

Help Desk Demands in the Mid-Market: Pragmatic Requirements and Solutions

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Help Desk Market Trends Overview

Modern businesses have come to rely on technology as a catalyst for business growth—one that has the potential to create competitive advantage and differentiation not often possible through alternative means. The myriad of pressures faced by corporations—commoditization, multi-cultural requirements,

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economic pressures—demand creative and cost-effective solutions. Technology fits this need and serves many purposes in the enterprise. It is the foundation for core business functions; one that is relied upon to support business operations as well as expansion.

Keeping IT infrastructure running is critical with this level of reliance on its operation. The help desk was developed to support business productivity. It has the fundamental purpose of ensuring that employees can use technology to carry out their

day-to-day jobs. Yet technology can only deliver on that promise if it is reliable. The support analysts working the help desk are responsible to be aware of potential issues in the environment and address technology problems as they arise.

For most organizations, the help desk is moving toward a service desk operation where “support” for all kinds of business activities are focused. This can range from the basics of problem and incident management or change processes to requests for services that are often routed through the service catalog. IT maturity and the increasing adoption of the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) best practices have been prime drivers of this evolution. The service desk now looks much more like a “hub” of service management activity to touch on asset management, Configuration Management Systems, change management, knowledge management and more.

In a recent ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES® (EMA™) study, *The Aging Help Desk: Migrating to a Modern Service Desk*, respondents were asked to characterize the nature and definition of the help/service desk. One such characterization was:

“The service desk has a greater view/responsibility/control of the operations of an IT organization, and more greatly ... the company (business entity) as a whole. Help desks are predominately responsible for responding to incident/problem management, and serves as a function of a service desk.”

Even for organizations that are oriented toward the help desk nomenclature, the nature of this IT discipline has changed. Seventy-five percent of the respondents in this study indicated that their help desk operations are expanding in responsibilities. Goals for the help/service desk in the enterprise include improving customer satisfaction (82%) followed by process deployment (72%) and then cost reduction (70%). Research also shows that there is a need for multi-language support and a smaller, but growing interest in financial metrics for the service desk (44%).

Top priorities for the help desk include self-service including password reset capabilities, process improvement, service catalog development, and consolidation of multiple support desk operations.

Mid-Market Requirements for the Help Desk

Help desk operations in the mid-market often mirror those found in larger enterprises yet on a smaller scale. Mid-market companies are interested in quality service support, process improvement and taking advantage of technology innovation. Automation and policy-based standards are important, as is the development of effective workflows. Details of important help desk features and processes are discussed below.

Escalation and Workflow

One of the most basic, yet highly effective, help desk features is the ability to create a workflow that can automatically escalate issues to ensure proper resolution. This workflow can sometimes even begin before the user reports it to the help desk when there is a tight integration with management systems' alerting mechanisms. Either way, once the issue has been identified and a trouble-ticket created, escalation and workflow direct its resolution process. Each company establishes its own escalation procedures. Some common actions include a time-based warning of unresolved issues, automated access to knowledge management articles, notification of IT management when a problem is unresolved and task assignments to the next level of IT support.

Proactive Problem and Incident Management

The ultimate goal of any help desk operation is the capability to predict failures in advance such that they can be addressed with minimal user impact. Proactive problem and incident management is a means of foreseeing issues as they arise. To do so, there must be a tight connection with infrastructure management toolsets. This point of integration can provide help desk staff with advanced warning of situations that may impact the quality of service delivery to the user. From an IT maturity standpoint, proactive problem and incident management at a minimum takes the help desk operation out of reactive mode.

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Self Service

Self-service is of interest to the help desk as a means to lower call volume and reduce resolution time. It can mean a lot of different things to different organizations. Included in self-service are the capabilities of password reset as well as a self-service portal where users can access the knowledge base and initiate their own trouble-tickets. Generally speaking, users can also access the status of outstanding problems and incidents.

Integration with Related Management Systems

Tight integration with network, systems, applications and security toolsets offers IT a strong advantage. With such integration, the help desk has visibility into the broader IT infrastructure. The help desk has warning about service-impacting issues in the infrastructure. In addition, details about the situation can be made available to the support technician.

Knowledge Management

Knowledge management is more than simply recording the resolution to individual problems and incidents. Knowledge management is a process that is needed to access all types of knowledge documents from FAQs to user manuals to problem and incident histories. In the mid-market, knowledge management has the potential to mitigate limited staffing resources by offering knowledge directly to users, and as a tool for support personnel.

Dashboards and Reporting

The help desk has historically been an organization that has challenges with corporate credibility. While all of the features and requirements discussed in this section can help to improve that situation, perhaps the most effective means is through reporting and dashboards that illustrate the performance of the help desk staff. Reports such as the number of issues addressed and resolved, analyst-based resolution time, technology-based failures and increasingly reports showing financial implications of service support can all serve to boost the perspective of the help desk operation.

ScriptLogic's Help Desk Authority Solution

Help Desk Authority is a mid-market help desk offering with tight integrations to both infrastructure management and remote monitoring. It has a robust help desk feature set and various packaging options designed to meet a variety of prospective buyer needs.

Help Desk Authority Summary and History

Help Desk Authority is a mature product that ScriptLogic added to its product line by acquiring Kemma Software in 2007. The product at that time was called BridgeTrak. The solution focuses on usability as a strong requirement in the mid-market where IT staffing resources are limited. Its process workflow is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Help Desk Authority Process Workflow

Features included in this solution are:

- Multiple console options including Windows, Web and Mobile devices enable virtual access to the solution.
- Automated workflow to route tickets and trigger notifications.
- Self-service capabilities covering ticket creation, viewing and status.
- Password reset allows end users to change their passwords, reset lost passwords and unlock their accounts from a self service web portal.
- Email templates for trouble-ticket creation and replay.
- A message board to deliver critical information to users.
- Single sign-on using Active Directory.
- Integrated knowledge-base linked to self-service.
- Customization at the field and screen level.
- Pre-built reporting and management dashboards.

Integrated Asset Management

One of the areas of enhancement to Help Desk Authority is the addition of asset management capabilities. Asset management enables users to both import and manage hardware assets from multiple systems. Asset details can be entered manually by the user or discovered with ScriptLogic HDAsset, Desktop Authority or PacketTrap. Both hardware and software information is available to Help Desk Authority. This provides key information to support technicians to aid in quicker problem resolution.

HDAsset gathers hardware and software from all computers, tracks software titles by status or package and delivers comprehensive asset reporting. Inventory data collection can be scheduled or run as needed. The software asset management features are designed to aid in software compliance programs. It specifically allows administrators to enter license count totals by software title or suite. Compliance can then be tracked by licenses in use. As with the core service desk, pre-defined reports are available and can also be customized.

Remote Support Integration

Remote support is an important part of any service support strategy; necessary to facilitate productivity of an increasingly distributed workforce. It serves the purpose of providing effective support to remote workers and offices by secure means. Help Desk Authority offers comprehensive remote support capabilities with the ScriptLogic Expert Assist Agent that is integrated with the help desk. This solution enables the support technician to take control of remote equipment and more quickly resolve issues. Highlights of the solution are:

- **Remote Computer Management:** Remote Computer Management is used to work “behind the screen” without interrupting user productivity. It has more than 40 management tasks that are accessed via a standard java-enabled browser. Some of these features are secure file prompt, file transfer and registry access. Support analysts will typically use Remote Computer Management first to investigate and troubleshoot user issues without interrupting their job—sorting out what might be happening in a given user environment.

- **Interactive User Support:** Interactive User Support is designed to facilitate collaboration between the support analyst and the user to solve problems that cannot be corrected “behind the screen.” It incorporates a number of features including the ability to chat with the user, securely enter passwords, access the relevant monitor and utilize the local machine’s clipboard. When Remote Computer Management cannot be used to solve user issues, a collaborative approach enables users and support technicians to work as a team.
- **Local User/Group Management and Performance Monitoring/Analysis:** Group Management is used to create, edit and manage group-related infrastructure details. Performance Monitoring/Analysis delivers dashboards and performance monitors to quickly provide insight into frequent performance problems. It includes pre-configured scripts to correct common problems as well.

Integrated Management Platform: Network, Application and Assets

ScriptLogic understands the need for close integration between its network and application management toolset PacketTrap and the Help Desk Authority solution. Through this integration, users can configure alerts in PacketTrap such that they create incident records in Help Desk Authority. Configuration options in PacketTrap also allow steps to be taken to automatically remediate issues prior to help desk notification. Information in the ticket is detailed. The support technician can access any prior steps taken to correct the problem from inside the incident ticket via Web page view of the device in PacketTrap. This view includes access to any prior steps taken to correct the problem.

The integration goes even deeper than basic transfer of information. Technicians have the option of viewing a snapshot of the device and related configuration details from within the Help Desk Authority ticket. This information can include hardware and software versions, performance counters and active processes. Once resolved, a two-way notification occurs closing the incident record in Help Desk Authority. When an incident is closed in HDA, the alert is automatically reset in PacketTrap by Help Desk Authority.

Help Desk Authority also integrates with ScriptLogic’s free sl360 Tool Suite that includes several other network management and monitoring tools.

Case Study: Experiences of an Eight-year Deployment

EMA interviewed a North American publisher of children’s literature who has been using ScriptLogic solutions for more than eight years. Prior to deploying the solution, the company had no help desk whatsoever. Support was handled largely by the business units—support coming directly from these groups. A help desk did not exist. No processes or procedures were in place.

The company has approximately 500 users—400 in the same location, with 50 more scattered around the country. Ten percent of these individuals are running Apple MACs and the remainder use PC technology. The slim support team of four handles everything including desk-side support, hardware and software assistance, technology refresh and encryption.

At the time Help Desk Authority was purchased, the company had recognized the need for streamlining support of its technology. The reputation of IT was compromised and yet the publisher had accepted that it needed more support directly from its technical staff. It went through a procurement

process and chose Help Desk Authority in a much earlier revision. It was clear to this company that Help Desk Authority provided a solution for “*anyone needing to support anything.*” It can be used to track all calls coming in or issues of any nature such as human resource requests or prospect inquiries in addition to the more traditional help desk. Workflow and escalation procedures automate the process enabling the publisher to issue and assign a trouble ticket to the appropriate group.

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In this environment, the company handles first and second level support right at the help desk. Issues that cannot be resolved here are handed off to third level support. While the publisher has not formally adopted ITIL, it has become familiar with its recommendations and moved forward with the development of processes for problem and incident handling as well as change management using a very pragmatic approach. While many of Help Desk Authority’s features are important, the company particularly appreciates:

- Automation that supports ticket processing and escalation.
- A knowledge base that has been enhanced to now store everything in HTML text.
- The addition of asset management in recent years supported the publisher’s desire to get a handle on hardware and software assets including routers, printers, MACs, PCs, servers, etc. Timing of this added functionality aligned well with the publisher’s strategic plans.
- Continuous expansion of capabilities that is growing alongside customer needs.

Help Desk Authority is currently used to support groups outside of IT. For instance, it is used in customer service to track changes in the ACD system. Other parts of the organization have also been able to take advantage of Help Desk Authority’s flexibility. This deployment will soon be moving from version 8.1 to 8.2 and the company looks forward to enhancements with the web client.

EMA Perspective

The help desk in its expanded role is taking on a central IT function as it evolves increasingly toward that of the service desk. Businesses rely on high quality and efficient service support—depending on it to sustain the broader goals of the corporation. When users are not productive, the business itself simply cannot grow and expand. In effect, a quality help desk staff, process deployment and related toolsets have become something of a competitive marker for organizations.

Requirements for the help desk now reach beyond the basics of recording and resolving IT issues in the infrastructure. Change, knowledge and asset management are now routinely part of and connected to the help desk in small and large companies. The need for a robust and flexible help desk solution, one that can grow with the needs of the organization, is imperative.

Help Desk Authority offers medium-sized businesses a solution for this challenge. The company has continued to invest in its technology to put it in a position to grow with the business. As seen in the case study in this paper, businesses have changing needs and are best suited to work with a software vendor that recognizes this and listens to its users as it enhances the product offering. Today, Help Desk Authority can accommodate the needs of mid-size companies. Its track record shows that it is prepared to continue evolving the product in partnership with its customers.

About ScriptLogic

ScriptLogic Corporation, a wholly owned subsidiary of Quest Software (NASDAQ: QSFT), is a recognized leader in the management, monitoring and support of desktops, servers and networks. ScriptLogic's award winning solutions benefit 28,000 customers worldwide in the areas of desktop, help desk, active directory, server and network management. IT professionals and organizations of all sizes rely on ScriptLogic to streamline administrative tasks and improve productivity through "Point, Click, Done" solutions. For more information, visit www.scriptlogic.com.

About Enterprise Management Associates, Inc.

Founded in 1996, Enterprise Management Associates (EMA) is a leading industry analyst firm that specializes in going “beyond the surface” to provide deep insight across the full spectrum of IT management technologies. EMA analysts leverage a unique combination of practical experience, insight into industry best practices, and in-depth knowledge of current and planned vendor solutions to help its clients achieve their goals. Learn more about EMA research, analysis, and consulting services for enterprise IT professionals and IT vendors at www.enterprisemanagement.com or follow [EMA on Twitter](#).

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Corporate Headquarters:
5777 Central Avenue, Suite 105
Boulder, CO 80301
Phone: +1 303.543.9500
Fax: +1 303.543.7687
www.enterprisemanagement.com



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