

A View from the Frontline.

University Edition

The author of this report is SDI's Industry Analyst Scarlett Bayes. Scarlett is dedicated to providing insightful and practical research to the service desk industry through investigating trends, analysing data and engaging with the IT service community. You can find more of Scarlett's work on the SDI blog and can follow her on Twitter @SDIScarlett



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Head of Leeds Beckett's End User Services
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“Higher Education service desks are further ahead in the sophistication of their implementations than the service desk industry as a whole.”

Introduction



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Following the latest iteration of 'A View From The Frontline' published earlier this year, SDI and UCISA wanted to take a closer look at the Higher Education industry, and note how it compares to the wider service desk industry. Within the scope of Higher Education, this report will take an in-depth look at service desk priorities for 2018, trends in IT Service Management tools and technologies, and the vendors that supply them. Where appropriate, statistics from this report will be compared directly with their counterparts in the 'A View From The Frontline 2017' report, in order to gain an understanding of similarities and differences of University service desks and service desks in general.

Most notably, automation, self-service, and self-help present themselves frequently as high priority matters for Higher Education service desks. Supporting user-owned devices is also identified as a significant factor which University service desks must base their service around. To some extent, University service desks are more focused on utilising newer technologies, such as self-service and automation, than we have seen previously in the wider service desk industry. This could be potentially due to a number of factors; for example, to perhaps support the technological needs of their end-users, the need to support distance learning or campuses in other geographical locations, and the need to provide 24/7 support, which perhaps signifies that University service desks are under more pressure to implement these technologies. Therefore, it is important to review the results of the survey, and understand how the Higher Education service desk industry differs from the service desk industry as a whole.

This report is not only useful for Higher Education service desks. The next generation of customers are currently becoming accustomed to the services provided by their

University service desk. Therefore, upon entering the workplace, they may compare the service desk of a separate industry to that which they have previously known; a Higher Education support function. If these customers are used to 24/7 self-service support, self-help, and BYOx, they may expect this of their future employers. Furthermore, we must consider pressure from large corporations, such as John Lewis or Amazon, who provide excellent customer service and support, therefore setting a precedent that Higher Education service desk users will expect from the support function.

The results of this survey, which was sent out to Higher Education service desk professionals during August and September 2017, provide a valuable insight into the frustrations and challenges service desk professionals experience on a daily basis, with a particular emphasis on ITSM tools and vendor relations. As well as this, we will look at the developments that service desk professionals would like to see in the future.

Main Findings

ITSM Tool Deployment

- Over half of respondents highlighted that their ITSM solution is provided on-premise

Service Desk Tool Frustrations

- Poor usability, features, and customisability were the top 3 most specified frustrations with a service management tool.
- Frustrations relating to mobile compatibility and intuition of a tool were also specified, which presents a difference to the responses in the 'A View From The Frontline 2017' report.

Vendor Frustrations

- A poor relationship was specified as the most significant frustration with tool vendors, comprising 24% of all responses.
- Respondents highlighted that vendors not providing training for their tool was also a significant frustration.

Influences for Service Desk Tool Selection

68% of respondents highlighted that self-service capabilities are the most significant influence when selecting a service management tool.

- Integration, automation, and mobility capabilities were identified as significant factors for tool selection.

Tool Development

- Over a quarter of respondents do not have an in-house development capability for their tool.
- Nearly half of respondents highlighted that they spend over 20 days each year developing their tool.

Key Innovations & Improvements

- Improved features, usability, and reporting were specified as the 3 most significant improvement respondents would like to see, in keeping with the frustrations they have with their tools.
- Respondents also specified self-service, automation, and AI as key innovations they would like to see.

Pain Areas

- Poor knowledge management integration capabilities were identified as a significant pain area for Higher Education service desks.
- 60% of respondents highlighted that their most significant pain area was increasing business demand for services.

The Last 12 Months

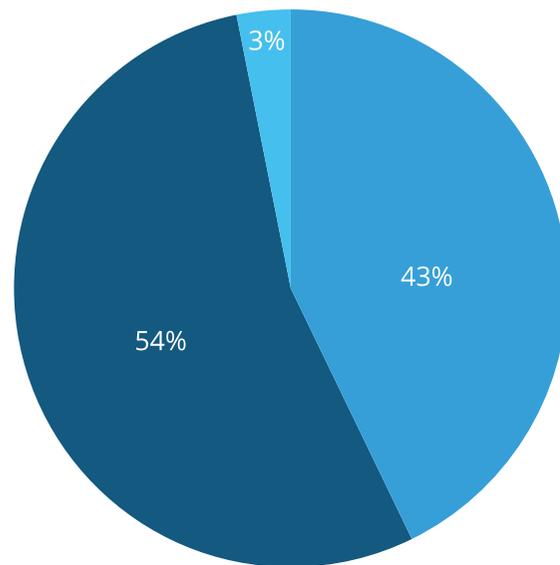
- Over half of respondents highlighted that their life on the service desk has improved over the past 12 months.
- Fire-fighting due to heavy workload has been specified as where the most amount of time has been spent in the last 12 months.

The Next 12 Months

- 74% of respondents highlighted that using more automation will be a top priority for their service desk.
- Nearly 80% of respondents expect to see a greater focus on the customer experience over the next 12 months.

ITSM Tool Deployment

How is your ITSM solution provided?



- Software-as-a-service (SaaS) or Cloud solution
- On-Premise
- Hybrid

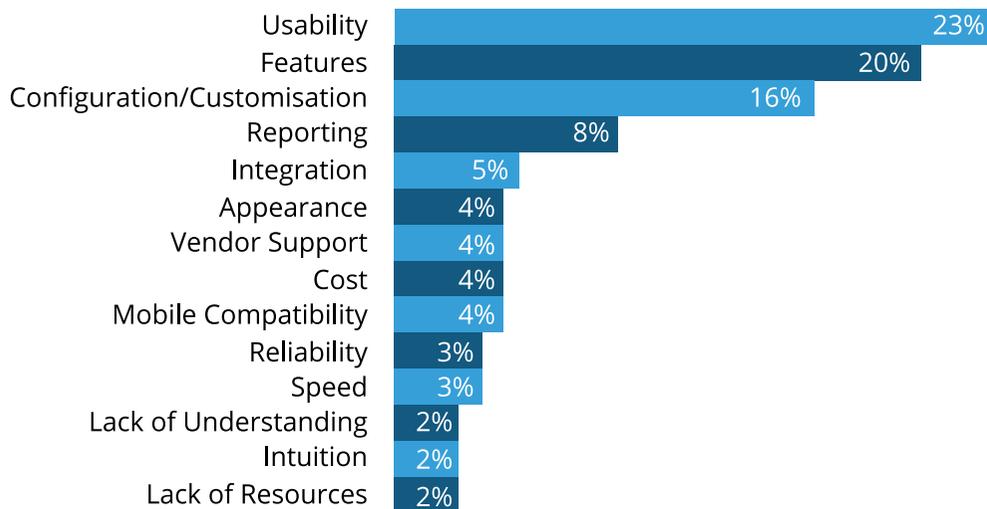
It is important to ask how an ITSM solution is provided, as the answer will usually lead to predictable frustrations with the ITSM tool surrounding, for example, security risks, customisability, and cost. It also gives some insight into the diverse needs of the service desk industry. Over half of respondents identified that their University service desk solution is provided on-premise. 43% of respondents identified that their service desk solution is provided as a SaaS or cloud solution. There are benefits to both, and it is possible to cherry-pick the right solution for you, as evidenced by the 3% of respondents who have opted for a hybrid solution.

The results of this are somewhat similar to the proportions seen in the wider industry, in which slightly fewer service desks' tools are provided on-premise or through SaaS, and 13% more have a hybrid solution.

Service Desk Tool Frustrations



What are your top 5 frustrations with your current service desk or ITSM tool?



An ITSM tool can make or break a service desk. As this industry relies more and more on technology to improve their service, tools become more integral to the running of a service desk. As such, negative aspects of a tool are easily identifiable and can quickly become a frustration for the professionals who use it.

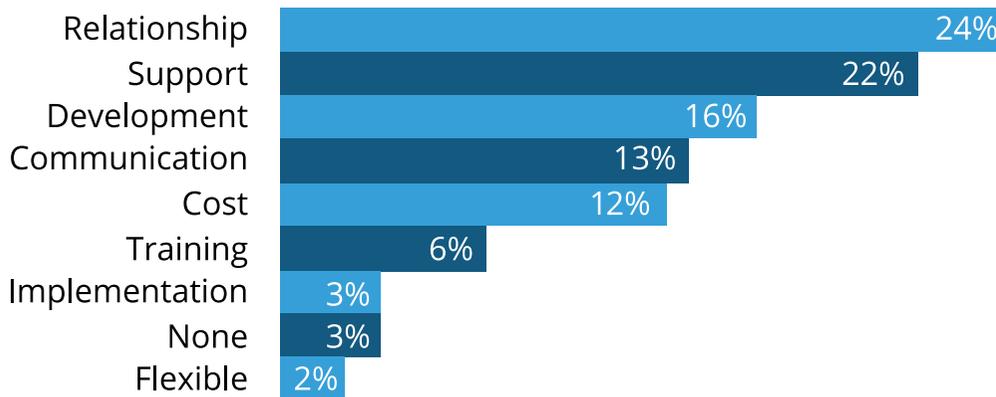
As in the industry wide 'A View From The Frontline 2017' report, poor usability and features surveyed top in terms of service desk tool frustration, accumulating 23% and 20% of all responses respectively. Most other frustrations have surveyed at similar proportions. However, one category which appears in both reports, vendor support, seems to be a more significant frustration for Higher Education service desks. Coupled with the fact that customisation was a frustration for a large proportion of respondents, this could potentially signify a lack of Higher Education specific service management tool designs, or due to a lack of investment in support, development, or time on the service desk's part

Responses to this question were slightly different to those received in the 'A View From The Frontline 2017' survey, which has necessitated several different categories; for example, a common frustration of respondents was Mobile Compatibility. The reason as to why this issue is more prevalent among Higher Education service desks could be due to the fact that end-users expect to be able to access 24/7 support.

Vendor Frustrations



What are your top 5 frustrations with your current service desk or ITSM tool vendor?



Several new categories have presented themselves in comparison to the 'A View From The Frontline 2017' report. Firstly, frustrations relating to lack of vendor development of tools and capabilities, which accounted for 16% all responses, and lack of tool training offered by the vendor, as highlighted in 6% of all responses.

Notably, the most significant frustration which respondents identified was a poor relationship with their vendors. 24% of all responses indicated that the post-sales relationship between vendors and customers

tend to be strained and impersonal. Coupled with the 13% of responses identifying communication to be a key frustration, it is evident that Higher Education service desk professionals expect better engagement from their tool vendors.

In a close second, support related frustrations accounted for 22% of all responses to this question. As this category also featured as a top frustration in the 'A View From The Frontline 2017' report, clearly a significant proportion of service desk professionals find their vendor does not provide ample support for their tool, and are slow to respond to issues.

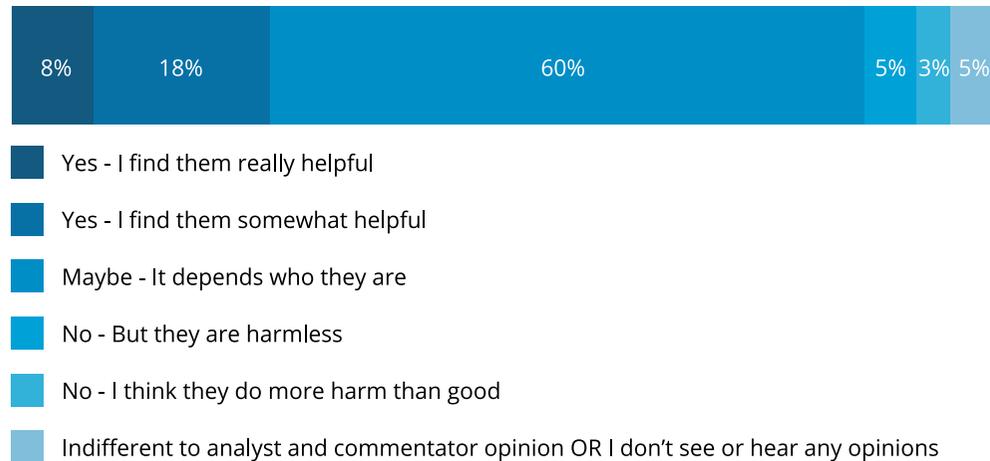
Frustrations relating to the cost of developing the tool, additional licences, or vendor support accounted for 12% of all responses, therefore suggesting that Higher Education service desk professionals find post-sales engagement with their vendors to be too expensive.

Perhaps, to remedy some frustrations surrounding on-going communication and support, vendors and their customers should start a conversation during the procurement stage to discuss the potential post-sales support the customer may need. This may allow for a better relationship between vendors and their customers, and lead to less frustration for service desk professionals.

Vendor Frustrations



Do you think the ITSM Vendors truly understand the needs of the Service Desk industry within Higher Education?



Higher Education service desk professionals are divided as to how well they think ITSM vendors understand their needs as an industry. Therefore, it is important to investigate how vendors are perceived by these professionals.

The largest proportion of respondents, 60%, argue ITSM vendors have varying levels of understanding about the Higher Education service desk industry, depending on the individual vendor. 26% agree to some extent that vendors are helpful, whereas 8% find that vendors do not understand the industry customers, and lead to less frustration for service desk professionals.

Vendor Frustrations



What would most influence your selection of a new service desk or ITSM tool?

The most significant influence for Higher Education service desk professionals when selecting a new service desk or ITSM tool, as highlighted by 68% of respondents, is whether it has self-service capabilities. With 35% of respondents who also identified automation capabilities as a significant influence, it is fair to assume that technologies are important to University service desks.

In terms of capabilities that allow the tool to be more accessible for the service desk, integration and mobility/other modern capabilities were noted as significant influences when selecting service desk or ITSM tools, as highlighted by 38% and 32% of respondents respectively.

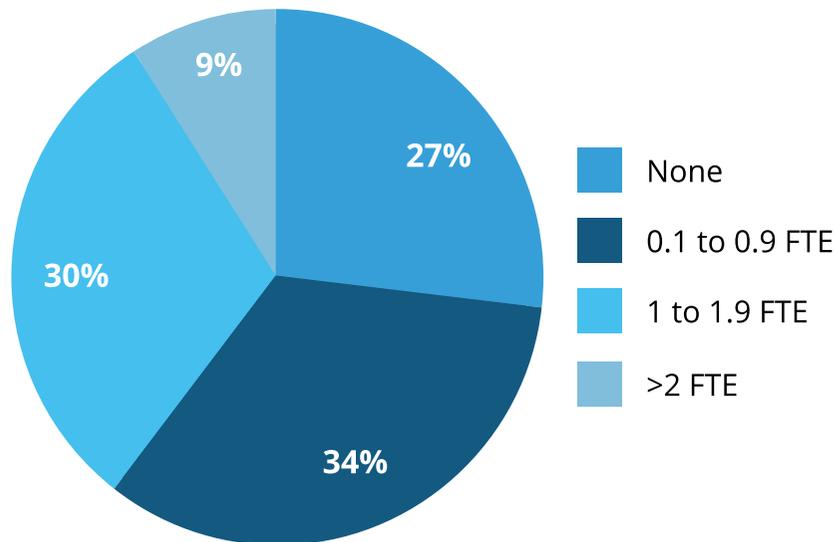
The top 5 influences in this report match those in the 'A View From The Frontline 2017' report, while the order differs. This suggests that there is not a great difference between the service desk industry as a whole, and the Higher Education service desk industry in terms of their influences in selecting a service desk tool. However, the slight reshuffle

in the 5 most significant influences, suggests that there are still some slight differences which are necessary to note. In the non-industry specific report, the top 5 influences were: product features and functionality; self-service capabilities; ability to easily configure and customise; access to quality support when things go wrong; and ease of use and UI. Given that self-service capabilities are most significant to Higher Education respondents, we can assume that keeping up with newer technologies is more integral to this industry than more generic product features and functionality.



Tool Development

Do you have in-house development for your ITSM Tool? If so how much Full Time Equivalent?



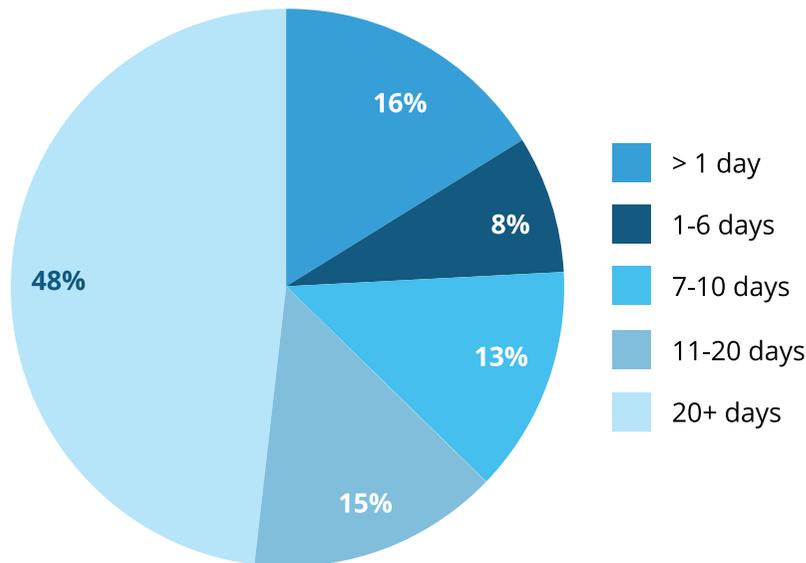
An FTE is the hours worked by one employee on a full-time basis. In this context, it is used to represent how much time is spent developing a tool, in terms of a full-time team member. Upon reviewing the data, we can see that there is no correlation between how respondents' tools are provided and their development FTE.

We can see that, the proportion of respondents whose service desks have 0.1 to 0.9 development FTE and 1 to 1.9 development FTE, are almost equal. Over a quarter of respondents highlighted that they have no in-house development for their support tool.

There is a potential argument that there is a correlation between developer FTE and the overall satisfaction of the tool. For example, a service desk which does not invest in tool development may find that their tool is lacking in features or usability. This will be an interesting statistic to benchmark against in 2 years' time, and potentially see whether Higher Education service desks may assign a large proportion of their budget to tool development to limit tool frustrations.

Tool Development

How much time do you spend each year on developing your ITSM Tool?



Nearly half of respondents identified that their service desk spends over 20 days each year developing their tool. Given that tools now come highly advanced 'out-of-the-box', it is interesting to note that this figure is so high. However, every service desk is different, so it would be impossible for vendors to provide a generic tool without development opportunities. As respondents have identified, limits to customisation and development

are significant frustrations for Higher Education service desks. Therefore, to potentially avoid some frustrations, vendors could focus on providing highly customisable tools, and rolling out regular developments to allow service desks to realise the most potential from their ITSM tool. Additionally, service desks could invest more budget and development time in order to improve the overall satisfaction and usability of their tool.

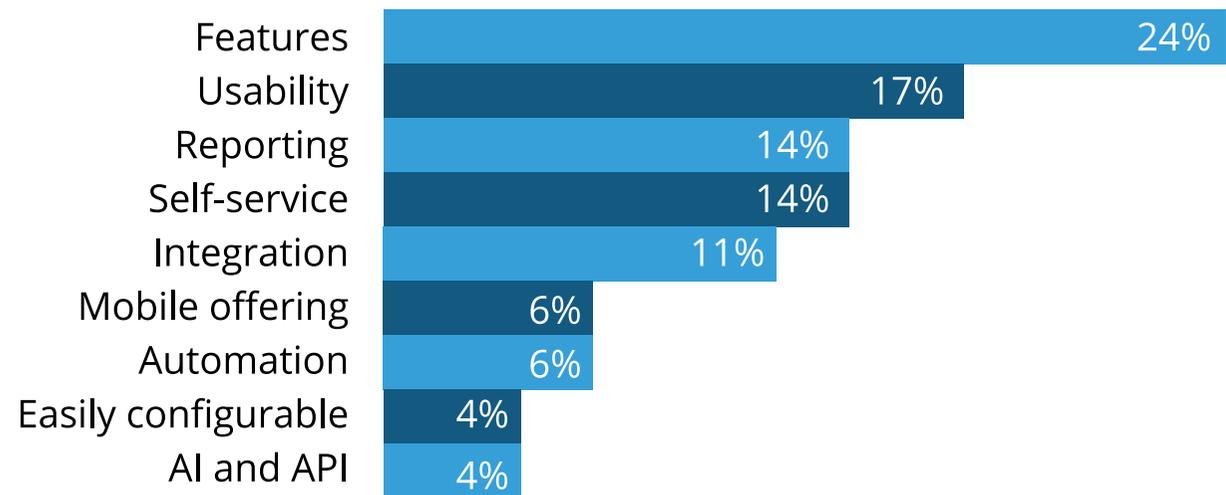
When planning to implement a new tool, it is important to also note that there needs to be a sufficient research and communication in the tool procurement process, to ensure that all requirements are met, and the service desk is not investing in a tool that could cause issues for service desk employees in the future.

Key Innovations And Improvements

List 3 key innovations/improvements that you would like to see in your ITSM tool in the next 12 months?

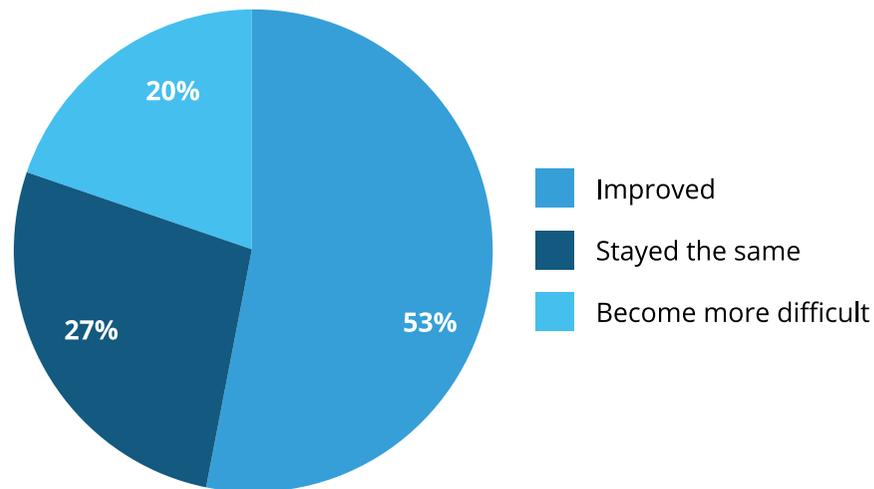
In terms of innovations or improvements that respondents would like to see in their ITSM tool over the next 12 months, improved features, usability, and reporting are the most anticipated improvements, constituting 24%, 17%, and 14% of all responses to this question respectively.

Self-service and automation attributed to 14% and 6% of all key innovations as specified by respondents. This is understandable, as self-service was specified as the main influence in selecting an ITSM tool, whereas automation featured further down in priority. Furthermore, a small proportion of respondents highlighted that they would like to see innovations in their tool linked to AI and APIs (Application Programming Interface, a platform used for integrating technologies like chatbots into your service). This is not a topic which was specified in the 'A View From The Frontline 2017' report, which further supports the idea that University service desks are more likely to implement newer technologies in response to their target end-user, improve the customer experience, and provide 24/7 support.



The Last 12 Months

During the past year, has life on your service desk...



When asked to summarise their life on the service desk over the past year, the majority of respondents highlighted that their life had indeed improved. In comparison, less than a quarter of respondents identified that their life on the service desk has become more difficult over the past 12 months, and 27% found that their life has stayed the same.

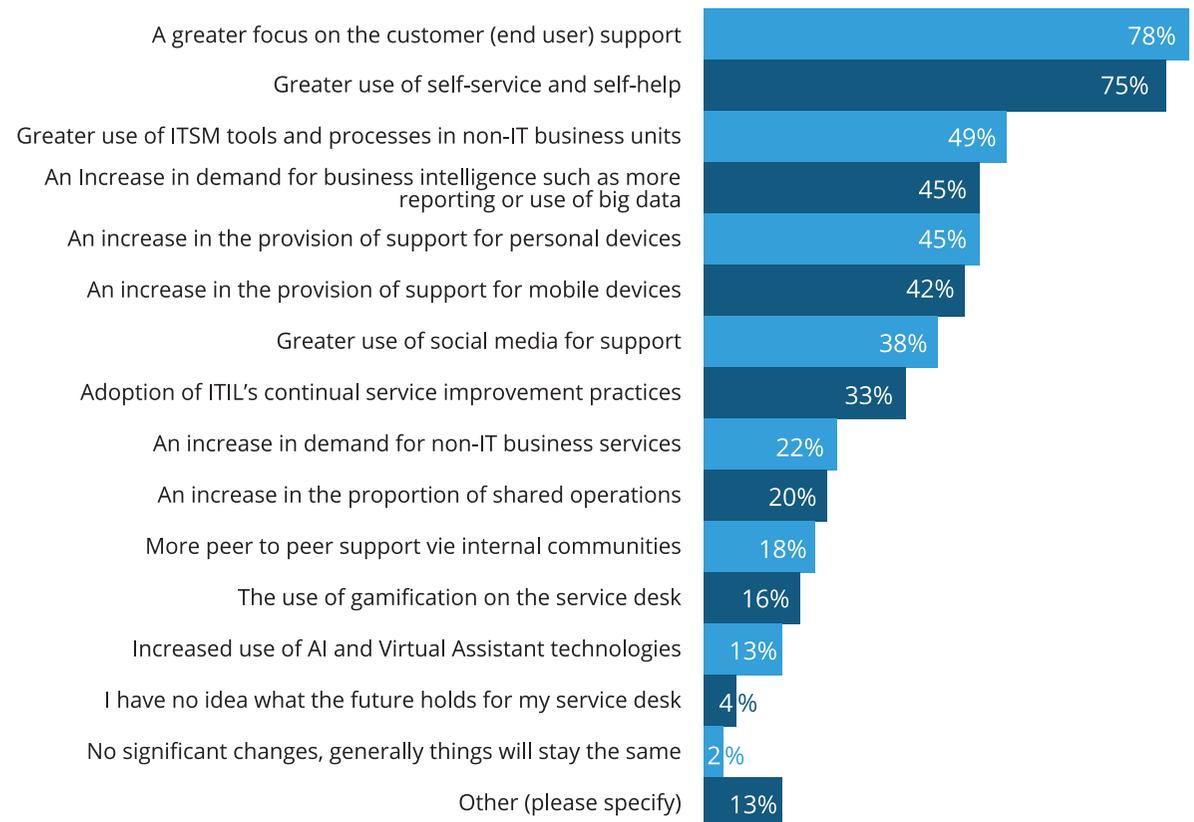
It is necessary to measure how service desk staff feel about their life on the service desk. If a large proportion of your staff are struggling on a daily basis, you must consider the factors behind this. For example, if there has been an increase in business demand for services, are there sufficient resources for the service desk to perform to meet this demand? Is there a significant number of calls to the service desk that could be resolved with an established self-service portal, and if so, why are customers not using this platform? If there is an issue that is causing service desk staff to struggle in their role, it may be necessary to address that issue in order to improve employee satisfaction and perhaps the efficiency of the service desk.

The Last 12 Months



During the last 12 months where has your support function spent most of its time?

In the last 12 months, the most amount of time, as identified by 72% of respondents, was spent on fire-fighting due to a heavy workload. This is in line with the 'A View From The Frontline 2017' report, in which fire-fighting was also identified as taking up the most amount of time by 61% of respondents. However, the time spent on other areas differ considerably between the two data sets.



The Last 12 Months



It is interesting to note that 31% of respondents have highlighted that they still struggle with end-user adoption of self-service portals. Therefore, we must question whether this pain area derives from users being averse to using new technologies, whether the portals are not user-friendly or are too time-consuming to navigate, or whether the portal is not developed enough to allow customers to be as self-serving as they could be. The key to succeeding with self-service is to engage with your customers from the outset, to ensure the new implementation will fulfil all their needs, and does so efficiently without being difficult to use. It is also necessary to market new portals and drive user traffic towards the portal, then gather end-user feedback to identify any need for development or improvement in order to tailor the portal to best suit the customers' needs.

48% of respondents identified that their service desk has spent the most amount of time helping customers with their own devices. We have previously established that Higher Education service desks are more likely to offer BYOx services due to the nature of their customer-base. This is supported when we compare this statistic to the 'A View From The Frontline 2017' report, in which only 26% of non-industry-specific service desks spent the most time supporting customers with their own devices.

It is necessary to measure how service desk staff feel about their life on the service desk. If a large proportion of your staff are struggling on a daily basis, you must consider the factors behind this. For example, if there has been an increase in business demand for services, are there sufficient resources for the service desk to perform to meet this demand? Is there a significant number of calls to the service desk that could be resolved with an established self-service portal, and if so, why are customers not using this platform? If there is an issue that is causing service desk staff to struggle in their role, it may be necessary to address that issue in order to improve employee satisfaction and perhaps the efficiency of the service desk.

The Next 12 Months

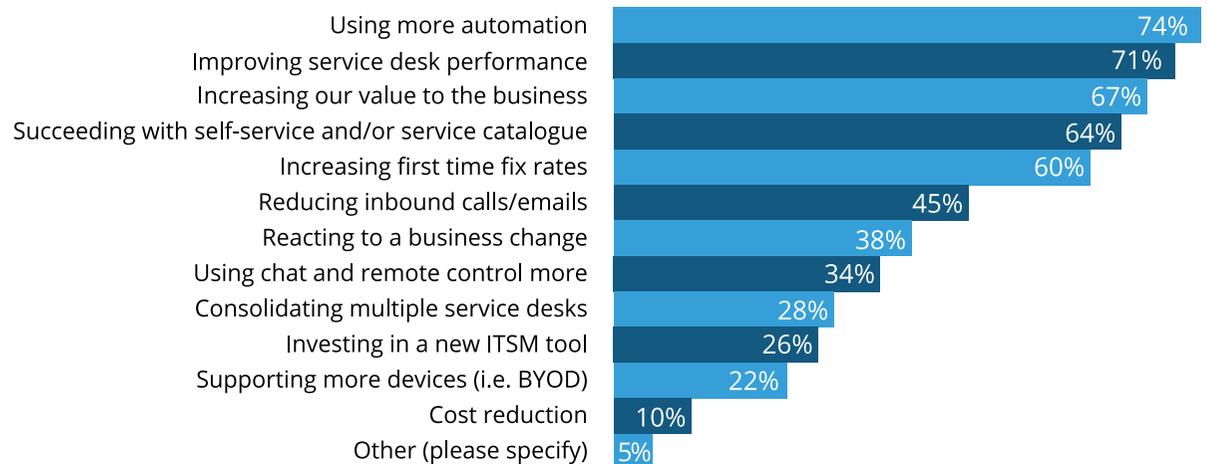


What are the top service desk priorities for your support function in the next 12 months?

An overwhelming 74% of respondents identified that using more automation will be a top priority for their support function over the next 12 months. Automation has the potential to greatly improve the efficiency of the service desk, and remove repetitive, time-consuming tasks. Given that a large proportion of Higher Education service desks have spent the most time of the last 12 months fire-fighting, it is understandable as to why University service desk professionals expect automation to be a top priority in 2018, as it can relieve strain on the support function, drive efficiencies, and improve customer experience and employee happiness.

Furthermore, 45% of respondents highlighted that they expect their support function to focus on reducing incoming calls and emails. This can be achieved by increasing end-user adoption of self-service portals, which 64% of respondents highlighted as a top priority, and as we have previously noted, 31% of respondents' service desks struggle with. This can also be achieved by focusing on problem management to find root causes of recurring incidents to establish known errors, work arounds and drive change management opportunities, thus allowing a decrease in the number of incidents, as well as the amount of time service desks spend on fire-fighting.

We have previously seen that 48% of respondents identified that their service desk has spent the majority of the last 12 months supporting end-users with their own devices. A further 22% of respondents have identified that they expect supporting more devices will be a top priority for their service desk over the next 12 months. This is a notably higher proportion than in comparison to the 'A View From The Frontline 2017' report, in which only 15% of non-industry-specific service desks specified that supporting more devices was a top priority.



The Next 12 Months

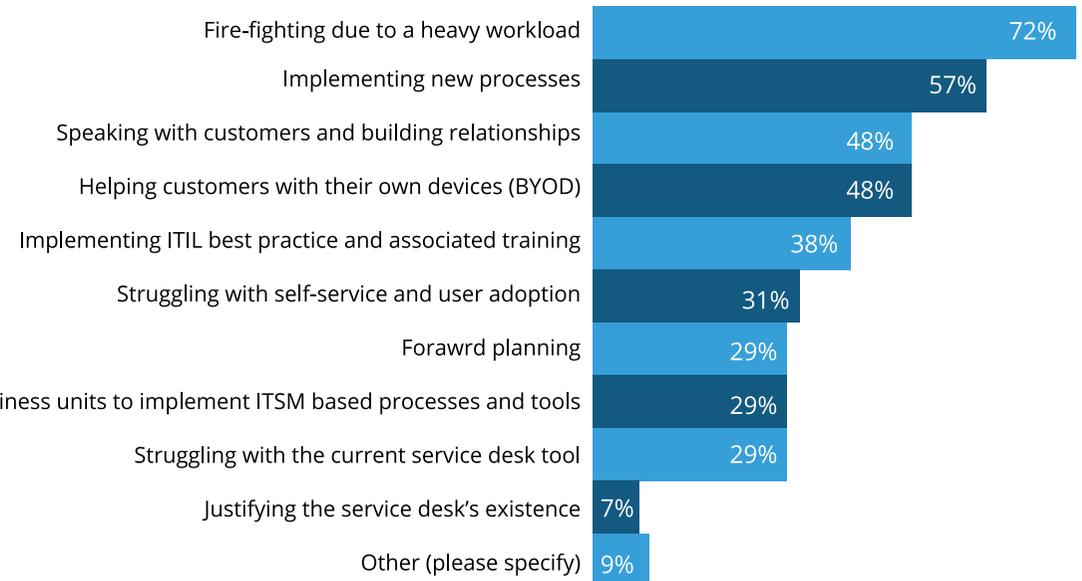


During the next 12 months, which of the following do you expect to see?

In keeping with the non-industry-specific 'A View From The Frontline 2017' report, the most common thing respondents expect to see during the next 12 months is a greater focus on the customer support experience, with 78% of respondents highlighting this.

We have seen a theme throughout this report, which has been a focus on using and succeeding with self-service. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that 75% of respondents have identified that they expect to see a greater use of self-help and self-service on their service desk over the next 12 months.

BYOx has also appeared several times throughout this report, and this question is no exception. 45% and 42% of respondents, respectively, expect to see an increase in the provision of support for personal and mobile devices. In comparison to the 'A View From The Frontline 2017' report, only 29% of respondents expected an increase in support for personal devices, which further supports the claim that, as an industry, University service desks support more user-owned devices.



Conclusion



The ITSM industry is incredibly versatile. The term “service desk” is incredibly broad, and therefore it is difficult to comprehend the scope of industries which rely on service desks, notwithstanding the different challenges and frustrations that individual service desks face. Therefore, in order to better understand the significance of this diversity, it is necessary to focus on specific industries and gauge their frustrations, struggles, and priorities. This allows vendors to be able to better comprehend the needs of industry-specific service desks, and provide them tools which best suit them.

This report has shown that Higher Education service desks are more focused on implementing new technologies, such as self-service and automation, and to some extent are further ahead in the sophistication of their implementations than the service desk industry as a whole. Furthermore, data gathered from the survey suggests that University service desks are much more likely to support user-owned devices. Understanding these differences is imperative for vendors, but also for service desks within an industry, as understanding common frustrations and priorities will allow service desks to understand how they are evolving in comparison to other service desks which offer similar services to their own.

In some areas, frustrations and pain areas affect all service desks, regardless of industry. This can be seen in the statistics in this report which do not differ greatly from those in the ‘A View From The Frontline 2017’ report. For example, many University service desks struggle with more simple factors with their tool, such as a lack of development, features, or usability. Previous data suggests that these frustrations are shared throughout the wider service desk industry. Therefore, this suggests that there are common issues which vendors could focus on remedying prior to concentrating on specific industries, such as their post-sales relationship with their customers, as well as the usability and features of a tool.

Summary



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This survey shows that University Service Desk's are more focused on implementing new technologies than we have previously seen in the wider service desk industry. The need to implement new technologies such as self-service and automation is likely to be driven by increased business demand for services (60% of respondents), with self-service often being seen as way of improving support for distance learning students, delivering against the demand for 24/7 support and supporting staff and students on international campuses.

Although many students typically arrive on campus with their own IT equipment there is still an expectation that their University will provide high quality IT services and equipment such as loanable laptops and high specification PCs as well as a super-fast highly resilient Wifi Service – hence the need for improving mobile capabilities and platform independent services.

As University Service Desks are expected to support a diverse and broad range of devices and software, the break fix model is no longer their primary purpose and the sector has had to move towards providing proactive, customer focused services. Expectations around IT and IT support are increasing all the time with companies such as Amazon, John Lewis and Apple setting the standards for customer service. The focus on empowered self help and self-service facilities will help meet those increased expectations and will reflect and mirror support models used by such companies.

It is clear from this report that many Universities are frustrated with their ITSM tool and the support they receive, but can all of this responsibility be laid at our vendors' door – as a sector I believe that many of us are failing to invest time and resource into developing our ITSM tool and we are not working in partnership with our vendors to leverage the value from the investment in these products.



— **Sally Bogg**

Head of Leeds Beckett's End User Services

About SDI

The SDI company mission is to inspire service desks to be brilliant. To achieve this mission SDI has developed a set of goals by which it aims to inspire service desks to:

Embrace: To raise the quality of service delivery by valuing best practice

Engage: To create an inspiring and engaging customer experience

Invest: To empower their teams to be inspired, take action and be better

Shine: To demonstrate and deliver exceptional business value

SDI sets the globally recognised best practice service desk standards that provide clear and measurable benchmarks for service desk operations and professionals. The standards are designed to encourage service desks to embrace and value best practice in order to raise the quality of service delivery.

For more information about SDI please visit www.servicedeskintstitute.com

About Freshservice

Freshservice is a cloud-based IT service desk and IT service management (ITSM) solution that is quick to set up and easy to use and manage.

Recognised as an ITSM Leader, Freshservice has been named best software for mid market IT teams, the most usable service desk software and #1 in customer satisfaction by G2 Crowd.

Freshservice leverages ITIL best practices to enable IT organisations to focus on what's most important – exceptional service delivery and customer satisfaction. With its powerfully simple UI, Freshservice can be easily configured to support your unique business requirements and integrated with other critical business and IT systems. Native integrations are provided “out-of-the-box” with many of the most popular cloud services such as Google Apps, Dropbox, AWS, and Bomgar to speed up deployment and reach.

To learn more about Freshservice visit www.freshservice.com



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