize

When you categorize and prioritize tickets by using tools such as a priority matrix, you can reduce resolution time significantly. This will help your IT technicians plan their schedules and work efficiently, making your users happy. Proper categorization and prioritization also means that each ticket

is assigned to the right person or group, reducing unnecessary escalations and delayed resolutions.

4. Define SLAs and Stick to Them

Well-defined SLAs can help IT help desk technicians work under predefined time frames depending on the severity level of the tickets, ensuring timely service to end users. Besides defining realistic SLAs, it is important that you track SLAs and escalate tickets appropriately so that necessary action can be taken.

5. Analyze Incident–Service Request Ratio

Cost per ticket can be broken down into two components – cost per incident and cost per service request. In general, cost of service requests are higher due to the longer time taken to resolve them. So, having regular reports on incident-to-service request ratios and working on ways to prevent higher levels of service requests will help bring down the cost per ticket.

6. Utilize Technician Skill Set Effectively

According to a research study by Metric-Net, 56.2 percent of the total cost per ticket is spent on technician salaries and benefits. Therefore, you can reduce cost per ticket when the existing workforce handles a higher number of tickets or if a reduced workforce handles the same number of tickets.



7. Identify and Resolve Problems

A single problem could result in a deluge of tickets to the service desk from every corner of the organization. That is, a single problem could elevate the cost per ticket due to repeat solutions and redundant effort. An important role of any service desk is to investigate, analyze, and eliminate any problem and thereby fix it for good. Eliminating a single problem reduces ticket traffic, leading to a lower cost per ticket.

These seven steps can help John and other IT help desk managers bring down their cost per ticket and make effective use of their IT budgets. And with help desk software available for free, cutting down your IT expense can't get any easier. So, go ahead and get started on your mission towards a leaner IT.

7 Questions to Ask Before Choosing the Best IT Help Desk



1. Cloud or On-Premise?
2. Does it have a robust feature set?
3. Can you implement best practices?
4. Is it customizable?
5. Does it integrate seamlessly?
6. Is the vendor credible?
7. Will you get continuous support?

An IT help desk ensures seamless end-user experience by centralizing and automating service management processes. The right IT help desk improves productivity, guarantees end-user satisfaction, cuts costs, and aligns IT with business. Here are the seven questions you must ask when choosing an IT help desk for your organization.

1. Cloud or On-Premise?

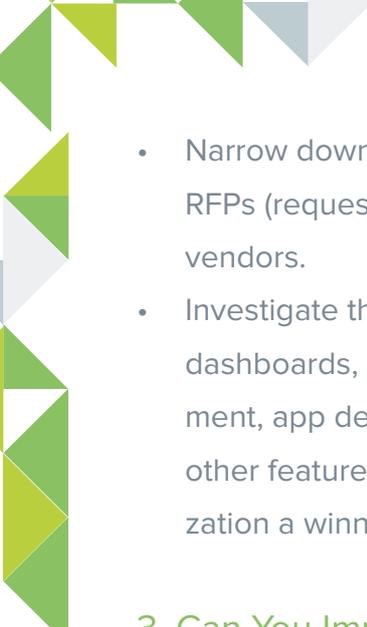
A cloud-based help desk requires less capital, can be deployed quickly, assures hassle-free upgrades, and provides scalability. On the other hand, on-premise models provide better control over data security and software. The cloud-based model is suited for small companies,

whereas the on-premise model is well-suited to meet the demands of large enterprises.

2. Does It Have a Robust Feature Set?

Today, help desk software come with a dizzying array of features and functions. Here are some pointers to help you find the one with the right feature set:

- Analyze the gaps in your current IT support.
- Identify the core IT service management processes that you want to implement in the short, medium, and long term.
- Prioritize and sort out the critical IT service management processes.

- 
- Narrow down your choice by soliciting RFPs (requests for proposals) from the vendors.
 - Investigate the availability of real-time dashboards, mobility, social enablement, app development platforms and other features that will give your organization a winning edge.

3. Can You Implement Best Practices?

With the right help desk software, you'll be able to implement ITSM best practices out of the box. So check whether your help desk facilitates optimized ticket routing; better communication between the IT staff and end users; streamlined SLAs; reporting on KPIs; and work flows for incident, problem, change, and release management. Also, you'll want to find the number of core ITSM processes the help desk can support.

4. Is It Customizable?

Customization gives an organization the opportunity to incorporate its internal process work flows into the help desk. Check whether customization is possible with email templates, web forms, business rules, SLAs, knowledge base, and dashboard themes. This will bring advantages such as faster request submissions and ticket resolutions, streamlined knowledge base, tailored dashboards, and personalized communication with end users.

5. Does It Integrate Seamlessly?

The IT help desk software in any organization must seamlessly interact with and complement other applications in the environment through APIs. So while selecting your help desk software, check whether it can integrate with applications such as network and application monitoring tools, asset management systems, and Sharepoint portals. This will ensure smooth information flow and reduce communication redundancy.

6. Is the Vendor Credible?

Evaluate your vendor's credibility by checking the company's reputation, size, and number of years in business. Read analyst reports and position the vendors in the ITSM landscape. Seek feedback about the vendor from organizations that have already used its products. Here, case studies, customer testimonials, and direct customer interactions come in handy.

7. Will You Get Continuous Support?

Effective product support is crucial to a successful help desk implementation. Therefore, vendor support in the form of product training, best practice consultations, post-implementation issue handling, and prompt fixes for bugs will make all the difference to your IT service. The vendor teams should be reachable around the clock and respond positively to

feature requests and feedback. Don't just settle for any help desk. Ask yourself these seven questions; narrow down your choices; and find the perfect help desk solution that fits your business needs.



About ServiceDesk Plus

ServiceDesk Plus is comprehensive help desk software with integrated asset and project management capabilities built on industry-standard best practices. ServiceDesk Plus is trusted by more than 125,000 organizations, across 186 countries, and is available in 29 different languages. With ServiceDesk Plus, IT organizations can leverage ITSM processes while unifying their help desk, asset management, and project management activities in a single pane of glass.

About ManageEngine

ManageEngine is a division of Zoho Corporation with offices worldwide, including the United States, India, Japan, and China. ManageEngine delivers the real-time IT management tools that empower IT teams to meet organizational needs for real-time services and support. Worldwide, established, and emerging enterprises — including more than 60 percent of the Fortune 500 — rely on ManageEngine products to ensure the optimal performance of their critical IT infrastructure, including networks, servers, applications, desktops, and more.



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