



MOBILIZING IT SUPPORT FOR EFFICIENCY, SPEED, AND EFFECTIVENESS

By Doug Mueller, corporate architect, BMC Software

To survive in today's economy, your IT organization will face increasing pressure to do more with less and work from anywhere at anytime. With this in mind, imagine how much more productive your service desk personnel could be if they were able to periodically manage and respond to issues from the field, rather than having to check in at their desktops. They could be alerted to and address urgent issues immediately. Or they could run a quick check on a key issue from a remote location. By taking advantage of mobile solutions, you will be able to leverage your existing service desk in new ways to increase responsiveness and effectiveness.

Mobile technology also benefits all business users who rely on IT services. A mobile IT organization is more responsive and can resolve issues faster. As a result, the business experiences less down time.

In the past, mobility has been somewhat elusive for service desk technicians, who often need to pull records from databases or fill out complex forms. Today, however, improvements in mobile technology have changed this situation. While service desk mobilization is considered to be in its infancy and still faces some hurdles, it's a promising area that brings many benefits to the business.

Multiple Advantages to Mobile Technology

Mobile technology isn't an appropriate tool for everyone or every job. If a person's role is to take calls for the service desk, then mobility isn't necessary. However,

if a technician or manager is constantly on the move fixing equipment or attending meetings in various locations, mobilizing will make the job easier and more effective. It will also improve the accuracy of service desk information used to make business decisions.

Mobile technology enables the support person to get accurate data in a format appropriate for the requirements of the job. This technology allows the technician to enter quick requests or do instant checks on key issues while sitting at someone else's desk, or when trying to resolve problems from any location.

A mobile device can be a useful tool for recording tickets when service level agreements (SLAs) are not being met, for checking items in violation, or for monitoring situations that are becoming critical. If, for example, a service desk technician is having problems resolving an issue, a mobilized service desk allows the

technician to remain on the floor while monitoring and recording data. As a result, the technician doesn't have to waste time returning to a desk to complete forms or look up information.

Mobility gives the technician the means to look out for situations that are becoming critical or that are problematic — as well as the option to choose what to do about these situations. The technician can resolve this problem on site where it is occurring.



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In addition, when a technician is working on a problem away from the service desk, mobile technology allows instant contact with the person who is handling the main call center. If a question comes in that requires expertise or approval, it's easy to send records between locations for instant attention and timely decision making. If a task is not getting assigned correctly, for example, the roaming technician or manager can quickly reassign it to someone else. If an SLA is about to be missed, the technician can assign a person to follow up on the issue. In short, the technician can be more productive when roaming.

A Best Practice: Mobilizing Key Functions

As you move to a mobilized service desk, start by focusing the operations on a key area that you're trying to mobilize. Consider the volume of data that must be entered and how the mobile staff will interact with the system. Be sure that the mobile devices can handle the desired interactions.

The greatest successes in mobilizing the service desk come when you find a place where a key process gets stalled or can't be moved forward in a timely manner simply because someone isn't sitting at the service desk computer. This is especially true if support people have responsibilities that require them to spend more time roaming than sitting at a desk.

For example, approval processes generally take longer than they should because the processes get stalled until

the approver returns to his or her desk. But if the approver has easy access to the issue, it can be approved quickly. If you rely on e-mail alone, however, the support tech may not have access to the ticket. Without the approval capability, the requester can't take action. You can remove this bottleneck with mobile technologies.

As you think about implementing mobilization, select applications that are very "point focused" or that require a quick request or status check. Find situations in which the

service desk support team needs to do specific, quick actions that are selective functions of their jobs and where they don't need a large quantity of data — or constant connectivity.

In these situations, the technician can take action to move the process forward from a mobile device. Other examples of point operations that are effectively handled with mobilization include doing quick requests and quick escalations. This also entails reassigning or escalating a process that's not moving, is out of support, out of band, or out of SLAs.

Keep in mind that taking a customer call and entering a trouble ticket via a mobile device is not the best use of mobilization, unless you streamline the effort by using templates. It's possible to accomplish this task without templates, but typing large volumes of data with many fields, menus, and validation information is time-consuming in the mobile environment. So don't plan to mobilize this data-entry function until you are able to minimize data input.

Reaping the Benefits

Mobilization makes the service desk much more efficient and enables support staff to deal with issues in a timely manner. With mobilization, you deal with the problem — and the resulting reporting — while you're in the midst of it. That means the problem and the details are fresh in your mind. There's no struggle to remember it all when back at the service desk.

Mobilization also enables you to quickly move along processes — such as simple acknowledgements, redos, pointers, or redirects — rather than having people wait for a technician to get back to them. Traveling technicians become more efficient because they have instant access to information and can update records from the field. If they need to update and upload a few sentences' worth of data, they can enter that information on their mobile devices. They don't have to report back to the service desk to recall and record updates.

If roaming support technicians need additional data, they can simply request it or link to it from their mobile devices. They don't need to wait to do such tasks until they return to the service desk.

Mobilization enables your staff to have shared logic across many different situations. That's why information about approvals that go across many processes and the interactions within many processes of those key functions should be integrated and available to your staff.

They won't have to look in numerous locations for purchase requests, vacation requests, and so on. A single approval list is available on the mobile device.

Making the Cultural Shift

Although mobilization of the service desk is in its infancy, it may take a cultural change in your organization to encourage the process to mature. Initially, you will need to automate manual processes. For example, if you require paperwork for approvals, turn that into a digital approval and automate the approval process.

Next, ask these questions: Do people have the right devices? Do they have the right applications? Will you need to train IT staff on how to leverage these devices most effectively?

Avoiding Potential Stumbling Blocks to Mobilizing Tech Support

Unrealistic expectations — Don't make the mistake of trying to do everything using mobile devices. This will backfire, because you simply cannot do the same types of work with the connectivity, speed, encryption, and security on the smart phone as you can do on a desktop. Instead, focus on optimizing the four or five key features that will most efficiently mobilize your service desk. If you haven't enhanced those key features, mobilization will appear difficult, and the reaction of your service desk staff will be predictable: They won't use mobile devices. It's important to set realistic goals to avoid disappointment.

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Work overload — If the service desk is supporting 1,000 employees, then the mobile support team is managing 1,000 desktops, the networks, all the mobile devices, the phones, and everything else. With a mobile service desk, the support person also needs to deal with wireless network problems and the interactions with all the other network providers. When a network goes down and users are experiencing difficulties, it's important to figure how the support person can load applications and track them remotely. You will also need to identify how security issues can be resolved.



The Value of Partnerships

Mobilization doesn't just happen in your business all by itself. It requires mobile devices and appropriate software that meet your IT support needs. For example, Aeroprise — BMC Software's mobile solutions partner for IT service management — extends BMC Remedy incident, change, and asset management functionality to BlackBerry devices by Research in Motion (RIM). Through the joint technology of this partnership, customers can also manage mobile devices by linking to discovery software and a configuration management database (CMDB).

Mobilization: A Case Study

Lennox International, a heating-and-cooling equipment maker, uses BMC Remedy IT service management solutions at its manufacturing plants. When a production line is down, it costs Lennox International millions of dollars. In the past, technicians had to leave the area and go to their desktops to take care of this type of problem. Lennox management determined that response time on incident tickets needed to be improved. So the company mobilized the service desk application using Aeroprise's mobility solution.

Now that the technician is no longer tied to the service desk, problem resolution is expedited, and the manufacturing line is getting up and running more quickly. When an incident arises, the technician can get knowledge from the mobile device, fix the problem, and log the resolution right on the factory floor. Mobilization of incident management has been so effective at Lennox that their facilities management is also requesting the use of mobilization.

Creating a Total Mobile Solution

Mobility and mobile interaction with key business processes is a critical part of an integrated strategy not only for managing IT, but also for improving the business. By effectively managing your mobile environment and using it to deliver applications with appropriate mobile functionality, you will increase the productivity and efficiency of your mobile staff. They will be able to resolve issues and restore services more quickly, saving time and money.

For more information about BMC's partnership with Aeroprise and their mobile solutions, visit www.bmc.com/aeroprise.

To learn more about how BMC can help your business, visit www.bmc.com or call (800) 841-2031.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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