

Desktop Support Through Remote Support

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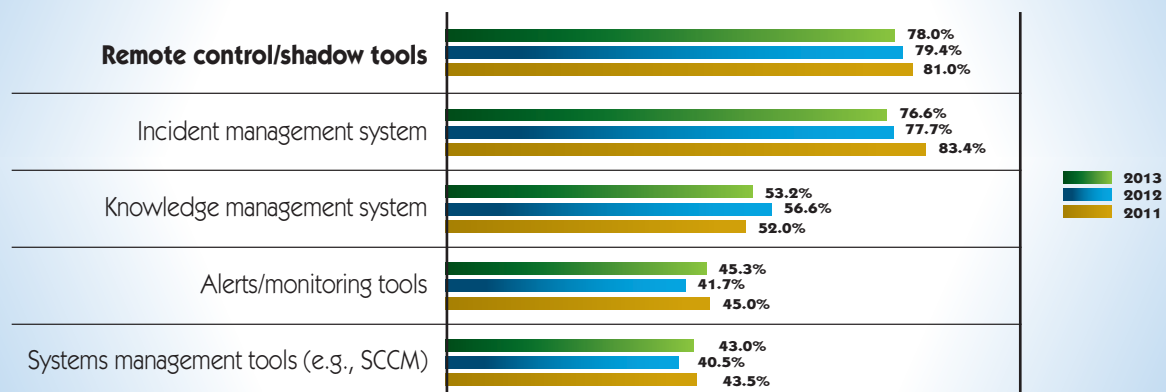
What would a business do without its technology support professionals? As business technology has become more and more pervasive and necessary, the methods for supporting that complex environment have changed and evolved. In the early days of desktop computing, help likely came not from a dedicated support team but from someone who was fascinated by technology and had educated himself (or herself) on the machine’s basic functionality.

Later, as the desktop computer evolved, there may have been a few dedicated IT staff tasked with taking care of them; these folks were usually very technical and very familiar with the inner workings of the hardware, but not very customer-focused. They were more comfortable flipping DIPP switches and using jumpers to get things to work properly. When software became the primary focus of computing, these same technicians developed knowledge bases to explain how drivers and software interacted with the hardware. autoexec.bat, config.sys—they spoke a mysterious language that baffled the average user.

Eventually, desktop computers and laptops were everywhere. Support teams continued to grow and nearly every office had a dedicated desktop support technician (large offices often had quite a few). The more technology-driven the business became, the more desktop support was necessary to keep the business running.

Today we’re seeing another evolution of the desktop support model. Not so very long ago, desktop support was defined by the ability to physically touch a device; however, more and more businesses have discovered that similar support can be provided via a virtual visit using remote support tools. As these tools become more complex, the physical visit is becoming thing of the past. Each year, we ask HDI Desktop Support Practices & Salary Survey respondents to rank the “must-have” technologies for desktop support. For the past two years, remote support tools have topped the list, surpassing even incident management tools.

Top Five Must-Have Technologies Required to Provide Successful End-User Desktop Support



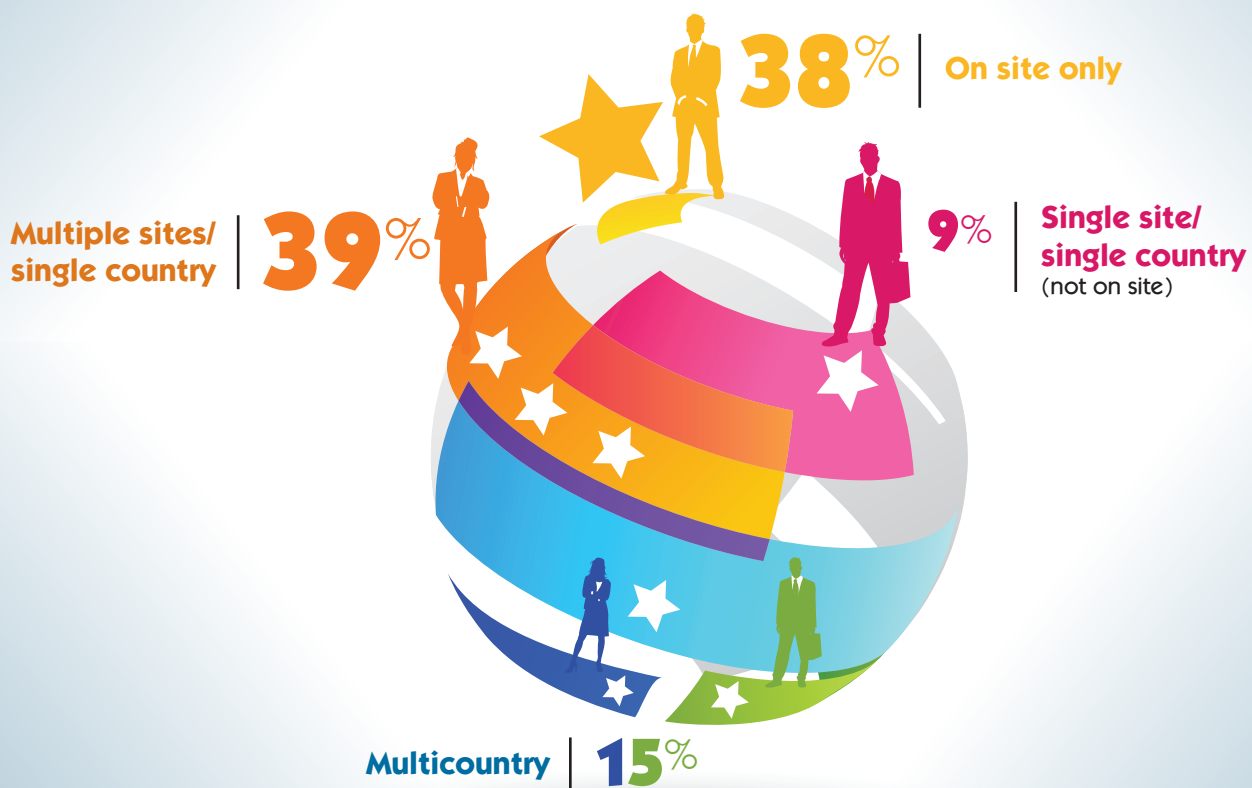
Percentage who selected each technology

Driving Factors

Why has the remote support model become so common? A key reason is the globalization of business. Teams are now distributed across the country and around the world, and remote support tools give support anywhere, anytime access to those teams. Over the past two years, more than 60 percent of survey respondents have indicated that they're not located on site, and, of those, more than half are in multiple sites and countries. This doesn't mean the remaining 40 percent aren't using a remote support model. Remote support also works for centralized support, where the most of the desktop support technicians are localized but they use remote support tools to accomplish their support duties.

Location of the Desktop Support Team

Percentage of desktop support teams



A fluid technology landscape has also encouraged the use of remote support tools. By allowing support professionals to use a single device to assist customers on a variety of platforms, someone using a Windows PC can provide support not only to other Windows clients but also to most of the current flavors of OSX and the various Linux distributions. Many of these tools feature support functionality for mobile devices as well, so tablets and smartphones are not out of reach.

These efficiencies ultimately translate into direct cost savings. By placing their support technicians in less costly areas, the business can save on real estate. By having anywhere, anytime support capabilities, the business can position support teams in multiple time zones and extend the amount of time support is available. Finally, by having technicians who can respond to and resolve incidents more quickly, the business benefits from faster service.

The State of the Industry

The 2013 HDI Desktop Support Practices & Salary Report surveyed nearly 1,000 organizations, and a recurring theme was the use of remote support tools. The survey crosses a wide variety of industries, from education to finance to healthcare, and all of them use remote support in some fashion. As previously mentioned, this is actually a multiyear trend, with these types of tools repeatedly being singled out as the most important tools used by desktop support professionals, even over incident management systems.

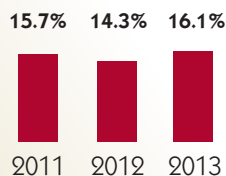
In general, these tools are owned and run in house, with 83.5 percent being run on local servers. The remainder is run via managed services, in Internet-based environments, or through other means. The majority of businesses (37.2%) license these tools using some sort of subscription service, which makes a great deal of sense because subscription-based service allows for regular updates and ensures that the latest version of the tools is always available. This kind of support is critical because technology changes quickly and new products and operating systems are released at a rapid pace. The next most common licensing approach (20.5%) is a direct purchase with maintenance. Similar to the subscription approach, direct-purchasing maintenance ensures that the tool will be kept up to date, at least within the current version of the software being used. Only 16.1 percent purchase a basic license with no maintenance. The data and trends for location and licensing have been consistent since 2011.

Licensing Model(s) Used by Desktop Support Teams for Remote Control/Shadowing Tools

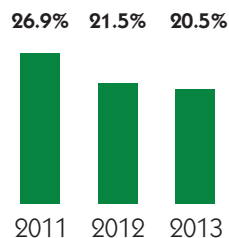
Percentage of organizations



One-time purchase for life, maintenance not included



One-time purchase for life, includes maintenance

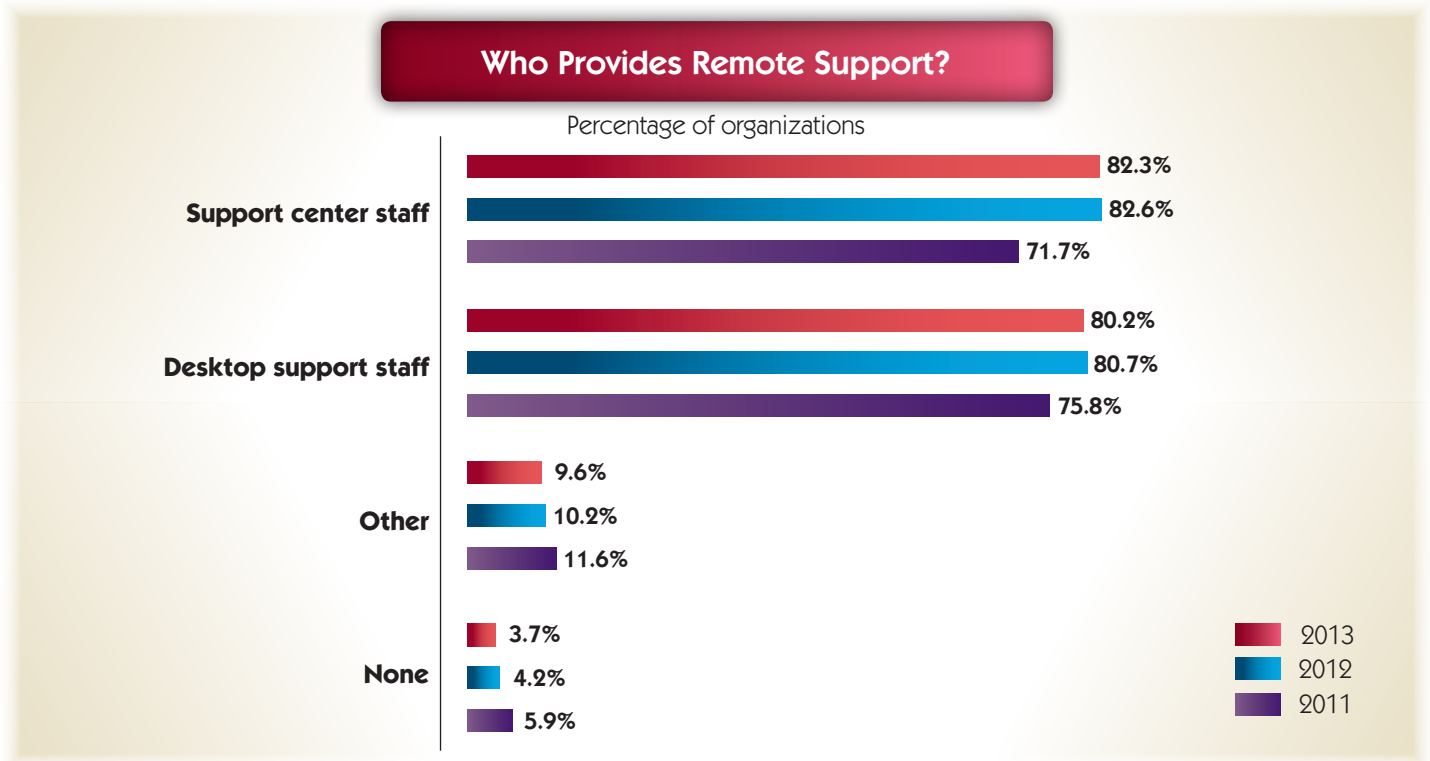


Subscription, renewed on a schedule



Remote support tools have become pervasive across all support teams. In 2013, survey respondents reported that the first time a customer might encounter remote support would be at the service desk. In 2011, 71.7 percent of service desks were using remote support tools; in 2013, that percentage increased to 82.3 percent. Allowing service desk analysts to use remote support tools increases the likelihood of first call resolution, because the analyst can actually see what the customer is seeing. The use of these tools by the service desk also aids desktop support, because even if support center analysts can't resolve issues directly, being able to see those issues with their own eyes enables them to accurately describe issues and route them to the appropriate area of desktop support for further investigation.

Even if the analyst can't reach the customer's desktop via the remote support tool, that's good information because it means the incident can be routed to a desktop support technician who knows she'll probably need to make a physical visit to the customer's desk.



Desktop support has seen an increase in remote support as well. In 2011, the survey found that 75.8 percent of desktop support teams were using remote support tools; in 2013, that percentage increased to 80.2 percent. This is very similar to the data for the service desk, and for many of the same reasons. Remote support transforms desktop support from an organization tasked with making physical visits to its customers into a diverse second- or third-level support team that combines virtual support with deskside visits. When desktop support technicians can quickly and efficiently take control of a customer's device, and even use enhanced administrative privileges for troubleshooting, first contact resolution rates go up.

Because so much second-level support can be done remotely, it has opened up the possibility of telecommuting for desktop support staff. While most organizations still require desktop support to be on site, some are beginning to recognize the advantages of using remote support tools to provide distributed support. When asked if desktop technicians are allowed to work from home at least part-time, nearly 22 percent of the respondents said yes, with another 8 percent saying that their organizations were considering implementing it within the year. As the business begins to rely less upon locally managed desktops and laptops, there will be less need for desktop support teams to be tied to specific locations.

The data shows that these tools are critical in the support of virtual environments. Of the businesses that utilize virtual applications, desktops, or servers, 94 percent indicate that they rely upon remote support tools. This makes sense, as these types of environments can be hosted anywhere and nearly all interaction is via a networked connection. The use of the same tools regardless of whether the client is local or virtual sends a clear message to the customer that the technical support teams are consistent and dependable.

This approach can be very successful, and the growing popularity of this approach is clearly indicated in the survey results. In 2012, 65.9 percent of organizations indicated that they were resolving at least half of their desktop support tickets using remote support tools; in 2013, that percentage decreased to 61.5 percent. However, the number of organizations resolving more than half to all of their desktop support tickets using remote support tools increased to 38.5 percent! Another indication of the efficacy of remote support is reflected in the customer satisfaction metric. Of the organizations that use remote support tools, 95–97 percent have customers that are either satisfied or very satisfied with their support teams.

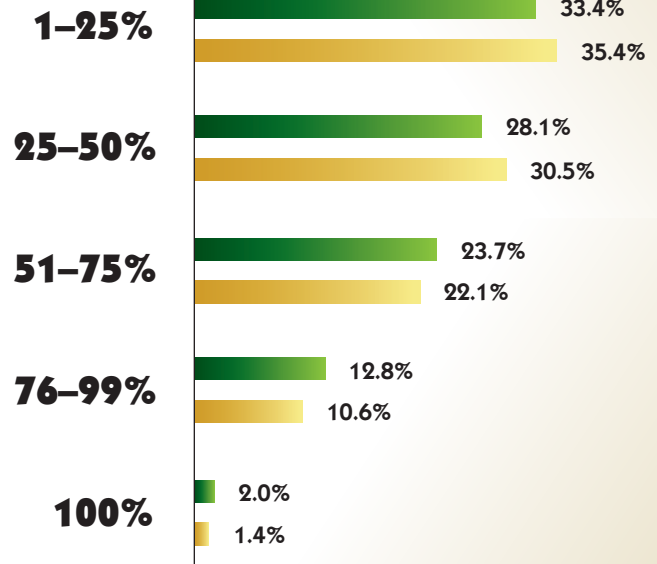
Amount of Desktop Support Resolved Remotely

Includes only those organizations that provide remote support.



2013
2012

Tickets



Percentage of organizations

Clearly, remote support tools are an effective means of resolving tickets. In fact, it's become so common that the percentage of tickets resolved remotely has become a standard metric, with 33 percent of organizations tracking and reporting this metric.

Of the organizations that reported a decrease in desktop support tickets in 2013, more than 37 percent indicated that the use of remote support tools was a significant factor.

Recommendations

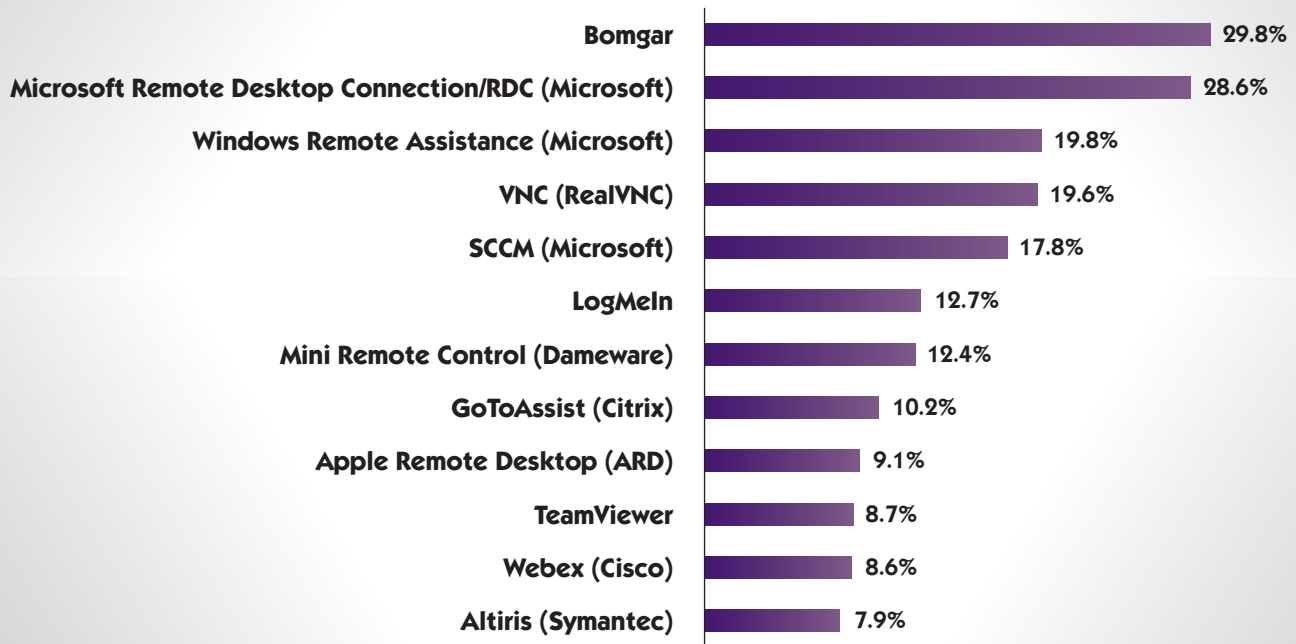
There are many compelling reasons to use remote support tools. Support teams can be located anywhere, which gives the business flexibility in hiring. By strategically locating desktop support technicians in multiple time zones, the business can expand its hours of operation; in fact, some companies have been able to offer 24x7 support simply by placing support staff in key locations around the globe. Remote support tools can transform a desktop support team that once had to be physically present to do its job into a true second- or third-level support team that can resolve critical issues quickly, without ever leaving their desks.

Should remote support tools be part of a desktop support tool kit? Absolutely! Any organization can use remote support tools, regardless of size, industry, or technologies supported. In fact, the greater diversity of technologies your organization supports, the more likely it will be to benefit from using remote support tools.

There are many remote support tools on the market; take the time to investigate which one would work best in your environment. The list below includes the most popular tools used by the organizations that responded to the 2013 HDI Desktop Support Practices & Salary Survey.

Tools Most Frequently Used to Provide Remote Support

Percentage of organizations using each tool



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