

INTRODUCTION TO SERVICE REQUEST CATALOGS



Before discussing Service Request Catalogs, let's make sure we're on the same page. As it turns out, many people confuse Service Request Catalogs with Service Catalogs. The two are admittedly similar, but still distinct in purpose. And frequently someone will say they want a Service Catalog when in reality what they're looking for is a Service Request Catalog.

A Service Catalog essentially just lists and describes the services available at a company. For example, if the list is online, then there's no button to click that takes you to a payment screen for any particular service you want. No interaction. The Service Catalog could even be written on a napkin as a budding small business owner comes up with ideas.

The Service Request Catalog, on the other hand, allows the customers to select services and products that they desire for themselves. They can browse not only the descriptions, but also request to receive the item listed. It's more of an IT shopping experience that typically works in conjunction with and as a fundamental extension to a Service Catalog. Some companies only have one or the other, some have both, and some have neither. All organizations should work towards obtaining both at some point, but it ultimately depends on their particular situation.

The Spectrum of Service Request Catalogs

Service Request Catalogs come in many shapes and sizes. The medium and complexity of any given catalog typically depends on the current standing of the organization. A new company without an online presence may have a simple booklet where customers can read the list of available services

and then write in their request. Other companies might have a localized system on their business computer that holds the information digitally but does not connect to the internet. Apps on notebook devices and phones provide another versatile option.

Some businesses may only need a base Service Catalog for the time being. Others might want to jump straight to a Service Request Catalog despite lacking a Service Catalog. Such a leap is possible, but should include the creation of the Service Catalog to accompany it.

If creating a Service Request Catalog for a business, it's important to consider which of the above options works best given the circumstances of the organization. As a company grows, so does its need for a high-caliber Service Request Catalog built by a skilled IT team. A quality catalog grants greater capabilities for scaling up while also providing familiarity and functionality for a positive customer experience.

Essential Qualities of Successful Request Catalogs

Contrary to the ideas that many IT professionals have in Service Request Catalog creation, customer experience is key. Making the catalog easier for customers to use increases sales, solidifies customer satisfaction, and facilitates the IT team's job in the long run.

Some IT teams take the opposite approach of focusing on tailoring the catalog to their needs. This can lead to messy, complicated interfaces that discourage customers from using it to buy the services they need. Investing a bit more effort into the design process can result in the best of both worlds such that customers are comfortable and IT is content.

Familiarity and Functionality for the Customer

Most of the people using a Service Request Catalog will already have experience shopping online. So much so that they typically have certain expectations of what the online shopping experience should be, no matter the product. They likely expect a shopping-cart type of experience with logical organization, and giving them that familiarity boosts the efficiency of the catalog. An IT team can and should [take pointers from stores and websites](#) on how to design the interface and selection process of the Service Request Catalog.

For example, department stores lay out their products in sections that consider the thought process and needs of their customers. Online retail websites also create sections as well as helpful guides to encourage customers to move between them. These sections are based on needs and mental connections between objects, rather than the objects themselves. While hairdryers and TVs are both electronics, they won't typically go in the same department because they have very different uses. The opposite is also true as some items are relevant to a variety of uses and places, thus making it sensible to place them in multiple departments.

Similarly, the layout of the Service Request Catalog should not group services based on their individual characteristics or their relationship to the IT team. It must consider the thought process and needs of the customer from their point of view as the user. If employees use the catalog, include a section for employee needs. If managers use it, a section with relevant services and perhaps even access restrictions might be in order. When the employees and managers have some overlapping needs, repeat those services for each appropriate section. With various services to choose from, the catalog can also provide guidance to help each user make informed decisions throughout the process.

Agility and Scale for IT

Although the customer experience is important, it must still effectively translate into instructions for the IT department on the receiving end. In part, this means keeping up with changes to the company, services, and customer needs over time. Staying agile with periodic updates can help the Service Request Catalog grow and improve with each release.

It's also a good idea to consider scaling up and adopting additional services over time. Within a company there may be other service branches such as human resources, finance, or legal. If they reach a point where a Service Request Catalog would be useful, there's little point in them creating their own from scratch.

Regardless of how many service branches get involved, be sure to [ditch the technical IT jargon](#) where it's not necessary. Too much of it can lead to confusion for uninitiated customers which leads to unintentional or incorrect requests. It also might scare away potential customers or create distance between employees or other service departments using the Service Request Catalog.

Service Request Catalog Creation

With the above expectations in mind, it should be pretty smooth sailing to create a Service Request Catalog. The catalog itself will typically have a simple tree structure that narrows down from broad categories to specific services. If there are multiple catalogs involved, combining them into a single portal increases functionality.

Consult potential users during the process to evaluate how they interact with the interface. The same goes for the IT end where incoming requests should be tested. Consider different scenarios that experiment with varying levels of priority, urgency, and impact of requests. There might be infrequent but tricky situations requiring special access, restrictions, perimeters, or overrides.

Creating a workflow and setting contractual deadlines for the catalog at hand helps layout the primary goals of the project. It also makes it easier to identify if and when things run awry along the way. Online workflow management systems resources can help smooth out the workflow process with automation and organization.

The investment of a little extra time and money into the process goes a long way in improving the Service Request Catalog experience for all parties. The final result often serves as a reflection of how mature a company is, so don't underestimate the power it holds.