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Responding to Service Desk Management Challenges and Risks

As technology advances, organizations change, and users' requirements expand, service desk operations face new challenges and risks that stretch available resources. Complex and distributed IT environments require service desks to proactively monitor use and performance, respond to incidents, analyze IT information, and support users. Failure to maintain service levels, especially during peak call periods, can impact the entire organization.

DemandDesk™ provides a flexible and complete service desk solution that meets the challenges and risks distinctive to each organization and IT environment. DemandDesk facilitates and supports fundamental service desk missions by:

- Capturing service calls, tracking their disposition, and identifying root causes
- Measuring performance against service level agreements
- Aligning service desk functions with available resources
- Providing insight to support activities and costs

DemandDesk and SaaS Benefits and Advantages

Because DemandDesk is a Software as a Service (SaaS) solution, it deploys faster, costs less, and provides more flexibility than traditional software. The benefits of SaaS are apparent when compared to traditional software deployment strategies.

	Traditional Software Implementation	DemandDesk Implementation
Cost	Purchase software application software, hardware, system software; pay annual license and upgrade fees	Subscription fee based on use with elimination of acquisition, maintenance, and upgrade costs
Infrastructure Requirements	Infrastructure footprint includes the full application, system software (e.g. database) required hardware, and data	Infrastructure requirements consists of Internet access and appropriate bandwidth
Deployment Speed	Full life cycle development and configuration process that can require months	Connect to fully configured application via the Internet that can be accomplished in days or weeks
Management	Internal IT department or external consultants as needed	SaaS provider manages application based on service-level agreement
Maintenance	Internal IT department responsible for backup and recovery, monitoring, security, and network connectivity	SaaS provider maintains application, data, security, and connectivity via the Internet
Upgrades	Internal IT department responsible for testing and implementing releases and patches in conjunction with change management process	SaaS provider upgrades software incrementally as releases and patches are available
Service and Support	Dependent on software provider that usually requires one-to-one problem resolution	Dedicated 24/7 support provided by expert-level technicians

The Latest Research and SaaS Users Confirm the Benefits

“Applications can be deployed much more quickly, with far fewer up-front costs. And ongoing operational and maintenance headaches are moved from the client’s organization” ²

“SaaS allows pieces of IT to now be acquired through a controlled and repeatable service model, where the SaaS provider acts as a center of excellence that the consumer can easily tap into to leverage significant economies of scale.” ³

OakTree Solutions Partners with CA to Provide a SaaS Service Desk Solution

OakTree Solutions has partnered with CA since 1999 to implement CA’s Unicenter® Service Desk for over 150 clients using ITIL best practices. OakTree’s engineers have accumulated years of experience with the CA suite of products and developed expert-level architecture, implementation, and operational skills.

<p>CA’s Unicenter® Service Desk Recognized as Industry Leader</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ITIL- PinkVerify™ Service Support Enhanced Certification• Forrester Research recognizes CA as a leader in IT Service Desk Management Tools ⁴• Gartner lists CA in the leader quadrant in IT Service Desk Tools ⁵	<p>CA’s Unicenter® Service Desk offers ITIL compatible service desk solutions that include feature for incident management, self service, knowledge tools, dashboard and management reporting, change management, SLA Management, notifications, and workflow automation. The Forrester Wave™ evaluation of Service Desk Management Tools in 2006 stated that CA’s service desk management tools were “characterized by industrial-strength tool suites with proven track records in organizations with more than 8,000 employees. Additionally, out-of-the-box configuration options also make them appropriate for organizations half that size or smaller that require robust tools to manage their needs.” ⁶</p>
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DemandDesk Features

Combining the advantages of a SaaS solution with the power of the CA’s Unicenter® Service Desk, DemandDesk delivers a complete service desk solution. Features can be added and removed as requirements change.

DemandDesk 2008

DemandDesk Feature	Description
Incident, Problem, and Change Management	Using ITIL compliant processes, DemandDesk records and tracks all service calls and reported incidents from initial report through disposition. Service calls can be prioritized and associated with specific service types.
Work Order Management	DemandDesk can generate, update, close, routing audit trail, and track resolutions for work orders.
Notifications and Escalations	DemandDesk provides a robust escalation and notification capability that can use multiple delivery methods including email.
Configuring Service Types	To enhance service information analysis and service prioritization, service types can be defined.
Workflow Management	Using CA Advanced Workflow, DemandDesk can define activities and align them with IT staff and schedules.
User Self-Knowledge	The User Self Service Knowledge Base automatically presents end users with information available to help them resolve their issues without a call to the service desk. It also provides the ability to open incidents with the service desk based on the content presented.
Analyst Query Capabilities	Analyst Object Search screens allow an analyst to search core objects in the solution. These objects include Incidents, Problems, Requests, Change Requests, Issues, Configuration Items (Assets), Contacts, and other organization objects. Queries can be saved.
Report Development	Standard reports can be defined and scheduled in addition to the robust ad-hoc reporting available.
Service Level Management	Service levels can be defined and performance monitored.

OakTree Solution’s Hosted Environment for DemandDesk

OakTree Solutions maintains a state-of-the-art data center to host DemandDesk and ensure its availability, functionality, and security.

Reliable and Secure Operational Environment

OakTree maintains all hardware and software in a 24 x 7 highly available data center. The solution environment uses redundant technology to provide direct and indirect access to the data center. Dedicated staff with skills and certifications in server hardware and software maintenance manage the data center.

Multi-Tiered Security Controls

OakTree uses a multi-tiered security model secure authentication and role-specific interfaces based on the access rights for each authenticated user. Access to hardware and software is restricted to authorized personnel. Client data is only used for its intended purpose

Hardware and Software Upgrades

Hardware and software is upgraded as needed to keep pace with vendor releases and the clients’ requirements. Performance is monitored and redundant Internet connectivity ensures availability. OakTree maintains data backups and disaster recovery and continuity of operations plans.

Help Hotline

OakTree maintains a Hotline at no additional costs to resolve any issues related to DemandDesk. All calls are prioritized and tracked and Service Level Agreements are in place to ensure that responses are timely.

A Case Study – OakTree Solutions’ SaaS Solution for a High Volume Service Desk Operation

The Environment

An educational institution with over 22,000 credit-students, 25,000 continuing education students, and over 2,000 distance learning students provides help desk services 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The help desk logs approximately 40,000 incidents per year. The Office of Information Technology staffing consists of approximately 240 staff members. The majority of staff used a legacy system to manage problems, incidents, and asset inventory.

The Service Desk Requirements

The customer decided to implement a new service desk solution because of requirements the legacy system could not meet.

- The legacy system did not use a relational database and as a result, it was not able to associate critical information such as asset, incident reports, and staff assignments.
- Reporting available was rudimentary and did not allow service desk management to fully identify root causes for problems.
- The legacy system was not ITIL compliant.

The Solution

Using ITIL compliant best practices and eight years of experience implementing CA Unicenter® products, the OakTree Solutions team installed, configured, and customized the following product suite:

Solution Component	Description
Unicenter® Service Desk	Full feature help desk support tool that includes incident tracking, SLA management, notifications, customer surveys, dashboard and reporting, customer self-service, process automation for workload management, and security administration
Unicenter® Knowledge Tools	Designed to enable users to search a knowledge base that contains information from experts and created from experience to provide more immediate user support and decrease incidents reported.
Unicenter® Dashboard	Accesses the Unicenter® Service Desk database and pulls information into several graphical and tabular views that provide a high-level status of the support operation and dynamically alerts management to user-defined threshold violations.
Unicenter® Desktop and Server Management	Automated desktop and server management tool that provides insight into asset configurations and automates operational processes such as discovery and inventory, deployment, maintenance, and migration to support a standardized IT environment.
DemandDesk	Generates custom reports from the CA Unicenter® technology using an interface that requires no knowledge of database programming, SQL code, or any other technical expertise.

OakTree Solutions Implementation

The OakTree hosted solution team utilized a best practices system approach developed through over eight years of performing CA Unicenter® implementations and legacy migrations. OakTree first implemented and customized the CA Unicenter® Service Desk and then migrated the legacy data. The customer was fully functional on the new system in less than 8 weeks.

OakTree Solutions Professional Staff Redesigns Strategic Processes

To enhance the solutions and meet the clients need to integrate bar coding data within the ticketing system, OakTree designed and implemented a customized solution that provided the customer with a fully web-based solution for uploading and processing bar code data. In addition, OakTree created a custom application that provides self-password reset capability, making it easier for the students to access their passwords, without having to call the service desk. Because many of the calls to the service desk were password reset requests, this web-based capability allowed valuable service desk staff to focus on problems and incidents.

OakTree Solutions designed and customized the customer's change management solution by creating advanced, automated workflows that were unique to their environment. Customized change management workflows included:

- Enterprise application workflows for maintenance, patch, and upgrades
- Network engineering workflows for network services that require approval for network engineering supervisors and managers
- Hardware workflow for add, change, delivery, disposition, and relocation of hardware that spans the entire hardware lifecycle
- Employee workflow for new and terminating employees

OakTree also created customized notification processes that included:

- Use of different formats for different recipients (User vs. Analyst)
- Addition of the resolution to the Closed Activity Format
- Notification distribution lists that can be sent to an individual groups or to multiple groups
- Ability to set variable options for distribution method
- Ability to turn off all notifications

The Results

The Unicenter® Desktop and Server Management (DSM) asset management tool works in tandem with the service desk system, serving as a repository and lifecycle-planning tool for over 25,000 hardware and 250,000 software items. Both the service desk and DSM asset management tools support on-line student and faculty problem tracking and resolution, student class registration, and classroom/computer lab usage. The Unicenter® Knowledge Tools allows users to search a database of known problems to identify a resolution without calling the service desk. Service desk staff use the Unicenter® Dashboard to monitor and track system integrity and performance. The standard reports designed during implementation provide service desk management with information from the DemandDesk database that allows them to identify trends in service calls and responses.

For More Information:

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About OakTree Enterprise Solutions, Inc.

OakTree Solutions, an Information Technology solutions provider, offers services and software spanning the entire realm of IT Services Management (ITSM), including Help Desk/Service Desk support services, IT LAN/WAN operations and maintenance, ITIL implementation, and Business Technology Optimization services. Headquartered in Reston, VA, United States, OakTree provides a wide range of expertise including planning, implementation, and operations and maintenance of enterprise systems management solutions. OakTree Solutions' flagship software product is DemandDesk, an ad-hoc reporting and trend analysis tool that extends the ability for end users to quickly and easily report from complex database solutions from major software vendors. For more information, visit, <http://www.oaktreesolutions.com>.

(Footnotes)

¹ "The Fast Track to Service Management Success: Software-as-a-Service ", Laurie McCabe, AMI-Partners, April 2008

² <http://www.brainstorm-group.com/bsgweb/0900EBS.asp>

³ <http://itblackbelt.wordpress.com:80/2008/11/23/saas-101-what-managers-need-to-know/>

⁴ Tools "The Forrester Wave: Service Desk Tools, Q1 2006", Chip Gliedman, Forrester Research, February 2006

⁵ "Magic Quadrant for the IT Service Desk, 2006", David M. Coyle, Kris Brittain, Gartner, May 2006

⁶ <http://ca.com/us/analysts/reports/collateral.aspx?CID=83513>