


The future of the IT Service Desk

A Wanstor Viewpoint



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IT Service Desks require the right strategy and streams of innovation to increase user productivity and support business goals. Wanstor has a wealth of experience in creating, managing and improving IT service desks across a range of industries.

This puts us in a position where we can realise the vision of an IT Service Desk which is available 24 / 7 on any platform.

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Introduction

IT service desks are generally accepted as the main interface and single 'touch point' where users receive help and guidance on IT service issues, problems and requests.

However, very few businesses see the IT service desk as a business function which requires longer-term strategic consideration and innovation.

For many businesses the IT service desk is a function which only exists when things go wrong, and is generally seen as a business function which costs a lot of money but delivers very little in return. At Wanstor we believe this attitude amongst business leaders has to change to one where they see the IT service desk as a real enabler of the business and a differentiator for their business against the competition.

Businesses are increasingly dependent on IT for their day-to-day operations. We have seen a clear correlation between organisations with robust IT support in place that enjoy successful revenue growth, customer satisfaction and employee productivity, versus those without. Additionally, many are now heavily reliant on IT in helping to innovate against the competition. This means IT service desks being asked to monitor more devices, improve availability, and guarantee first time issue resolution.

As technology continues to play such an increasingly important role in business success, company leaders can no longer afford to view the IT service desk as a cost constraint for the business. This mindset needs to change, allowing them to see the IT service desk as a proactive problem solver, an innovator, and a best friend to the business.

Wanstor believes it is essential for business leaders to look closely at existing IT Service Desks and develop a long-term vision that is based on the societal, business and technological changes that will continue to affect the way in which IT support must be delivered in order to encourage a successful outcome in computing and business.

In the past, the IT service desk dealt predominantly with support queries covering inoperative hardware, application performance or issues surrounding access to data. As technology has evolved, and the end users' expectation of workplace technology has become greater, these requests are abstracted into questions with more specific focus. *'I need to'* or *'how might I do this'* require a fundamentally different skill set and approach to problems faced by IT.

In addition to evolving user expectations, business leaders are also demanding more agile, flexible, innovative and cheaper IT solutions to meet the rapidly changing needs of business.

When viewed in the context of current economic conditions, this forces organisations to re-evaluate their existing strategies and systems with a clear focus on increased service delivery at lower cost whilst maximising usage of existing resources.

These pressures mean that for many businesses, it is a great time to evaluate their existing IT service desk strategy and design one which truly enables the business, both now and into the future.

At Wanstor, we truly believe that the days of service desk agents acting as the sole means of IT support are over. The future will instead be a hybrid mix of people, processes, portals and automation. Employees want access to IT services and support at the time, location and on the device of their choosing.

This may create problems for IT professionals trying to manage such a vast technological infrastructure, but as it becomes a reality, so does IT need to adapt accordingly.



Wanstor's approach to future IT Service Desk Management

Wanstor has been working for some time to anticipate the challenges and changes that businesses are likely to face.

This document describes a vision of the IT service desk that we believe our customers will have begun adopting by 2020. It identifies key areas of change, and how IT service desks should develop in the coming years to meet future challenges.

At Wanstor, we understand that no-one can predict the future. But as a result of our experience, innovative thinking and taking the time to understand a range of customers and markets, we believe that we are in position to forecast future requirements and trends, with innovative ideas regarding IT service desks.

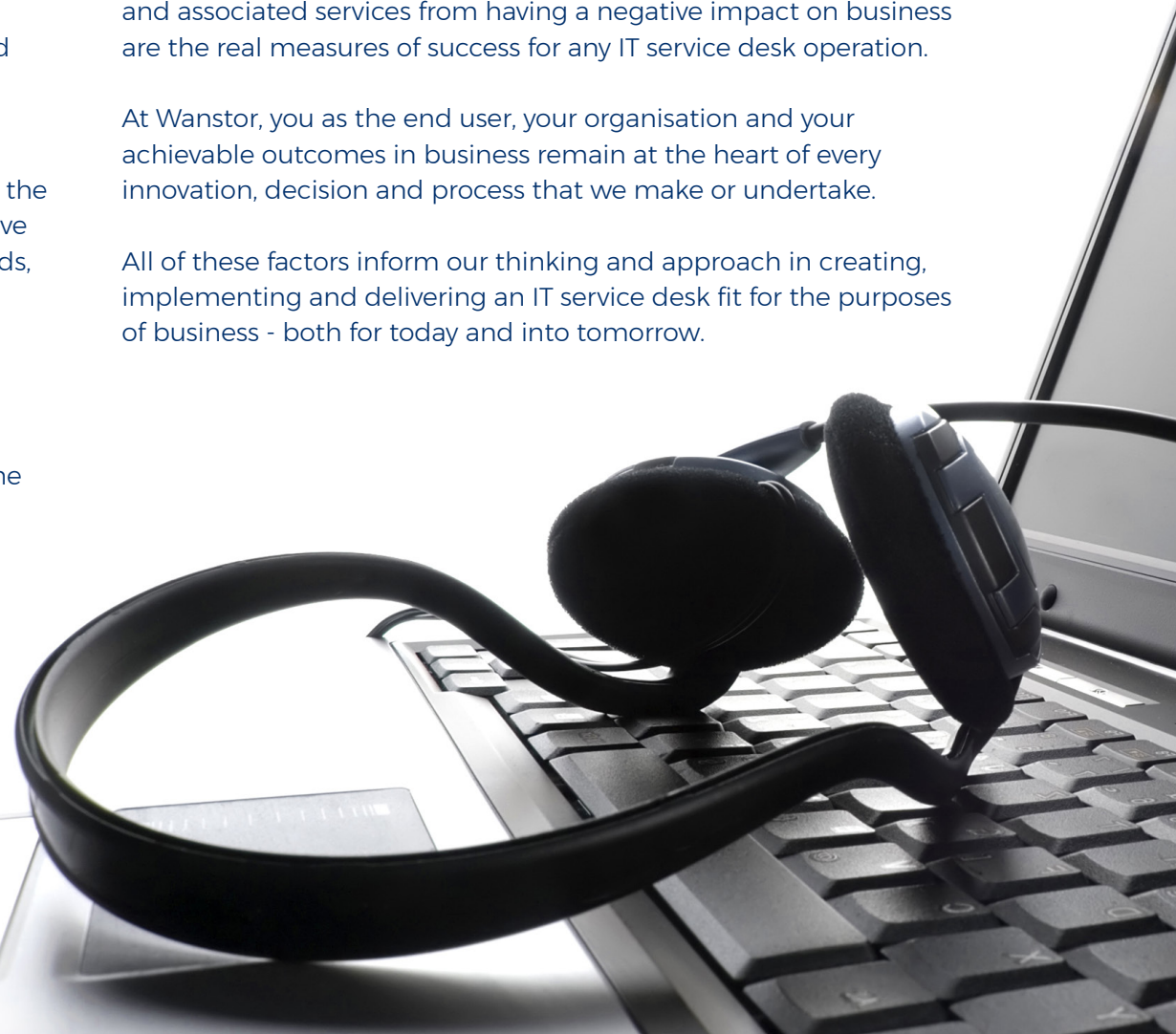
Many market experts have identified a growing demand over the last two years for greater value delivery from IT service desk providers. We have seen many businesses enter and exit the IT Service Desk marketplace over the past 15 years. Some have done a fantastic job in helping IT functions evolve into real drivers of change for the businesses they serve.

Others have been unwilling to invest both time and effort in developing a service desk offering that truly enables both users and businesses, resulting in many customers actually viewing IT as a burden in their lives rather than an enabler.

We understand that an IT service desk is user-centric. Innovation, process automation, the delivery of business value, standard problem solving measures and the service desk's role as a cost saving facilitator capable of preventing failures in both technology and associated services from having a negative impact on business are the real measures of success for any IT service desk operation.

At Wanstor, you as the end user, your organisation and your achievable outcomes in business remain at the heart of every innovation, decision and process that we make or undertake.

All of these factors inform our thinking and approach in creating, implementing and delivering an IT service desk fit for the purposes of business - both for today and into tomorrow.



Our vision for the IT Service Desk of the future

Wanstor's vision for the IT service desk of the future is for it to be available anywhere, anytime, and on any platform.

Service desk agents and users will no longer be restricted to a particular location or technology in order to deliver or receive fast and efficient technical support. Virtual agents will be a part of all IT service desks in the future and they will complement or in some cases replace human agents.

A BYOD (*Bring Your Own Device*) policy on Service Desk means that employees can access company data and networks from virtually anywhere in the world

Employees are already spread across multiple locations and are mobile in every sense of the word. They access company tools from anywhere in the world using their favorite apps on devices of their own choosing (BYOD). IT service desks must adapt to these changes in order to keep pace and make sure their employees and end users are efficient, effective and motivated.

At Wanstor, we believe some of the measures now trending and bringing innovation to IT service desk environments will include:

- + BYOD-ready infrastructure with proactive IT solutions to common problems across mobile devices
- + Email ticket submission
- + IM technology for any device or location with internet access
- + Intuitive Support Systems that recognise known users
- + Self-aware hardware and software automatically updating patches and targetting vulnerabilities
- + Peer-to-peer support and feedback
- + Virtual agents automating problem resolution based on analytics software
- + Device-agnostic self-service portals emulating search engines like Google allowing users with corporate network access to resolve IT queries at any time
- + Attrition and development of staff with up and cross-skilling of First and Second line engineers as standard
- + Automatic prioritisation, classification and optimisation of tickets, helping IT service desks become more effective in problem resolution, cost efficiency and security



BYOD-Ready

BYOD is now seen as standard for employees in many businesses. The trend is set to grow as more and more people begin utilising personal tablets, laptops and phones for work purposes. Businesses must face a reality where employees want to and will use their own devices for work. The service desk will need to be prepared for and adapt to meet this trend.

At Wanstor, we have seen some businesses embracing BYOD as a way of increasing the productivity of their workforce, whilst others are not so open to the idea, due mainly to security concerns. We see BYOD as a double-edged sword. On one hand, employee productivity should improve, while on the other stands the issue of security.

It is a key factor for Wanstor that boundaries are clearly defined with regards to BYOD and that employees have to follow the standards, procedures and guidelines involved when connecting their device to the company network. The IT service desk needs to understand and communicate the level of support provided to employees who bring their own devices.

The service desk also needs to have clear understanding and criteria in place for BYOD so as to determine support offered by internal IT, what falls to third party device manufacturers, and what responsibility the employee must bear.

Email Ticket Submission

Email is often seen by end-users as a way to expedite ticket logging in order to avoid call time. In reality, resolution of email tickets usually takes longer, due to either end users' inability to outline any given issue appropriately or a failure to describe an issue accurately within the original ticket. A service desk agent is, on the other hand, trained in asking questions that are most likely to provide the answers they require.

Despite this limitation, IT departments must accept that many users prefer email over telephony. In order to process email ticket submissions efficiently and effectively, systems must be designed to allow for automation of ticket routing based on content.

This will essentially change the way in which email tickets are handled.

Wanstor are currently researching improvements to email ticketing via faster resolution through machine learning; early results are encouraging. We anticipate email ticketing automation will become a 'must have' for the IT service desk by 2020.



Instant Messaging

Many service desk departments have trialled instant messaging solutions. Instant messaging is simple to deploy, requires limited training for operatives, and is extremely efficient in response to simple queries or requests. There are, however, aspects to consider before implementing standard instant messaging technologies as part of an IT service desk.

Businesses need to consider how this channel is managed, and the benefits it brings; there will, from experience, be more complex requirements to consider as well.

Although it may be possible for service desk agents to manage multiple IM conversations simultaneously, this presents an obvious flaw - a busy agent may not meet optimum response times on individual calls. Failure to provide an instant or near-instantaneous response will leave users with poor impressions of the IT service desk.

At Wanstor, we believe that the future of instant messaging technologies for service desks lies in automated replies, or bots.

Embedding Artificial intelligence within Instant Messaging technology allows users to research and troubleshoot issues in their own language.

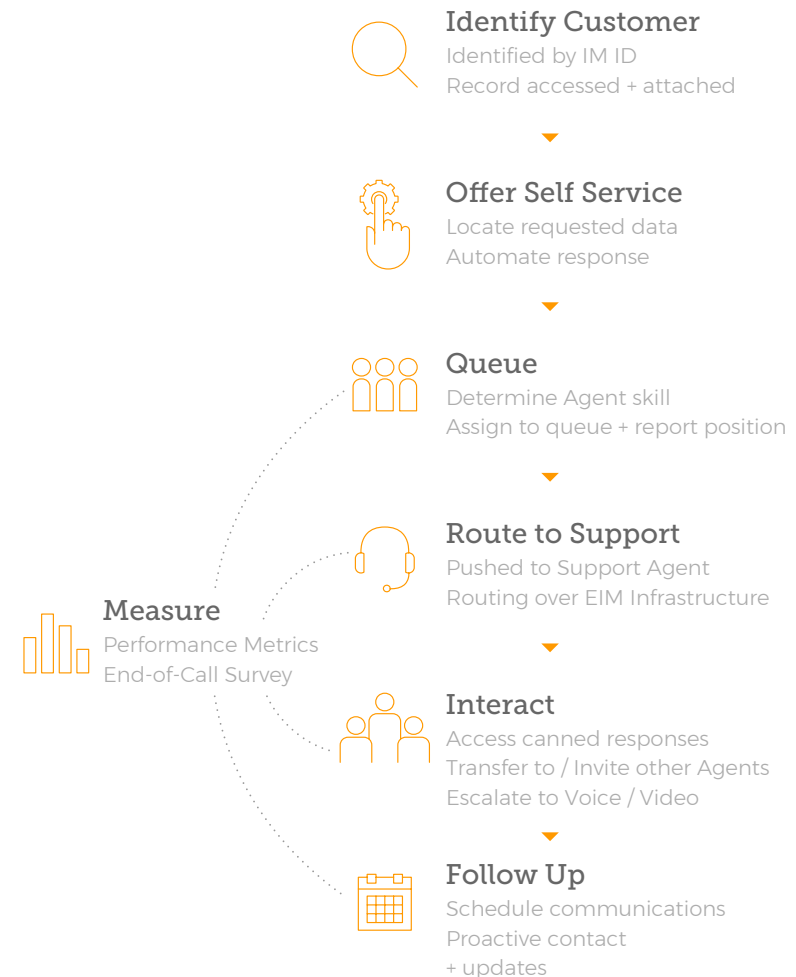


figure 1 : Route to Customer Service via Role-based Agents

Bots are becoming more capable of negotiating intelligent solutions to a host of IT grievances. Some now available can provide service comparable to human operators, as well as proving to be more cost effective, faster and reliable.

Instant Messaging Technology must be fully integrated into any ticketing tools or platforms currently employed

To fit these artificial intelligences for instant messaging purposes will require a knowledge base that is in constant evolution. For this channel to succeed, it is vital to understand how service levels, ticket volume and user satisfaction may be monitored, measured and reported upon.

Any Instant Messaging technology must, therefore, be fully integrated into ticketing tools.

With technology companies currently spending on research into chat bots and instant messaging solutions, we have no doubt this development will become ubiquitous to service desks at some point in the future.

Intuitive Support Systems that recognise the user

A user may access service desk intranet sites repeatedly in seeking solutions to specific IT problems. If unsuccessful, that user will probably pick up the phone and call service desk. Once identified to an automated voice system, the service desk will know that this user has accessed the intranet, including specific areas visited.

This will allow automated systems to react more intuitively in suggesting possible solutions to users.

By having this knowledge to hand, service desk agents will be able to process queries more swiftly, improving end user satisfaction.

With such detailed information and historical data pertaining to users' ticket service, desk agents can proactively identify user trends, suggest training requirements, change intranet pages and provide information to the IT department for solutions to issues.

Not only will this improve user satisfaction, it will assist in the automation of processes moving forward. Support tickets can be directed more accurately to appropriate service desk personnel thus saving time, effort and money in allocating individual tickets to agents.



Support Systems that automatically identify users

Smart systems may employ various forms of information including biometrics in identifying users before connection to the service desk.

It is envisaged that in future, when someone contacts the service desk, agents will automatically receive identifying information for this individual.

This again reduces time, saves money and avoids frustration in having to continually repeat information. By envisaging what this technology enables, we can begin to understand its importance.

An example might be a user calling the service desk in order to request a new laptop. Service desk agents are aware in advance of the users identity, his or her department, manager, the necessary approval required, and the process involved in the order, setup and deployment of hardware.

This complete information will eventually become available without the need to consult different systems. A technological advance of this kind will bring its own set of unique challenges around privacy and security, but will undoubtedly become a reality in the future of all service desks.

Self-aware machines and software

As machines move online in connecting to both the internet and other devices, they become capable of resolving issues, alerting owners, IT departments and even devices of developing issues. This is critical for businesses addressing thousands of devices within an IT infrastructure.

For IT service desks, this means forewarning of issues affecting any device held within the technological estate. In most businesses today, a user or a group contacts service desk, who identify an issue and then reactively inform engineering teams.

Alerts generated automatically on failure enable the service desk to contact users proactively. Immediate solutions, hardware changes and interventions can be triggered automatically, sometimes without an end-user being aware of any irregularity at all.



It is easy to imagine the benefits of such proactive measures for IT engineering productivity and end-user satisfaction. Today, such work is already carried out by several software systems, informing users of required updates. However, most hardware still depends on human intervention to identify and query issues.

Once this changes, IT service desks will move quickly from reactive cost centres to proactive business enablers.

Peer-to-Peer support

Sometimes the best solution for a specific problem does not come from the IT department, a manual or a knowledge base, but from someone in the company who has experienced a similar technical situation or problem. Peer-to-peer support is not the solution to every problem, but it is sometimes the best support available.

An increasing number of businesses are recognising that peer-to-peer support is both essential and saves money. It also engages users within a business's community and provides more comprehensive support than trained IT personnel can.

The need for desk-side engineers is greatly reduced and employees reach out to each other in order to establish better co-operation. Incentives can further foster such behaviour.

The service desk plays a key role in this approach by redirecting enquiries to the appropriate colleague if they have innovative information systems facilitating such routing in place.

Virtual Agents

A virtual agent is a computer-generated character that simulates a conversation to deliver interactive voice or text-based information in a service desk environment. Virtual agents can provide accurate, personalised, fast, interactive information to users via websites, phones, social media sites and instant messaging applications.

When properly designed, deployed, and managed, IT service desk virtual agents will be able to hold intelligent conversations with end-users and provide efficient methods for ticket resolution. Currently virtual agents are still complex to build, customise and operate.

However, at Wanstor, we have seen several technology businesses make great strides in the past 12 months in terms of designing and deploying virtual agents which have intelligent capabilities.

We believe it will not be long before the first real virtual agents for service desks are available to businesses. At Wanstor, we believe it is only a matter of time before virtual agents replace human agents on service desks to perform simple first contact tasks such as password re-sets and the deployment of security patches.

Self-Service Portals

Self-service portals and knowledge bases are two essential requirements for the service desk of the future - ideal tools for simple incident and service request resolution.

At Wanstor, we have deployed several customer portals which have significantly changed user behaviour from phoning the service desk to finding solutions for their own IT problems through the intranet system provided to them. By having access to searchable content on readily available portals, users will be able to find the right information at the right time on the device of their choosing.

The benefits of deploying a self-service portal are obvious; the more users accessing a portal, the fewer the number of calls to service desk - fewer agents are required, saving IT departments money and making more time available for other IT and business projects.

We believe that an IT service desk of the future must implement robust self-service resources to facilitate the resolution of repetitive first line problems and, also, promote knowledge-sharing.



Attrition and People Development

Every company understands the importance of attrition and people development but why are they so important for the service desk and what can be done to innovate?

The IT service desk position within many businesses is usually at the bottom of the decision tree. It is usually something for employees to do before moving onto another role.

Fortunately, this perception is changing, not just because of the increasingly high calibre of professionals that the IT services industry is attracting, but also because of the innovation factor in competent service desk companies which are transforming repetitive tasks into a better work experience.

At Wanstor, we understand that motivated IT service desk employees make a big difference in terms of performance and results, leading to improved results for the business as they continue to look for ideas around how to improve the service.

Automatic prioritisation, classification and optimisation of tickets

Wanstor believes the automation element of tasks the service desk faces will in many cases be the difference between a high performing IT service desk and one which is delivering mediocre results in the future.

We have already seen, and are using smart-learning algorithms for web-based content (Google search and others) but what about a ticketing tool that discovers the importance of a ticket based on the words and data it contains? What if the problem could be resolved by a machine rather than a human interaction?

The possibilities of automation and prioritisation for the service desk of the future means businesses could be a few steps away from a more responsive, quicker time to resolution, cheaper to run IT service desk environment.

Just imagine, tickets get automatically escalated, routed, prioritised and archived based on their actual content rather than human choice.

This saves time and money, reduces human error, increases user satisfaction and offers a much better end-to-end service.

Final Thoughts

The IT Service Desk will likely always be a requirement within business as internet technology is never perfect, no matter how efficiently it is deployed.

With IT and its users often proving unpredictable in multi-vendor environments, technology becomes vulnerable to behaviour that can lead to service interruption, failure, or worse.

At Wanstor, we believe the Service Desk of the future will be busier than ever, with users and businesses becoming ever more reliant on technology to increase staff productivity, enhance customer service and promote ongoing processes improvement. It has the capacity to become a business differentiator, and a way for employees to step away from the time-consuming mundanity of day-to-day IT administration in moving to more high value, business-critical projects. Taking time to put the right IT Service Desk model in place can help you transform the reactive, costly IT Service Desk into one which is proactive, empowering and enabling.

If you'd like to find out more about how we can help you prepare for the Service Desk of the future, call us on **0207 592 7860** to speak with one of our Solutions Specialists, or email us on **info@wanstor.com** and we will be in touch.

