

THINKstrategies



A Whitepaper for Channel Organization Decision-Makers

Automating and Optimizing Service Desk Performance

Published On Behalf of Kaseya



Executive Overview

As organizations of all sizes become more dependent on information technology (IT) to conduct their day-to-day operations, they are increasingly seeking better ways of managing IT to maximize its value. A key component of any successful IT management strategy is an effective service delivery capability, and an organization's service desk is essential to ensure quality service and support.

In many organizations, the service desk is often the 'first line of defense' that must react to IT issues. However, most organizations have not designed their service desk to effectively respond to problems, never mind proactively manage IT operations to mitigate potential risks.

The Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL®) is an internationally recognized framework of best practice approaches for delivering high quality IT services. While this framework has proven to be useful for many organizations, it is equally important that organizations leverage the right tools to fulfill the expectations of this framework.

Although a myriad of service desk tools and technologies exist to address these issues, many organizations lack the inhouse skills and resources to successfully deploy them. As a consequence, the service desk staff is at a distinct disadvantage trying to properly identify and resolve an escalating volume of issues.

This situation has led many organizations to outsource their entire IT operations in hopes that a third-party service provider can handle their IT requirements more cost-effectively. Unfortunately, most outsourcing agreements fail to achieve their original objectives and are either terminated or significantly restructured.

The failure of traditional outsourcing arrangements has fueled the growth of a new group of managed service providers (MSPs) offering more narrowly defined services which allow organizations to 'out-task' specific IT management functions rather than relinquish their entire IT operations to a third-party. Ironically, many MSPs are grappling with the same service desk management issues as end-user organizations.

A new generation of service desk automation and management solutions is emerging that can help IT organizations of all sizes deliver better quality support to their end-users. These holistic, yet versatile solutions also offer more flexible pricing and powerful reporting capabilities to reduce the total cost of ownership (TCO) and increase the return on investment (ROI) of an IT operation.

This whitepaper will examine these issues and describe how Kaseya's integrated service desk solution enables IT organizations, and third-party service providers, to respond more effectively to IT problems as they arise and proactively manage the IT environment to reduce the risk of IT problems and better support their end-users.

It will also look at how Kaseya is enhancing its service desk capability with a growing 'ecosystem' of technology partners; expanding its education programs to enable users to fully leverage a service desk platform; and offering an 'out-tasking' option to those MSPs who would prefer to offload certain tasks of the service desk function.

Market Trends Driving Today's Service Desk Requirements

Organizations of all sizes are becoming more reliant on IT to perform their daily business. IT has been a major contributor to the geographic expansion of businesses across international boundaries, increases in worker productivity and the rise of the mobile workforce.

At the same time, IT has fuelled greater global competition and created greater risks of systems failures. Compounding these issues is the escalating demands of a dispersed workforce which often needs remote support in order to perform their jobs from home or on the road.

Small- and mid-size businesses (SMBs) are often shorthanded when it comes to fully leveraging technology, while large-scale enterprises are often frustrated because their IT staff is spending too much time simply keeping their IT systems up and running. In both cases, they would prefer to be using their limited resources to perform more strategic tasks which can have a greater impact on their business rather than simply reacting to problems.

Yankee Group has found that a vast majority of IT problems are caused by human error. As a consequence, Gartner estimates that most IT departments spend upwards of 80% of their time trying to resolve problems rather than more directly helping an organization achieve its business objectives.

A growing population of MSPs is aiming to offload, or out-task, these hassles so the end-user organization can focus on its core business. However, in order to build a successful managed services business, the MSPs must implement a cost-effective service desk function.

Traditional network/system management (NSM) software platforms have failed to address these issues for a number of reasons. In the same way that traditional, legacy applications, such as SAP and Siebel, have been difficult to deploy and fully utilize, the traditional NSM platforms, such as IBM's NetView and HP's OpenView, have been too expensive for most SMBs to acquire and too complex for most large-scale enterprises to fully deploy.

The traditional NSM platforms require considerable manual effort to perform their various functions, rather than automating these tasks. They also lack an open architecture, so third-party solutions cannot be added easily to enhance the basic NSM functionality.

In an increasingly competitive marketplace in which companies of all sizes are seeking to better position themselves while improving their operating efficiencies, finding ways to improve the reliability and cost-effectiveness of their IT operations is becoming increasingly important.

For some organizations, this means strengthening their inhouse skills and resources by acquiring the right software and training to meet their objectives. For other organizations, they may view the service desk as outside their core competencies and seek to offload, or outsource, it to an expert provider.

Service Desk Best Practices

The Service Desk is the centerpiece of a successful IT Service Management (ITSM) operation, according to the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL). ITIL is a best practices framework which outlines how effective IT teams should operate in order to properly support an organization's corporate objectives.

The service desk should provide a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for corporate end-users, and possibly third-parties, to satisfy their IT needs. The service desk is also referred to as a helpdesk or call/contact center in many organizations.

The service desk responds to and reports the status of IT incidents and end-user service requests. It also provides an interface between the end-users and the IT team. In ideal situations, the service desk should pro-actively keep end-users and business executives informed of all service-related events, actions and changes that may affect them.

More specifically, the service desk may perform the following management tasks:

- Incident Management
- Problem Management
- Change Management
- Configuration Management
- Asset Management
- Release Management
- Availability Management
- Capacity Management
- Financial Management
- Service Continuity Management.
- Security Management
- Service Level Management

This is obviously a long list of responsibilities which few service desk teams have been able to master entirely either due to a lack of tools or skills. There are plenty of point-solutions, such as Configuration Management Database (CMDB) products, but few fully integrated, easy-to-use platforms to handle all the service desk responsibilities.

Failure to fulfill these responsibilities can have an adverse affect on the broader organization. Among the most obvious affects are,

- Slow response to incoming calls, leading to longer resolution times
- Poor incident recording and tracking which prevents proactive analysis
- Inadequate status reporting which can lead to customer dissatisfaction
- Ineffective problem identification, diagnosis and resolution
- Inconsistent monitoring and escalation procedures which could violate SLA
- Failure to properly close incidents which could distract staff from real issues
- Poor communication/coordination of second and third line support

Within enterprises, these affects could aggravate tensions between the inhouse IT department and its corporate end-users and executives. These issues could also result in customer abandonment and threaten the corporate reputation of MSPs.

Circumventing these problems requires the right technology and education.

How Kaseya's Automated Software Platform Satisfies Corporate and MSP Service Desk Requirements

Kaseya's offers an integrated platform which automates many of the routine service desk functions, so the internal IT team or external MSP can proactively manage the environment and more quickly resolve problems when they arise.

The platform includes an easy to use trouble ticketing, tracking and reporting system. It also includes a powerful problem resolution capability to resolve issues quickly. Users and support personnel can interact in real time to report, diagnose and resolve issues without ever having to physically visit the desktop.

Kaseya's service desk platform is web-based, so it can also be deployed quickly. It also does not require dedicated servers or a major reconfiguration of your current systems. It does not require significant training or a lot of consultants to implement. The web interface also permits the platform to be accessed from anywhere, at anytime by authorized personnel based on access controls set by the administrator.

The platform also allows the administrator to configure alerts based on issue creation and update preferences, including user definable issue categories, priorities and status ratings. Email, beeper and other communications methods can be used to issue alerts to support personnel based on the issue criteria and specific device or user groups.

Kaseya's **Computer Audit and Discovery Asset Management** capabilities perform automatic audits of an organization's servers, workstations and remote computers. It also permits flexible scheduling by the administrator.

The service desk platform also proactively monitors all servers, workstations and remote computers, and Windows Event Logs for specific conditions and codes and customize the alerts based on each event. **Network and Computer Monitoring** policies can be set and modified easily to respond to changes in the computing environment. The administrator can also define and enforce policies for file access, network access and application blocking.

A key element of any proactive management system is patch management. Kaseya's **Patch Management** capabilities include automatic discovery of all missing patches and updates, and scheduling the deployment and installation of new patches and updates on a predefined and recurring schedule without any administrator intervention.

As more employees work remotely, remote access to centralized applications and data is becoming a greater need. Kaseya's **Remote Desktop Management** allows the administrator to easily establish remote access policies including passwords, notification method, screen modes and control levels.

Kaseya's scripts provide an easy, fill-in-the-blank method to automate the deployment of complex applications and system management functions.

The Kaseya service desk platform also records and reports all activities and events in a centralized database and via a unified dashboard. The administrator configurable reports include hardware and software inventory, change management, disk utilization, license usage and compliance, network usage and statistics, server

and workstation uptime history, help desk trouble tickets, computer logs and status, and security patch and update status.

Using a combination of application program interfaces (APIs) and software development kits (SDKs), Kaseya has designed its service desk platform to permit third-party solutions to 'plug and play' easily to meet the specific needs of its enterprise customers and MSP partners.

Kaseya recently launched a new **Technology Alliance Program** (TAP) which encourages independent software vendors (ISVs) to develop solutions which can enhance Kaseya's service desk platform. It also provides a single-point-of-contact to enterprise customers for technical support. The first round of TAP members includes Autotask, Catbird, and Tigerpaw Software.

Expanded Training and Outsourcing Options

Kaseya has also recognized that many of its service delivery partners need additional help with the business aspects of rolling out an effective managed service offering.

Beyond understanding the technical qualities of Kaseya's service desk platform, many service delivery partners are also interested in learning industry best practices for packaging, pricing, promoting and administering a successful managed services business.

In response, Kaseya is expanding its service offerings by introducing the **Kaseya emPower Program**, to include 'Kaseya product implementation, product and business education and a toolkit of sales and marketing aids,

Kaseya also recognizes that some enterprise organizations and MSPs may want a third-party to handle various tasks of their service desk function so they can focus on other aspects of their operations. Kaseya's **emPower Program** enables these enterprises and MSPs to selectively outsource, or 'out-task', designated functions to Kaseya's service desk experts who will assume this responsibility on an ongoing basis. Kaseya's global service desk staff can augment the enterprise IT organizations or MSP's staff by handling desktop and/or server support; IT monitoring; and provide project based consulting.

Summary and Conclusions

As employees become more dispersed and dependent on computer systems and software to perform their responsibilities, organizations are facing escalating challenges supporting the IT and application needs of their end-users.

The pivotal piece of an IT support operation is the service desk. This is where hardware and software issues are reported and the resolution process is managed. Yet, most organizations lack the tools and/or skills to successfully handle service desk responsibilities.

Outsourcing the entire IT function to gain greater service performance has proven to be a risky proposition as the majority of outsourcing arrangements fail to achieve their original objectives. This has led a growing number of organizations to selectively outsource, or 'out-task', specific IT functions to specialized service providers.

However, many MSPs are also having problems cost-effectively handling the volume of events produced by their client-base because they lack the automated systems to proactively manage their customers' IT operations and prioritize real issues.

Traditional NSM platforms have proven to be too complex and costly to respond to these challenges. Many of these organizations and MSPs have discovered the advantages of a new generation of web-based, service desk automation platforms, such as Kaseya's solution. The platform provides a fully integrated set of management functions that can be easily deployed and utilized via the web. The intuitive user interface and unified functionality makes Kaseya's solution cost-effective and scalable to meet an organization's evolving needs.

Kaseya has also built its IT Automation Framework to permit third-parties to develop additional features, via its TAP program, which can be easily integrated via APIs and SDKs to enhance its capabilities. Kaseya is also offering an expanded services program, called "*Kaseya emPower*", that addresses the technical and business needs of its service desk automation users. And, Kaseya has created an out-tasking option for organizations that want to offload certain areas of their service desk function so they can focus on other aspects of their IT operations.

It is for these reasons that a growing proportion of organizations of all sizes, as well as MSPs, are turning to this kind of integrated service desk management automation solution to meet their business objectives.

This whitepaper was sponsored by Kaseya.

About Kaseya

Kaseya is a global provider of IT automation software for IT solution providers and outsourcing firms. Corporate IT organizations also benefit from deploying Kaseya's enterprise systems management capabilities. Kaseya allows businesses to proactively manage distributed IT infrastructure easily and efficiently with one integrated Web based platform. Kaseya's technology has been deployed on over one million machines in over 25 countries around the world. For additional information, please visit www.kaseya.com or contact Kaseya at sales@kaseya.com or 415-694-5700.

About THINKstrategies, Inc.

THINKstrategies is a strategic consulting services company formed specifically to address the unprecedented business challenges facing IT managers, solutions providers, and investors today as the technology industry shifts toward a services orientation. The company's mission is to help our clients re-THINK their corporate strategies, and refocus their limited resources to achieve their business objectives. For more information regarding our unique services, visit www.thinkstrategies.com, or contact us at info@thinkstrategies.com.