

WHAT DOES A SERVICE DESK DO THAT A HELP DESK DOESN'T?



Many long term IT professionals grew up in an IT Help Desk environment. But as organizations move towards IT Service Management (ITSM) environments, the focus has shifted to providing an IT Service Desk for customers and employees rather than a Help Desk. Which leaves many IT professionals questioning what an IT Service Desk is and how does it differ from a traditional IT Help Desk?

Given that, here's my humble opinion on what the difference is between an IT Help Desk and an IT Service Desk.

What traditional IT Help Desks do

Traditional IT Help Desks are centered around break/fix activities and basic provisioning services, such as user profile creation, network authority management, termination activities, and email administration. They support the deployment of new IT technology and services. IT Help Desks mostly support internal users with some support provided to external customers, as needed. They function as a single point of contact (SPOC) for IT Support activities.

An IT Help Desk is reactive. It solves day-to-day problems such as resetting passwords, fixing printers, and helping people deal with device issues. Many people refer to IT Help Desk support as tactical support that focuses on IT strategy, both in deploying new initiatives and in providing help to keep those initiatives running. An IT Help Desk generally uses a tracking system such as [BMC Track-IT! software](#), that provides automated ticket recording and routing, self-service options, and a

knowledge base. Ticket reporting capabilities also help IT Support adhere to key Service Level Agreements (SLAs).

Traditional IT Help Desks perform a subset of ITSM and Service Desk capabilities, mostly in the areas of incident management, problem management, knowledge management, and some IT fulfillment and provisioning. A Help Desk can exist without a corresponding Service Desk, but an IT Service Desk almost always incorporates Help Desk responsibilities and capabilities into its functioning.

What IT Service Desks do

IT Service Desks are centered around IT Service Management (ITSM) and business needs. ITSM refers to all the activities, policies, and processes that organizations use for deploying, managing, and improving IT service delivery. Organizations enable these ITSM goals by implementing a number of best practices covering several areas, which may include:

- An IT service catalogue of available IT services that the Service Desk provides, and that users can request and order IT services from.
- An incident management system, covering the issues provided in a traditional IT Help Desk environment.
- Provisioning and configuration services, including user services, hardware, software, configuration, applications, etc.
- An event management system, which monitors "state" changes for IT service and configuration items, to determine whether appropriate actions should be applied in response to a change. Event management also allows personnel to obtain service assurance (verifying that a service is working correctly), to provide audit reporting, and for service improvement.
- Problem management activities, which are intended to prevent problems and recurring incidents from happening, eliminate recurring incidents, and provide mitigation for incidents that cannot be avoided.
- Providing systems for other types of IT services, including change management, release and deployment management, service testing, supplier management, service level management, service catalogue management, and availability management.

[The Information Technology Infrastructure Library \(ITIL\) framework](#) provides a pre-defined framework of best practices and standard processes for implementing ITSM. ITSM best practice and process implementation is aided by using an ITIL verified Service Desk platform such as [BMC FootPrints service desk software](#).

Within ITSM, an IT Service Desk can provide a full implementation of ITSM needs. Like the Help Desk, an IT Service Desk serves as a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) but the focus changes to becoming a SPOC between the service provider (rather than just the IT department) and the users.

An IT Service Desk is considered strategic rather than tactical, because it's centered on business needs and it can focus on IT process deployment, monitoring, and continuous improvement, in addition to fixing existing problems. An IT Service Desk is both reactive and pro-active. It incorporates Help Desk functionality and it's reactive when it uses its incident management and event management capabilities. But it can also be proactive through its interaction with ITIL's Continuous Service Improvement (CSI) practices where recurring issues occur.

The Big Difference

IT Service Desks perform many of the same functions as traditional IT Help Desks. The difference is in focus and scope. Where IT Help Desks traditionally have a narrow focus on incident management, deployment support, and basic provisioning, Help Desk services only form a subset of the functions provided by an IT Service Desk. A Service Desk covers everything that's needed for planning, deploying, managing, and improving IT services, which covers all functions in an IT organization, as well as line of business owners, contributors, and resources. And it has its own framework in ITSM and ITIL for providing those functions. Simply put, a Service Desk has a much broader scope and mandate than a Help Desk does, covering all aspects of providing IT services to both internal and external customers.