The Top 10 Reasons for implementing a Consolidated Service Desk

A discussion paper from Numara Software
It’s always about the bottom line

Irrespective of whether you are a public or private sector organisation, providing you are servicing customers – internal or external – there are compelling reasons to adopt a Consolidated Service Desk (CSD) strategy. However, the final business case will undoubtedly rest on a financial argument.

We have many Numara Software customer scenarios we can share with you where our clients have implemented a CSD strategy and are now enjoying the benefits of this work but one of the most marked justifications has recently been published by the Chartered Institute of Accountants which said: “More than 30% of the fortune 500 companies who have implemented a shared services centre are reporting savings in their general accounting functions of up to 46%”

This report sets out our views of what we believe are the key elements in a CSD strategy which drive this type of cost saving as well as illustrating just how it can also greatly improve your business or organisation.

What is a Consolidated Service Desk?

Getting a decent explanation

You may discover that many vendors are a little reticent when it comes to answering this question and will quite often steer the discussion towards the merits of their own product, arguing that anything else will be unduly complex. The reality is likely to be that they do not have a technical platform which can deliver a consolidated service desk and so will focus on the merits of what they can offer rather than provide you with a reasoned debate.

Why would you need a CSD?

If you take an aerial view of your organisation you will see that it is a ‘process ecosystem’ and that it all joins up. It may not be as joined up as you would like it to be but, none the less, it is joined up.

Typically, organisations in the private sector comprise a number of different functions such as HR, IT, Complaints, Facilities, Manufacturing, Marketing and Customer Service.

A Local Authority will have all of the above for their own inner workings, but also Citizen Response, Planning, Education, Refuse, Council Tax etc.

Education is different again, having very structured departments providing services such as Administrative Information Technology Services (AITS), Human Resources (HR), Office of Business and Financial Services (OBFS), Academic Computing and Communications Centres (ACCC), Computing & Communications Services Offices (CCSO), UIS Help Desks (NCSO), and UIC Medical Centres (ITS).

Irrespective of type, all organisations have functions with significant links, relationships and interdependencies. A consolidated service desk will bring cohesion and coherence to enabling all functions to link more effectively, achieving:

- A consolidated technology platform
- Consolidation of some or all of the interdepartmental processes
- Consolidation of some or all of the staff supporting the function

An effective consolidated service desk, works from an open, secure and scalable platform which can run multiple service desks from one system.

So what are the top 10 reasons for adopting a CSD?

1. Consolidation and integration of technology
2. Consolidation and integration of process [The process HQ]
3. Consolidated administration
4. Consolidation of reporting and management information
5. Empowerment
6. Ability to react to the needs of the business
7. The customer experience
8. Sharing the load
9. Planning and managing complex change
10. New technology
1. Consolidation and integration of technology

Consolidating disparate services does not have to be a ‘one hit’ transaction where you replace all of your help desk, service desk or customer self-service technologies all at the same time. It is a phased approach to a consolidated technology infrastructure. The benefits for this are many including:

- lower cost of acquisition,
- significantly lower maintenance and support
- protection against ‘bespoke’ knowledge within administrators of the niche vendor / home grown applications
- lower cost of acquisition
- solid security platform
- uniform (and consolidated) integration to other data sources (with disparate systems you may have to integrate to Directory / CRM / ERP / Telecom subsystems etc., many times over)
- server hardware consolidation
- administration of service packs, DB changes and OS upgrades – all of which can be more efficiently managed centrally

An additional benefit of consolidated software architectures is the ability to provide multi-site service centres, especially where you have chosen a vendor who can provide the service via a web browser (whether that be as an ASP/SAS service or as a common premise-based solution where the ‘users’ access the application via the web). Thus agents or service providers can share resources to deal with global time-zones, peak times, seasonal trends or language issues.

2. Consolidation and integration of process [The Process HQ]

There are a number of reasons for integrating various processes, inside and outside your business or organisation. These will include the desire to reduce cost, speed up delivery or improve the customer experience.

One of the best ways of visualising process integration and consolidation is to select a common process which exists currently and follow the customer experience. A good example is of a new recruit joining your business or organisation. Well, in fact, the CSD process may have started before the person was identified or hired with the application for headcount, which then moves on to ‘request an offer letter’. These processes may be very HR centric, but as soon as an offer for a position is accepted, the implications and process requirements multiply: the recruit needs a desk or an office and a security pass so facilities need to be notified; he or she will need a PC and a phone, so IT and purchasing will need to be notified, IT needs to set up email accounts and appropriate access to corporate or organisational resources. And so on continues.

You may be thinking that we do not have or need a help desk/service desk to do this. You’re right but you do have a process. It may not be optimised and you may not be able to report against it, but it exists. By consolidating a simple process, you can gain control over it, drive it, report against it and improve the service you provide.

This is an example of a very simple internal process. But consider external revenue-impacting processes specific to your industry or sector and you begin to see the virtues of a CSD strategy - the HQ of process design.

3. Consolidated administration

Naturally, all processes and service management systems have their own administration overhead. Non-automated processes generally rely on paper or, at best, email. Automated processes are likely to have a departmental help desk with its own unique technology that requires administering on a day-to-day basis. Multiply this by two, three or more service desks or defined processes and you can start to see the inefficiencies, liabilities and general shortfalls.

One thing is constant in today’s modern business and that’s change. The acceleration of change directly impacts system administration as policies and processes have to be edited to support the initiative. With a CSD you can centralise and reduce this overhead. Furthermore, you will be building skills and experience on one piece of technology rather than diluting (and becoming beholden to) your system administration function.

4. Consolidation of reporting and management information

Ask yourself: What is my overall service level right now? This question will have different meanings for different organisations. However, just imagine that you are a Service Director responsible for a large city council. You have six service desks providing a range of support including Council Tax, Citizen Response, Planning, etc. Answering the question may require various data exports and the manipulation of disparate data to arrive at something that resembles an answer. If the question is repeated a week later, you may find yourself using a different method for arriving at an answer, therefore losing any reference to the previous report.

The same applies to organisations which have Customer Service Centres (probably with multiple disciplines or skills), blended with internal IT service. Let’s be honest, it is the IT that drives the organisation’s people and systems. Without it, there is little likelihood of any customer service.

The key is that the more you can consolidate into a single service management platform, the simpler the reporting task becomes: consolidated, open, standardised, available, rapid, segmented, and real.

5. Empowerment

Whether you have multiple systems or not, we have hopefully demonstrated you do have a process ecosystem – big or small, advanced or simplistic. Making changes to the process or systems can be dramatically simplified through a CSD strategy as it provides a common DNA thread through your system. This just doesn’t happen with a ‘fragmented’ service desk design. Implications of change are not understood as the administration point of each desk or process is bespoke, or simply not available – “Sorry, Pam administers that system and she is on holiday for 2 weeks.”

A CSD approach integrates rules, policies and dependencies, empowering users to gain appropriate administration levels to run the service.

The more advanced CSD platforms will offer ‘process wizards’ so that complex process changes or new service designs may easily be planned, built and executed across multiple service functions.
6. Ability to react to the needs of the business

Have you ever been the recipient of the JUST word?

‘Can you just set this process up for me?’
‘Can you just move us all on to Windows Vista?’
‘Can you just integrate this?’
‘Can you just link the company we acquired?’

That one word may as well be the iceberg that just tapped the Titanic, many years ago. ‘Just’ is a MASSIVE word. Imagine that you just needed to change your directory strategy, or your ERP/CRM platform and that each of your three service/help desks relied on data that was within the legacy system. Just very quickly becomes three times as big and complex.

With good service management systems, flexible and easy to implement Configuration Management Databases (CMDB) are provided as standard. When consolidating these types of system, the net result is an improved ability to evaluate the implications of the ‘just’ word. The CMDB gives dependency management information and, rather than seeing the cascading implications just within one service desk function, the consolidated desk means that you only need to do this once rather than many times over.

A CSD together with CMDB functionality improves the ability for the service director or IT owner to advise the management team on the whole rather than on pockets of the business.

7. The customer experience

Integrating business processes can have a dramatic impact on your customers’ experience of interacting with you. To capture and know their history ‘companywide’, makes sense. And increasingly, customers want to know that you ‘see’ or at least have access to other transactions and communications relating to them which have taken place. For internal service, would it not be a good idea for the IT team to see the status of your office move that your facilities people are planning? Wouldn’t it be useful for the marketing teams to see the project status of a new product launch?

External customers will see a marked improvement if your service desk can now see incidents that have occurred in other departments, such as complaints or, simply, if general communications are linked to open tickets.

The Harvard business review published a paper entitled ‘Sack your customer... it will make you more profitable’.

This report showed that in a study of various organisations it was the few awkward customers who bought little that cost companies the most. Here’s one example of where the added benefits of consolidating data can clearly be seen. Without this consolidated information, how do you know who your awkward customers are? Are they hidden in multiple databases of multiple support desks?

8. Sharing the load

We understand you cannot share all of the service management loads within your organisation as the provision of each service will no doubt require particular skills. For example, we would not expect an HR specialist to provide first line IT support. However, there will be many process similarities either across the various customer service functions, or between, HR, Payroll, complaints, legal and facilities etc. By consolidating some of the resources dedicated to solving these service issues, we can show significant reductions in staffing costs while still improving customer service and response times.

9. Planning and managing complex change

Planning and managing complex change within the organisation is a significant challenge. Typically, any organisation can be described as a series of islands connected by bridges. Some bridges may be bigger than others or indeed only permit one-way traffic. For example while the sales and marketing islands may have a large two-way 3 lane bridge, the link between IT and sales may be a single tenuous rope bridge at best. In many cases, the collaboration technology between islands to coordinate a major change, whether that be a product launch, a company acquisition, or a company office move, commonly reverts back to a two-dimensional email system.

A CSD not only delivers the ‘desk’ but also the collaboration process for islands to plan, execute, monitor and audit a complex change. There will be a clear visibility of activity and the means of promoting an ‘electronic ecosystem’ which makes collaborating and reporting a practical reality.

10. New technology

Historically, the CSD ‘pitch’ was to save money by taking all of your geographically dispersed service centres and consolidating them into one location. This does have its place but it requires significant investment to ‘restructure’ the physical layout and may detract from the benefits of having a regional support desk. The bottleneck, even today, for many vendors is that they cannot make two, three or thirty service desks act as one – easily or cost effectively.

There is now no need to ‘physically’ consolidate or centralise, just electronically centralise by using one platform that can deliver ‘partitioned software’ or ‘multi tenant’ architecture via a web interface. This allows you to run as many service desks as you want from one server. The key, and where so many fail, is the ability to report on the individual service centres as if they were on their own single platform and also to run a holistic report on all of the service centres.

So when you’re next asked “What’s our service level?” You no longer need to spend the weekend up to your eyes in reporting applications!
Your next step

If you are seeking out the best means of moving service to the next level in your organisation, your research will present you with a number of competitive products or solutions. Be clear about your criteria. It is easy to be distracted by the noise of impressive irrelevant functionality. And how easy will the transition be? How much support or development will you need to make the change? There is no substitute for thorough product research, but why not select a product by which to judge the rest?

Numara FootPrints™ may not yet be familiar to you, but it’s a good place to start. It is a Consolidated Service Desk which offers a powerful and adaptive platform for service management with a portfolio of pre-constructed applications which will dramatically reduce implementation time. It also provides service design wizards which allow you to build your own workflows with limited reliance on costly professional service support. It could be your fastest route to successful change and business advantage.

About Numara FootPrints™

Numara FootPrints is the service management solution to keep your organisation in step with the changing demands of your internal and external customers. Multiple instances of the Numara FootPrints solution can be deployed across an organisation either as a totally integrated solution or as stand alone systems. Each instance can have its own workflow, escalations and look & feel. This level of flexibility can be implemented in weeks making Numara FootPrints the highest ‘capability-to-total-cost’ solution on the market today.

Numara FootPrints is a future-proof solution that will adapt to the needs not only of your business today but also for where it may be tomorrow.

About Numara Software, Inc

Founded in 1991, Numara Software, Inc. (formerly Blue Ocean Software) is a global provider of service desk management solutions for help desk and customer support professionals who need to simplify and gain control over their increasingly complex environments. The Numara Software trusted solutions address critical IT and support functions, such as customer service desk, IT help desk, asset management, software patch and deployment, and network monitoring.

With its two flagship products, Numara Track-It! and Numara FootPrints, and more than 50,000 customer sites worldwide, Numara Software is the service desk management leader for small to mid-sized enterprises.

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