A well-organized help desk is critical to every enterprise's IT service delivery. Accurate and current information about the status and history of users' PCs significantly boosts help desk efficiency. This paper shows how asset discovery software plays a vital role in raising help desk efficiency while maintaining customer satisfaction and resolving problems effectively.

Status data

According to a survey by industry analysts Gartner Group, the average duration of a support call is 17min, 42 percent of which is spent establishing the status of the user's PC.

Clearly a support technician cannot accurately diagnose a user's problem without knowing the status of the PC, its hardware configuration, operating system, application software and other files.

Configuration database

Unless status information is stored in the help desk configuration database or is readily available elsewhere, the technician establishes it by iterative Q&A with the user, which is a time-consuming process.

Even if a user knows the current status of their PC, they may not be aware of previous changes. So the configuration database also needs to provide the history of these changes, including hardware modifications and software patches, otherwise the technician will still have to make a site visit.

Knowing the physical location of the user's PC and the status of the segment of the network to which it is connected will also significantly speed up the resolution of the problem.

ITIL best practice

According to the definition of ITIL, configuration management, a subset of service delivery, has four aspects: identification, control, status and verification. Asset management contributes to ITIL processes by supporting the identification, status and verification aspects.

If the discovery and entry of IT asset data is not automated, the configuration database seldom contains sufficiently accurate information and it is highly unlikely that the data will be 100 percent

up to date. Even help desk suites that boast ITIL certification may rely on manual entry of configuration data which in a real-life environment can prove unreliable.

Populating the configuration database with the output from automated inventory management software will provide a regular update of the status of all devices on the network. This means the technician will automatically have the information required to resolve problems efficiently.

Improved efficiency

With audit data present the average duration of a help desk call falls 50 percent, from 17min to 8.5min, says Gartner, which can result in significant improvements in help desk efficiency. Technicians will be able to handle more calls during their shift and users will see improved service levels and a quicker return to productive work.

Centennial's own study also shows that the presence of audit data can cut out 80 percent of on-site visits and double first-time fix rates, further increasing help desk efficiency.

Fluctuating IT assets

Today's dynamic business requirements mean IT assets are constantly changing, so the configuration database will require frequent updates. Being able to see up to date discovery data in the help desk screen will significantly boost the efficiency of the help desk (see box below).

Works with Centennial Discovery®

Centennial's approach to open schema makes it easy to add live asset data to help desk applications. Many organizations are already benefiting from integrating Discovery with a number of help desks, including:

assyst by Axios Systems	Marval
Epicor ITSM	Remedy
HEAT Service Desk (FrontRange)	Sunrise Sostenuto ITSM
Magic Service Desk & HelpDesk IQ (Remedy/BMC Software)	Supportworks (Hornbill)
	Unipress Footprints

CENTENNIAL software

IDG
IDG Global Solutions

Ideally organizations need an automatic process to feed live asset data into the configuration database regularly and not just when known changes – such as OS or hardware upgrades – occur. Audit software that uses an industry-standard SQL database will have ease-of-use advantages here.

Asset discovery data required

Automated asset discovery software needs to provide the following data:

·   Hardware: machine name, manufacturer, serial number, BIOS date, processor, memory, hard disk size/space, installed adapters, network information

·   Software: vendor, application name, version/patch, last used, frequency of use, licensable & unlicensable applications, product type

·   Identification of file types, eg MP3s, and percentage of disk space used by file type

·   Audit history and record of changes

·   Current location and location tracking to alert administrators to movements, additions and removals

For most diagnoses, a help desk technician won't require all the data fields gathered by an asset management package. However, the ability to drill down into this information as necessary will be of great help should the technician need it.

Conclusion

When help desk technicians have ready access to accurate and current configuration data about the status, network connection and location of users' PCs, average support call time halves, first-time fix rates double and on-site calls fall by up to 80 percent.

Asset management software used to populate the configuration database improves help desk efficiency and supports ITIL processes in configuration management.

About Centennial Discovery

With its market-leading software recognition engine and unique LANProbe technology, Centennial Discovery is the only way to accurately identify software and hardware installed across the corporate network.

Centennial Discovery automatically finds and audits all IP-address-able devices (including PCs, servers, network printers, firewalls and switches) and even tracks the physical location of machines around the entire organization.

Thanks to its efficient IP-based communications, Centennial Discovery can perform full system audits on a weekly or even daily basis with virtually no impact on network performance. What's more, it won't take six months to implement: Centennial Discovery users are often up and running in a day.

With over three million licenses sold to blue chip organizations around the world, Centennial Software is the vendor of choice for fast, easy and accurate IT auditing and analysis.

About Centennial Software

Centennial Software is the fastest growing dedicated developer of network discovery and IT asset tracking software. The company's flagship product Centennial Discovery is the ideal solution for IT professionals to quickly and easily ensure software licensing compliance, mitigate network security risks, improve helpdesk efficiency and optimize IT network assets.

CENTENNIAL software

IDG IDG Global Solutions

www.centennial-software.com