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Streamlining Service Request Processes: A Key to Business Success

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Executive Summary

When you shop online, you probably gravitate toward those vendors that provide a catalogue of requestable services listing all of the products they offer. Usually, this catalog includes a brief description of each item, its price, and its delivery time. From the catalog, you easily drill down for more details on any product, just by clicking on it. Then, when you find the product you want, you simply select it and your order is automatically placed. Finally, you can return to the online site at any time to determine the status of your order. Now that's convenience.

If only the employees in your organization could have that same level of convenience in finding the services they need, requesting those services, and tracking the status of their requests.

Good news... they can. Service request management technology is evolving, giving employees the luxury of one-stop, online shopping for all the services they need. It also gives the service providers in your organization a single place to advertise their services to employees. It's like having a service supermarket at your employees' fingertips.

The business benefits are significant. Because the system employs standard, repeatable, best-practice processes for handling requests, it reduces business risk and gives management greater insight into service delivery quality and costs. Employee productivity rises because people can find the services they need when they need them. Services are delivered quickly, effectively, and at a lower cost. Employees can initiate and track service requests on their own, reducing the load on the service desk. And, finally, all service requests are tracked for later auditing, as needed for regulatory compliance.

This paper:

- > Discusses the need for a service request management solution that enables enterprises to realize these business benefits
- > Examines the criteria that a service request management solution should meet
- > Describes the business benefits in greater detail

The Pent-up Need for Service Request Management

If your organization is like many, your IT staff has been tasked with managing a rising flood of service requests from employees, including requests for new hardware and software, changes to existing hardware and software, access to enterprise applications, and technical support. What's more, there is a chance that your IT team is also responsible for managing service requests beyond those that the IT department provides. Examples of such services include requests for office space, furniture, telephones, company credit cards, parking spaces, and training — the list is nearly endless.

In many cases, service requesters have to make multiple requests to different groups and departments to satisfy a particular need. Here's an example:

As soon as a hiring decision is made, the hiring manager must request a variety of services to ensure that the new employee has all he or she needs to do his or her job. That involves requests to:

- > Add the new employee to the human resources (HR) and payroll systems
- > Order office space, furniture, telephone, and other equipment from the facilities department
- > Order a properly configured desktop and/or laptop computer with all appropriate software from the IT department
- > Provision the employee with access to all appropriate enterprise applications
- > Schedule an ID badge photo session with the security department
- > Enroll the employee in a new-hire orientation class given by the training department
- > Have the hiring manager's department administrative assistant order office supplies

If your organization is like many, it is not easy for employees to find and request the services they need. What's more, it is difficult for the IT staff to fulfill service requests in an efficient and timely manner. These problems have created a pent-up demand for an effective service request management solution, one that streamlines, standardizes, and automates service request processes.

Difficult for Employees to Request Services

Employees often find it difficult to determine what services are available. In addition, it's not easy for them to determine where to go for service requests, because various groups are

responsible for different service offerings. Further complicating the problem is that the processes for handling requests typically differ, depending on the request and the group handling it. Request forms may also differ, which can cause confusion and result in delays when requesters fail to provide complete, accurate information. As a result, employees have to struggle with multiple request and approval processes, as well as inconsistent, confusing forms — and they have to track each request separately. It can be particularly frustrating when employees have to initiate and track multiple service requests, such as in the example of the hiring manager bringing on a new employee.

Difficult for IT to Manage Request Fulfillment

Service requesters are not the only ones finding service requests problematic. The IT staff has to grapple with inefficient, costly, and often ad hoc service request management processes that are error prone and difficult to track — and that often introduce delays.

Organizational silos exacerbate the problem. As the amount of services available to users grows, the complexity of service request management also increases. A single request may require action by multiple groups and departments. When these requests are submitted, IT has to cope with fragmented processes, as well as with a siloed organizational structure that does not foster coordination among groups. In this environment, it is difficult to effectively manage the quality and cost of fulfilling requests.

The Service Desk: Only a Partial Solution

Many IT organizations have attempted to alleviate service request problems by directing employees to submit and track service requests through a service desk. Although this approach may make life a little easier for requesters (in that they now have a single place to submit and track service requests), it may actually complicate life for the IT staff. That's because this approach doesn't fully automate the process.

A service desk alone does not provide a complete solution. This approach simply transfers user problems to the service desk agents who act as proxies for the users. Funneling requests through the service desk does not adequately address the problems the IT staff faces in effectively managing service request fulfillment. Also, directing all service requests to the service desk substantially increases the workload on an already overburdened service desk staff. This could distract the staff from more business-critical issues, such as addressing the availability and performance of mission-critical applications.

Choosing the Right Solution

Today, solutions are available that can help IT address the service request problem effectively. With the right solution, employees can quickly find the services they need, determine service prices and fulfillment turnaround times, request services, and track the status of their requests — all on their own. At the same time, IT can effectively manage service request fulfillment using repeatable, standardized, best-practice processes, automating wherever possible.

The available solutions, however, vary substantially in their functionality and approach. Choosing the right one for your environment requires careful evaluation of available systems.

The following section presents several major criteria that you should consider when comparing solutions. A solution that meets these criteria can help you achieve maximum value from your service request management investment.

One-stop Shopping

With so many services available, employees need a single place they can go to request services, regardless of the type of service or who provides it. An effective solution supports a “one stop shop” model in which employees can go to one place online to learn what services are available, determine the price and turnaround time of each service, and submit and track their requests. An effective solution also provides a single place where service providers can list their services.

Actionable Online Service Catalog

A key part of an effective service request management solution is a comprehensive, actionable, online service catalog that puts a list of services, prices, and turnaround times right at employees’ fingertips. Employees can then search for and request needed services from the catalog.

Easy catalog navigation is essential. Services must be presented in everyday business terms, not technical descriptions, so that business users clearly understand what services are being offered. Users should not have to know who provides which service, or what processes are involved in fulfilling a service. Also, the catalog should display only those services to which the user is entitled, by such factors as role and location.

Online request forms should be straightforward, and the system should guide the requester in entering information into the forms. Automatic population of forms with known information saves time for users and increases accuracy. For example, if an employee requests an update to an application on his or her desktop computer, the solution can

leverage the information maintained by a configuration management database (CMDB) to determine which desktop computer is currently assigned to that user, and ask the user to verify that the prepopulated information is indeed correct. If verified as correct, the solution can then fill in the appropriate fields on the request form with configuration information about the computer.

A major problem with some service request management solutions is that they make it difficult for service providers to add services to the online catalog. An effective solution, however, should facilitate the addition of services to the catalog. It should not require low-level coding by experienced programmers. Rather, the solution should permit administrators to add, modify, and delete services.

Integration with Existing Systems

Streamlining service request processing does not mean that the solution must establish service fulfillment processes on its own. In fact, one of the major problems with some service request management solutions is that they attempt to do just that by deploying processes that parallel, and sometimes short-circuit, processes already supported by existing backend systems.

Instead, the solution should leverage and integrate with existing backend systems that drive and automate key processes. This includes integrating with IT service management applications that address such processes as change, release, configuration, incident, problem, and asset management. It also means integrating with existing backend systems that address processes performed by groups other than IT — such as facilities, HR, finance, and training.

Integration should not require an extensive development effort or expensive consulting engagement. Look for a solution that provides out-of-the-box integration with certain backend systems, using open interfaces and tools to facilitate integration with other backend systems.

While this integration is crucial, it is also advisable to select a solution that can handle requests for services that are not fully supported by backend systems. To fulfill these requests, the solution should include the capability to define the workflow of processes that are not automated by backend systems. The workflow software can generate work orders to fulfill the requests, automatically forward the orders to the appropriate groups for execution, and require the receiving groups to report the status of work orders to the service request management system.

In essence, the solution should act as a front end, passing requests to the appropriate applications and backend systems, coordinating workflows, and tracking progress. (See Figure 1.)

By utilizing your existing backend systems, you leverage your investment in existing processes, as well as in the systems that support them. What's more, integration with multiple backend systems enables you to create single requests in the catalog that initiate and coordinate multiple actions across multiple groups. So, a user need make only a single request to gain a combination of services that would otherwise require the user to make and track multiple requests to multiple groups. The "new employee" example discussed earlier in this paper illustrates this point:

Instead of submitting and tracking multiple requests to different groups, the hiring manager submits a single service request to bring on a new employee. The solution takes care of the rest. It automatically creates all the necessary requests to provide the needed services, routes the requests for required approvals, initiates action in the appropriate backend systems to fulfill the requests, and tracks all

requests through to successful completion. At any time, the manager can check the status of the "onboard new employee" service request online.

Service Level Management

Look for a solution that permits you to track service request turnaround times against service level agreements (SLAs). The solution should roll up and track total times for service request turnaround (from request to fulfillment); help ensure that these times are maintained within SLA-specified limits; and initiate corrective action when SLAs are in danger of being missed. It should also help to define operational license agreements (OLAs) for tracking the internal processing of fulfillment.

CMDB

It's important to choose a solution that is based on an underlying configuration management database. The solution can leverage the information in the CMDB in a variety of ways to facilitate service request and fulfillment processes. One way already discussed is the prepopulation of information, such as computer configuration information, into the service

Integration with Fulfillment (Back-office Systems)

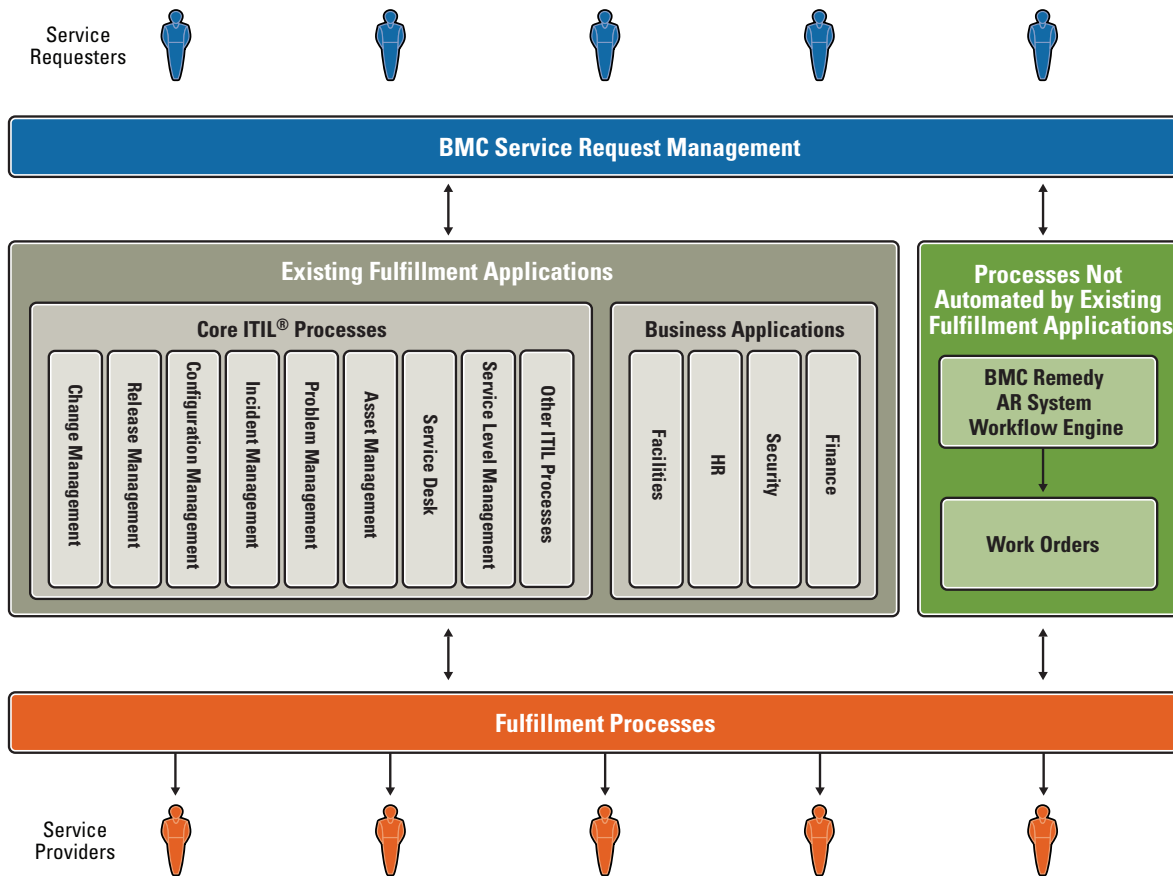


Figure 1. Integrate with process-driving fulfillment systems.

request form to facilitate the request process. Another way the CMDB can help is to provide access to user information — such as user role and location — to determine a user's service entitlement.

It is important to record your services in the CMDB and track relationships among the services and the equipment providing these services. This approach gives information on which services are impacted by which equipment, as well as what is affected when something goes down.

Scalability

Your environment is likely to expand in many ways, adding new employees and implementing new services. Consequently, you should look for a solution that scales to accommodate this expansion, even for the largest enterprises. To position yourself for the future, therefore, you'll need robust software with the ability to handle high request volumes, and large numbers of requesters, services, and service providers.

Realizing the Benefits

The cost of fragmented service request processes can be quite high. As a result, more and more enterprises are focusing attention on improving service request management. An effective solution can deliver compelling business benefits, such as higher employee productivity, reduced workload on the IT staff, higher quality request fulfillment, and lower business costs.

Higher Employee Productivity and Satisfaction

A service request management solution helps increase employee productivity and satisfaction by enabling employees to find, request, and obtain the services they need quickly and easily — all on their own. They interact with the service catalog in the same way for all requests, using language that business users understand. They know, in advance, the prices and turnaround time for each request. They can track the status of their requests. What's more, the services they request are delivered completely and on time. The frustrating inconsistencies, fragmentation, and delays of traditional service requesting virtually disappear.

Finally, by enabling employees to request and track status on their own, the solution significantly reduces the workload on the service desk staff. This frees the staff to focus on more business-critical activities.

Improved Service Quality and Reduced Risk

You can apply standard, repeatable, and best-practice processes to the management and fulfillment of service requests, automating processes wherever possible to increase speed

and efficiency. Further, the requester, the business owners, and process owners can accurately track service request processes, monitoring delivery against SLAs and ensuring that no requests "fall through the cracks." The result is improved service quality.

Business risk is reduced because all requests are handled in a consistent fashion, with all processes thoroughly documented. As a result, there is less chance of unwanted consequences, such as improperly executed changes disrupting service or inadequately tracked processes resulting in regulatory non-compliance.

More Effective Resource Management

Because an effective solution manages and tracks requests from entry to successful completion, you can get a better handle on the resources required to fulfill requests and the associated costs. With accurate resource and cost information, you can better manage your resources and establish meaningful prices for requested services.

Conclusion

If your organization is like many, service request management is a growing problem. Your users are becoming frustrated trying to find and obtain the services they need. Service providers are becoming more impatient with the difficulty of putting their services in front of users. And your staff is expected to increase the quality and lower the cost of service request fulfillment in the face of fragmented and cumbersome service request and fulfillment processes, many of which are manual. The pressure has been building for quite some time.

Now, relief is available in the form of a service request management solution that can streamline and automate service requests and fulfillment. With the right solution in place, employees can find and request the services they need, just as easily as they find and order books online. Service providers can quickly and easily advertise their services in a centralized online catalog. And the business can enjoy the luxury of automated processes that help ensure timely and high quality service fulfillment every time.

All you need to do is select right solution for your organization. Solutions are available that can have you up and running in a matter of weeks. You'll not only make your users, service providers, and IT staff happy, you'll also help ensure business success through increased employee productivity and satisfaction, reduced business risk, and lower costs. For more information about BMC Software solutions for service request management, visit www.bmc.com.



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