Desktop Support: Managing Ticket Volume Under Pressure

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When people think of computers, they typically think about the machines that allow them to check email, surf the web, and be productive. The fact is, that's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to technology.

If you bought a new car recently, there's a computer inside that allows your car to "talk" to other cars on the road, pass on traffic alerts, and communicate other vital information. Cars are becoming rolling Wi-Fi hotspots, with on-demand media and Internet connectivity. In retail, there are plans to use smartphones for targeted advertisements: when customers pass by particular products, a targeted ad will appear on their phones giving the specifications of those products along with any special deals the store may be offering. Grocery stores are exploring the idea of "smart carts" that use RFID technology to keep track of products as they're placed in the cart; when they're done shopping, customers will simply roll up to the checkout lane and the technology in the cart will communicate the final total to the checkout computer—no cashiers necessary.

Healthcare is rapidly becoming more technological. Due to government regulations, a heightened awareness of risk management, and the need to store more data, electronic medical records are becoming the norm. Other advances in medicine allow doctors to treat patients—and even perform surgery—remotely, through a networked video link.

Technology is no longer a mystery; it surrounds us, and it is integral to the success of our businesses. Among other things, technology allows customers to provide immediate feedback—positive or negative—and that feedback can span the globe in a matter of hours. It's no surprise, then, that a recent IBM study indicated that more than 60 percent of senior-level executives are focused on improving the customer experience, and 82 percent of them are investing in technology to facilitate that relationship. IT must be part of the solution, and there's an increasing expectation that IT needs to deliver more than just the traditional levels of support.

This strong focus on the customer, coupled with rapidly changing technology, puts a tremendous amount of pressure on technical support teams to perform well and prove their worth to the business. When HDI asked whether IT was feeling pressure to prove its value, the response was overwhelmingly in the affirmative, from

Support Center Spending Priorities

Support business growth	Improve effectiveness	Improve customer service	Improve efficiency	Reduce costs	Expand services
27.6%	**17.2%**	**17.2%**	**17.1%**	**15.4%**	**8.1%**

Percentage of organizations selecting each factor as their highest priority

both desktop support and the support center. In fact, a whopping 85 percent of IT departments and 87 percent of support centers reported feeling this pressure to some degree.

To accomplish this, IT must align itself with the business, identifying and leveraging technologies that will allow the business to succeed. This is reflected in the spending priorities of the support center: 27.6 percent of organizations report that supporting business growth is their main focus. In a three-way tie for second are improving effectiveness, customer service, and efficiency, all at around 17 percent. In many ways, these three priorities are integrally tied to the first, as these are the things that IT must deliver upon to best support business growth.

This can be challenging, because as IT is trying to properly align itself with business priorities, it must still focus on the day-to-day work of providing effective technology support. Sixty-six percent of support centers and 54 percent of desktop support organizations have seen consistent increases in ticket volumes over the past few years; in desktop support, those increases have been not just consistent, but significant.
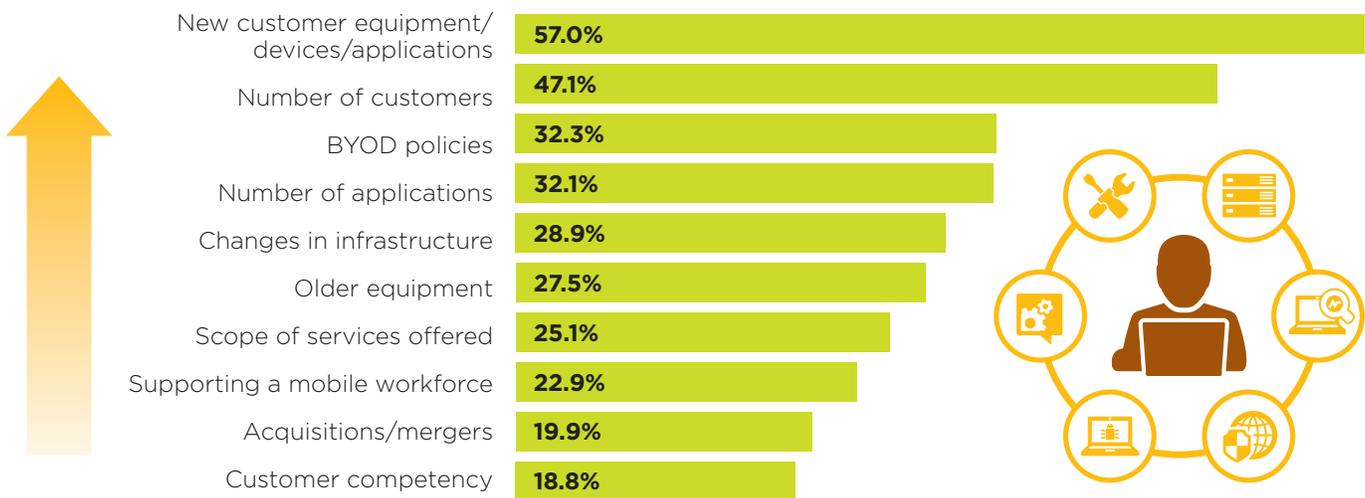
The primary causes of this increase in workload are new and expanding technology. New end-user equipment or applications were cited by 57 percent of the organizations surveyed as a key reason for the additional volume. An increase in the customer base was the second most

common factor, with 47 percent saying that a growing customer base influenced the number of tickets that were opened for support. Of the top ten reasons given, seven are directly related to technology policies, hardware, or software: new customer equipment, devices, and applications; BYOD policies; the number of applications; changes in infrastructure; older equipment; the scope of services; and the mobile workforce. The remaining three—the number of customers, acquisitions/mergers, and customer competency—are customer-focused.

A small percentage of desktop support organizations (16%) have seen a decrease in ticket volumes. In these cases, that decrease is primarily due to the competency of the service desk staff, along with enhanced tools and newer technology.

Technology has become a commodity, and the customers IT supports are primarily consumers of that technology; they expect it to "just work," and they may not have the skills to troubleshoot or resolve issues when technology goes awry. A study by *The Wall Street Journal* found that Millennials (those born between 1980 and 2000) multitask for up to eighteen hours a day; for example, they can surf the Internet, play a video game, and interact on social networks simultaneously. But this doesn't mean they're technically equipped to fix their own problems. They are consumers of technology, and they're quick to escalate when that technology doesn't work in the manner they expect.

Top Ten Reasons Desktop Support Ticket Volume Is Increasing

Reason	Percentage
New customer equipment/devices/applications	57.0%
Number of customers	47.1%
BYOD policies	32.3%
Number of applications	32.1%
Changes in infrastructure	28.9%
Older equipment	27.5%
Scope of services offered	25.1%
Supporting a mobile workforce	22.9%
Acquisitions/mergers	19.9%
Customer competency	18.8%

Percentage of organizations selecting each factor

Top Five Reasons Desktop Support Ticket Volume Is Decreasing

Service desk staff competency	**47.4%**
Changes in infrastructure	**39.4%**
Remote tools for support	**32.9%**
Knowledge management	**31.9%**
New customer equipment/devices/applications	**29.1%**

Percentage of organizations selecting each factor

Given the steady increase in ticket volumes noted over the past few years, and knowing that this is a trend that will likely continue, how can technical support teams manage this volume? For the past three years, desktop support teams have recommended three key tools.
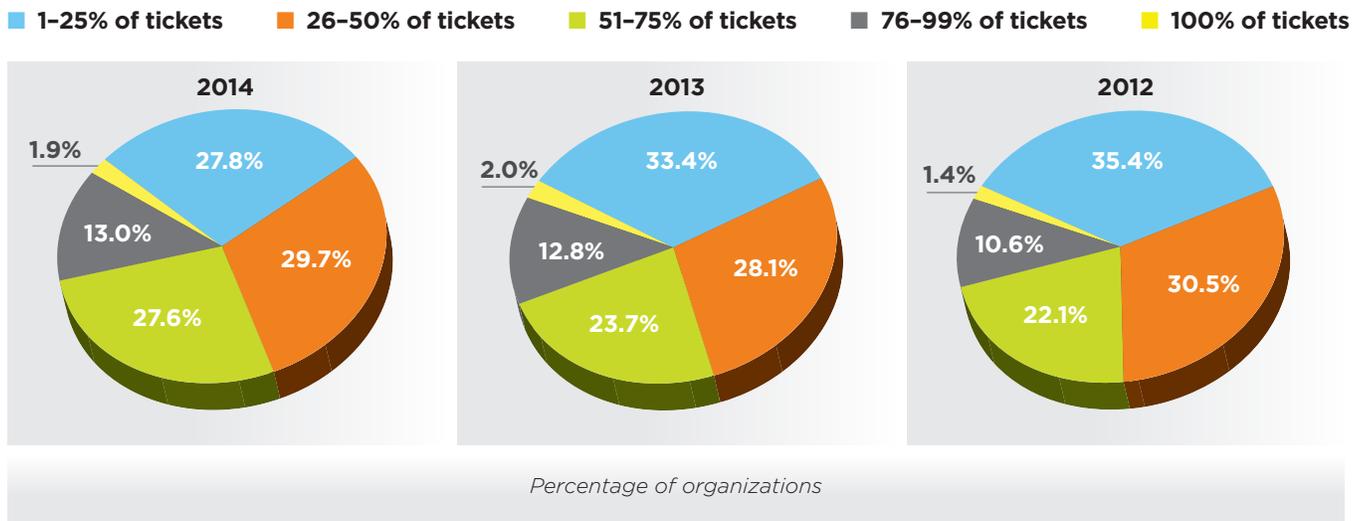
1. Remote Control Tools

Having the ability to take control of a customer's computer and troubleshoot issues remotely gives technicians the freedom to quickly resolve issues without needing to physically visit a device. In fact, teams can be established virtually anywhere and provide quality service to workstations anywhere in the world. Remote control tools became the most required technology for providing successful customer support, as reported by the desktop support industry, in 2012. It has remained in

this top spot for the last three years, even over incident management systems.

The number of organizations that resolve more than half of their incident tickets remotely has consistently increased from year to year, from 34 percent in 2012 to 43 percent in 2014.

Remote control tools have also improved the customer experience in the support center. Of the companies surveyed, 77 percent provide their frontline staff with remote support tools, allowing support analysts to resolve issues without escalating them to second-level support teams. In addition to improving the customer experience, this comes with measurable cost savings: $8 per ticket, on average.

Average Amount of Desktop Support Resolved Through Remote Support

■ 1–25% of tickets   ■ 26–50% of tickets   ■ 51–75% of tickets   ■ 76–99% of tickets   ■ 100% of tickets

2014
1.9%
27.8%
29.7%
27.6%
13.0%

2013
2.0%
33.4%
28.1%
23.7%
12.8%

2012
1.4%
35.4%
30.5%
22.1%
10.6%

Percentage of organizations

2. Ticket Management Systems

In 2014, 84 percent of desktop support organizations reported using an incident management system, with an additional four percent planning to implement one in the next year. This isn't surprising, as these systems allow for better organization, tracking, and reporting. Most of these systems fit neatly into the ITIL landscape, and they often offer additional modules to expand the capability of the tool.

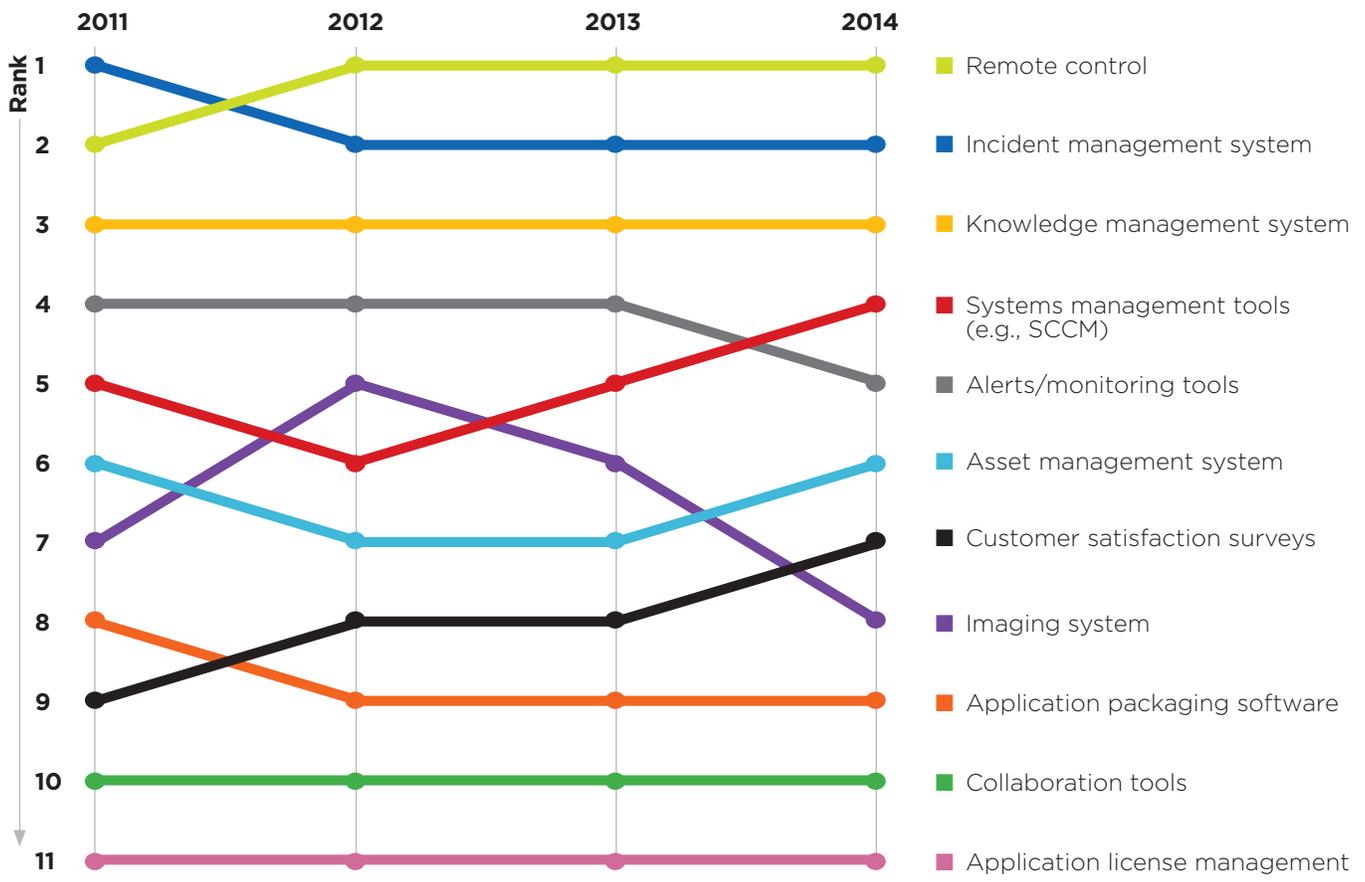## 3. Knowledge Management Systems

Knowledge management systems offer the ability to capture and catalog information specific to an organization, and then provide quick, consistent support via an easily searchable system that prioritizes issues and solutions. Knowledge management solutions have a proven track record of measurable cost savings resulting from the immediate availability of known solutions (that

is, analysts don't have to reinvent the wheel with each ticket).

In addition to cost savings, average first level resolution rates are higher for technical support organizations that have adopted knowledge management systems. For service requests, the resolution rate was 70.3 percent, compared to an industry average of 68.6 percent; for incidents, it was 67.3 percent against an industry average of 65.6 percent.

Remote control tools, ticket management systems, and knowledge management systems are only some of the tools that allow desktop support organizations to manage increasing ticket loads while providing value to the business. A more complete list of the most commonly used technologies, along with their rankings by desktop support over the past four years can be seen in the chart below.

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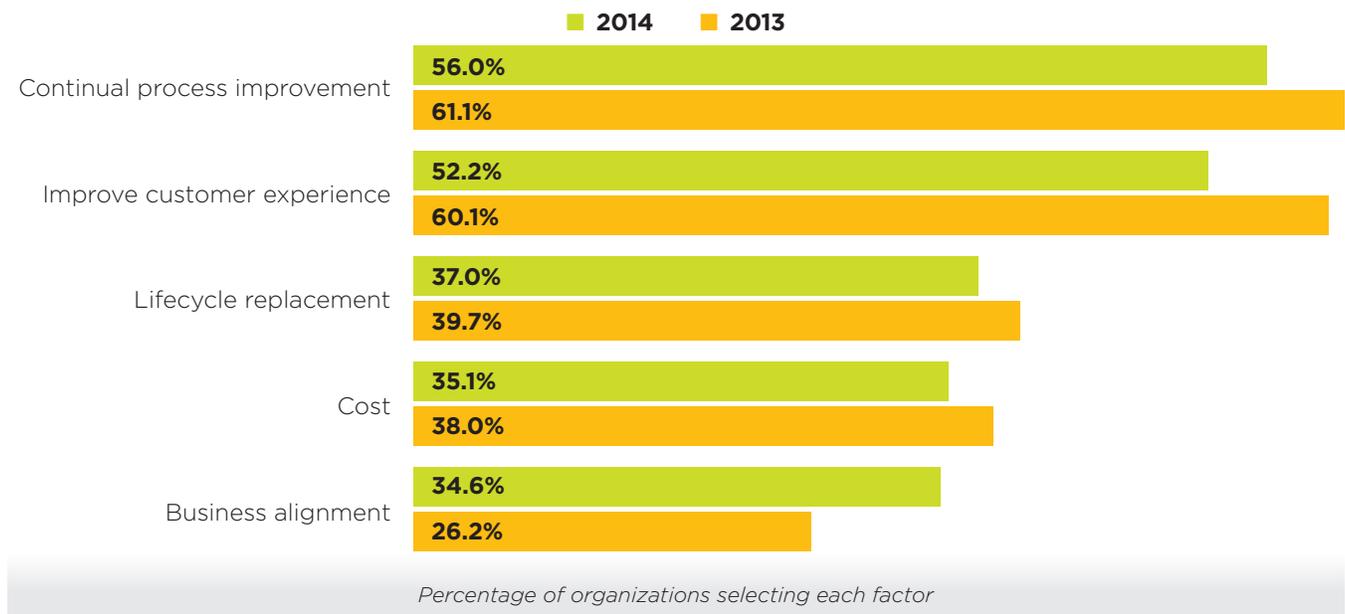

- Remote control
- Incident management system
- Knowledge management system
- Systems management tools (e.g., SCCM)
- Alerts/monitoring tools
- Asset management system
- Customer satisfaction surveys
- Imaging system
- Application packaging software
- Collaboration tools
- Application license management

Rank based on percentage of organizations that identified each technology as a must-have for providing successful end-user support

Managing Ticket Volume Under Pressure

This year, 82 percent of desktop support organizations are planning to add, replace, or upgrade the technologies they use to support end users. The chart below lists the top factors motivating technology purchases and implementations.

As technology continues to evolve, support professionals need to keep abreast of the changes and leverage new ideas to meet the challenges of a changing business and technology landscape. If we are able to do this, we can succeed in providing value to the business and helping achieve its goals.

Top Five Factors Motivating Technology Upgrades and Implementations

2014 / 2013:
- Continual process improvement: 56.0% / 61.1%
- Improve customer experience: 52.2% / 60.1%
- Lifecycle replacement: 37.0% / 39.7%
- Cost: 35.1% / 38.0%
- Business alignment: 34.6% / 26.2%

Percentage of organizations selecting each factor

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