THE HELP DESK AND THE NOC: WHAT MSPS NEED AND WHY

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Critical to the success of virtually every high growth managed service provider (MSP) are network operations centers (NOCs) and help desks. MSPs with high performing NOCs and help desks can find these services are a vital underpinning to their successful operations. This whitepaper discusses NOCs and help desks, and what factors MSPs should consider when setting them up.

The NOC

The NOC is the nerve center of your MSP monitoring operation. Typically, the NOC will perform monitoring and proactive maintenance for your customers, using your RMM solution and any other applications required.

Typical tasks handled in the NOC include:

- Performance monitoring
- Preventive maintenance including patch management, AV updates and backup tasks
- Software distribution

The Help Desk

Help desks handle trouble tickets, routing and escalation. They troubleshoot problems (such as a forgotten password) and provide solutions. Help desks typically provide one-on-one interactions with end users.

The Ideal Help Desk

From an end user's perspective, the help desk should solve their problem immediately. For techs, the help desk software should offer the tools to efficiently deliver that outcome. To this end – there are several things to consider when choosing help desk software.

Help Customers Help Themselves

When customers contact the help desk for an answer – they generally do not care how they get their answer, as long as it is fast. Self service capabilities are vital to improving the customer experience. Not only does self service provide immediate solutions - it also does so without tech involvement – which is a boon to your bottom line.

THE HELP DESK VERSUS NOC

Though some use "help desk" and "NOC" interchangeably, they are in fact different services:

- The NOC usually operates 24/7/365, while the help desk typically operates during extended business hours but not around the clock.
- The NOC is inward facing within the organization: end users typically do not interact with the NOC. The help desk is outward facing, and is the point of contact with end users.
- The NOC handles monitoring and proactive main-tenance, which is usually not true of the help desk. The help desk is reactive.

Self service can take many forms:

- Self-service technology/portals – These systems allow customers to perform common tasks on their own like password reset or updating profile information.
- Suggested answers – When users enter the help desk interface, they are presented with "suggested FAQs" triggered off key words or topic areas.
- Knowledgebase – A robust, easily searchable knowledgebase will often provide DIY answers. The addition of videos also helps with knowledge transfer. It is important to have a simple process to add new KBs as issues arise – so answers to previously asked questions are available the next time they are asked.

Know Your Data

Whatever software you choose, it needs to support your business processes and goals. Drill down dashboards and comprehensive reports should let you track key performance indicators (KPIs), so you know how your help desk is performing. Tracking key metrics will give you visibility into common call drivers, trending issues, techs who need more training, which customers are profitable (or not), and more.

Automation is Imperative

Like your RMM system, the help desk also benefits from automation such as workflows. For example, the "new employee" workflow would generate a number of help desk tickets at the click of a button. These tickets would cover tasks ranging from issuing a laptop to creating a network account to assigning a desk – and all those tickets would be created, assigned, timed, and escalated so that the new employee has everything they need on their first day. Similar workflows for other common tasks ensure multi-step procedures are complete and timely.

THE OUTSOURCING QUESTION

Outsource the NOC?

For many MSPs, delivering round-the-clock monitoring and management can be a challenge. The demands of such service can stretch an MSP's resources and distract from other tasks. Such service may also prove disruptive, since many calls come in during non-business hours. In these cases, outsourcing the NOC – either totally or outside business hours – could be a viable option.

HOW THE HELP DESK HELPS THE MSP'S BUSINESS

For many end customers, the help desk is the most common touch point with the MSP's services. As such, it helps:

- Make a good impression
- Resolve problems quickly
- Minimize the impact of issues
- Spot trends
- Present a good interaction point for expanding the MSP-customer relationship

By having the day-to-day demands of the NOC handled by a third party, the MSP can focus on building the business. In addition, techs are freed up to provide higher margin services. MSPs can also scale up and scale down to meet changing market demand easily and quickly.

For MSPs who can handle the demands of 24/7/365 service, keeping the NOC in-house is a good option. An in-house NOC provides the MSP with complete control over all aspects of customer management and keeps all of the customer data in house. Its quality and efficiency are dependent on the MSP, not on an outside company.

When thinking about outsourcing the NOC, some considerations are:

- The requirements and demands of your SLAs
- The billable hours - would your engineers be more productive dealing with NOC issues or on other tasks?
- Your in-house staff - do you have the personnel needed to adequately staff, manage and maintain the monitoring and management levels your customers need around the clock?
- The number of clients you have and are likely to have in the future - do you have the flexibility to scale as needed?

And What about the Help Desk?

Unlike the NOC, the help desk usually has well defined hours, which tend to fall more in line with traditional business hours. This makes an in-house help desk considerably more feasible for many MSPs that an in-house NOC.

The help desk is, as noted, outward facing, which is another reason to have it in-house. It provides an important contact point with customers, and having such an important touch point in the hands of a third party can be a concern.

However, the MSP that lacks the in-house expertise and headcount required to adequately staff a help desk, may find outsourcing to be a viable option. Whatever your choice, remember that help desk staff are representing your company directly to your customers at an important customer touch point. Quality is important.

Help Desk Manager by SolarWinds N-able

Help Desk Manager by SolarWinds N-able allows you to enhance customer service and end-user satisfaction with streamlined ticketing and help desk functionality. Help Desk Manager delivers robust functionality including email to ticket support, rich self-help features, and customer portals. Help Desk Manager can be implemented standalone or integrated with SolarWinds N-able's Remote Monitoring and Management platform for a full end-to-end solution.

N-central by SolarWinds N-able

N-central delivers world-class remote monitoring and management right out of the box. With flexible pricing and a freemium/a-la-carte pricing model, N-central is designed for MSPs of all sizes. N-central offers optional modules for Patch, Backup, AV, Audit, and more. N-central's NOC view provides a customized all-in-one monitoring view designed for on-screen or large-scale viewing.
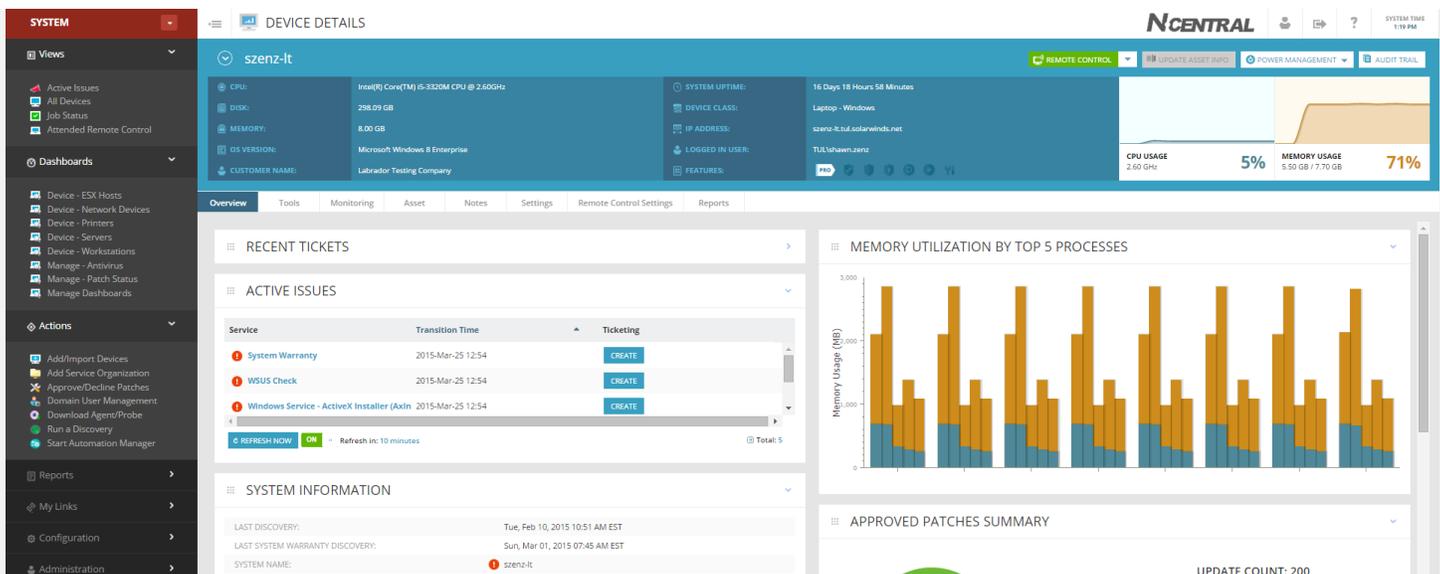
A central NOC view
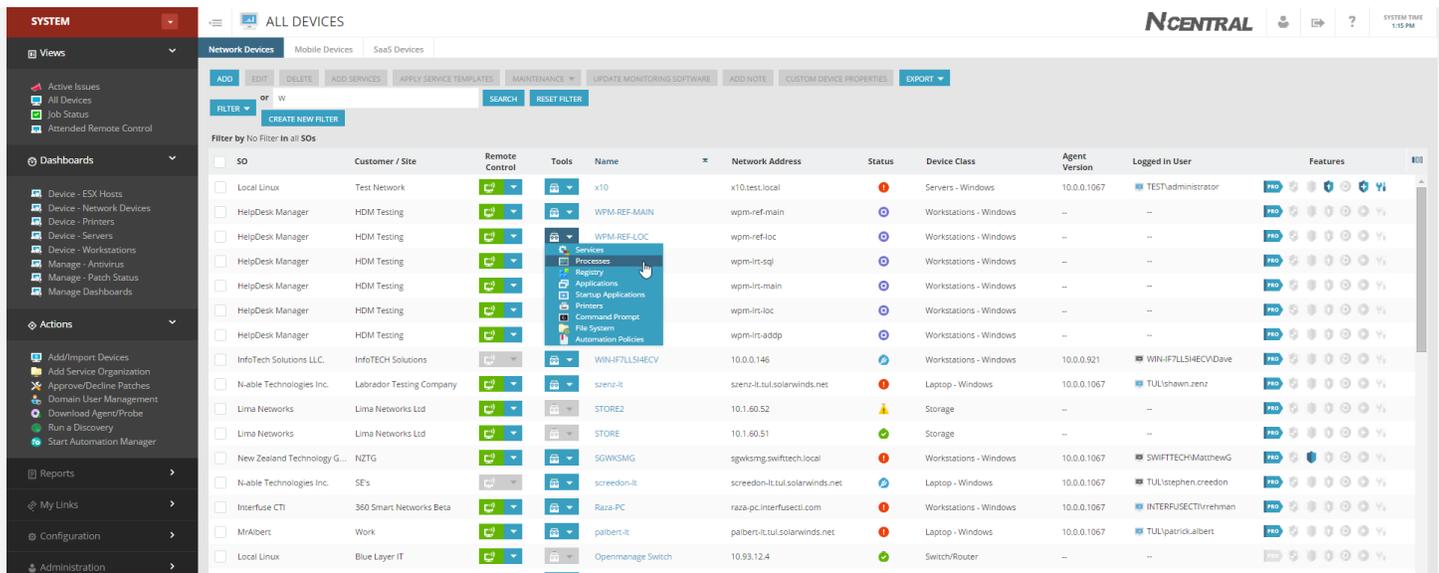
Learn more or start a free trial of the entire N-central product suite at **www.n-able.com.**

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SolarWinds N-able is the global leading provider of complete IT management, Automation, and MSP business transformation solutions. N-able's award-winning N-central® is the industry's #1 RMM and MSP Service Automation Platform. N-able has a proven track record of helping MSPs standardize and automate the setup and delivery of IT services in order to achieve true scalability. N-central is backed by the most comprehensive business enablement support services available today and the industry's only Freemium licensing model. Thousands of MSPs use N-able solutions to deliver scalable, flexible, profitable managed services to over 100,000 SMBs worldwide. With offices in North America, the Netherlands and Australia, N-able is 100% channel-friendly and maintains strategic partnerships with Microsoft®, Intel®, IBM®, CA®, and Cisco® among others.

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