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Help desk

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> *This article is about technical support. For the webcomic, see Help Desk (webcomic). For Wikipedia's help desk, see Wikipedia:Help desk.*

A **help desk** is a resource intended to provide the customer or end user with information and support related to a company's or institution's products and services. The purpose of a help desk is usually to troubleshoot problems or provide guidance about products such as computers, electronic equipment, food, apparel, or software. Corporations usually provide help desk support to their customers through various channels such as toll-free numbers, websites, instant messaging, or email. There are also in-house help desks designed to provide assistance to employees.

Contents

Names and professional association

The Help Desk Institute (HDI) was formed by Ron Muns as a for-profit organization in 1989, its purpose being to serve the industry as a professional association focused on the development of technical support personnel and the sharing of optimal practices. It adopted the name HDI in 2004 to reflect the maturing of the support industry. Technical support was expanded to cover desktop systems as well as provide other types of assistance for customers of organizations.

While the term "Help desk" initially implied the place where employees receive technical support relating to their organization's IT infrastructure, the scope of the term has expanded in meaning and use. In major academic institutions, "help desk" can also refer to help provided in an academic library. The 2012 HDI Practices and Salary Report[1] reported that for the first time in the 20 years since its inception, the name "service desk" (at 32.3%) is more frequently used than "help desk" (at 26.6%) or other names (which total 40.1%). The primary reason is likely to be the global adoption of the terminology of the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL), which uses the term "Service Desk" to describe a one-stop function providing support and assistance, replacing the concept of a "Help Desk" within the context of the provision of IT support.

Functions

A typical help desk can effectively perform several functions. It provides a single point of contact for users to gain assistance in troubleshooting, get answers to questions, and solve known problems. A help desk generally manages its requests through the use of software such as issue tracking systems. These systems often involve the use of a "local bug tracker" (LBT). This system allows the help desk to track and sort user requests with the help of a unique number, and can frequently classify problems by user, computer program, or similar categories. Many software applications are available to support the help desk function. Some target the enterprise level help desk and some target departmental needs.

In the mid-1990s, research by Iain Middleton of Robert Gordon University[2] studied the value of an organization's help desks. It found that value was derived not only from a reactive response to user issues, but also from the help desk's unique position of communicating daily with numerous customers or employees. Information gained in areas such as technical problems, user preferences, and satisfaction can be valuable for the planning and development work of other information technology units.

Organization

Large help desks[3] are often structured into different levels to handle different types of questions. For example, a first-level help desk may

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be prepared to answer the questions or provide the information commonly found among the FAQ or in a knowledge base. If the issue is not resolved at the first level, it can be forwarded to a second level with resources to handle more complex issues. Organizations may also have a third line of support to deal with software-specific needs, such as updates and bug fixes that directly affect a specific client.

Large help desks have a person or team responsible for managing the incoming requests, called "issues"; they are commonly called queue managers or queue supervisors. The queue manager is responsible for the issue queues, which can be set up in various ways depending on the help desk size or structure. Typically, large help desks have several teams that are experienced in working on different issues. The queue manager will assign an issue to one of the specialized teams based on the type of issue raised. Some help desks may have telephone systems with ACD splits ensuring that calls about specific topics are put through to analysts with the requisite experience or knowledge.[4]

A large number of these help desks have strict rosters. Time is set aside for analysts to perform tasks such as following up on problems, returning phone calls, and answering questions via email. This roster system ensures that all analysts have enough time to follow up on calls and also ensures that analysts are always available to take incoming phone calls. As the incoming phone calls are random in nature, help desk agent schedules are often maintained using an Erlang C calculation.

Desk side team

The desk side team (sometimes known as "desktop support") is responsible for issues related to desktops, laptops, and peripherals, such as personal digital assistants. The help desk assigns the desktop team the second-level desk side issues that the first level was not able to solve. They set up and configure computers for new users and are typically responsible for any physical work relating to the computers, such as repairing software or computer hardware issues and moving workstations to another location.

Network team

The network team is responsible for the network software, hardware and infrastructure, such as servers, switches, backup systems, and firewalls. They are also responsible for the network services, such as email configuration, file management, and security issues. The help desk assigns the network team issues that are in their field of responsibility. Networks often have proprietary or open source monitoring devices that forward outage information to help desk systems so that tickets may be automatically opened and primary contacts paged.

Server team

The server team is responsible for most or all of the servers within the organization. This includes Domain Name System (DNS) servers, network authentication, network shares, network resources, email accounts, and all aspects of server software. It may also include more advanced services such as those related to databases, storage or content management systems, specialized proprietary services, and other industry-specific server-based applications.

Other teams

Some companies have a telecom team that is responsible for telephone infrastructure such as PBX, voicemail, VOIP, telephone sets, modems, and fax machines. They are responsible for configuring and moving telephone numbers, voicemail setup and configuration, having been assigned these types of issues by the help desk.

Companies with custom application software may also have an applications team who are responsible for the development of in-house software. The help desk may assign to the applications team such problems as finding software bugs. Requests for new features or information about the capabilities of in-house software that come through the help desk are also assigned to applications groups.

The help desk staff and supporting IT staff may not all work from the same location. With remote access applications, technicians are able to solve many help desk issues from another work location or their home office. While there is still a need for on-site support to effectively collaborate on some issues, remote support provides greater flexibility.

See also

- Call center
- Comparison of issue tracking systems
- Comparison of help desk issue tracking software
- Customer service
- Support automation
- Technical support
- Call board

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References

1. "2012 HDI Practices and Salary Report" (https://www.h2desk.com/blog/2012-hdi-practices-and-salary-report/).
2. Middleton, I *"Key Factors in Help Desk Success (An analysis of areas critical to help desk development and functionality.)"* British Library R&D Report 6247, The British Library 1996
3. "IT Help Desks Not Just For Large Enterprises" (http://www.informationweek.com/news/smb/ebusiness/230800044).
4. https://www.calvin.edu/it/about/student_jobs/HelpDesk%20Technician.pdf

External links

- Help Desk Software (https://www.dmoz.org/Computers/Software/Help_Desk/Browser_Based/) at DMOZ

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