

WHITE PAPER

# the fourth- generation service desk, and why it's a mandate today

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# executive summary

Over the past 15 years, we've seen generations of service management platforms come and go—but many critical limitations persist. Consequently, IT organizations, and the businesses they serve, suffer from a lack of agility, poor service levels and high costs. This paper offers a look at the obstacles of prior generations of service management platforms, and it reveals how a new generation of solutions addresses some of these fundamental limitations.

Unless IT teams stop repeating these same mistakes and start managing their service desk in a fundamentally different way, they'll continue to be plagued by high costs and poor performance.

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## Introduction

An effective service management solution can deliver a great deal of value to an organization. The more a platform fosters speed among agents, the quicker issues will get resolved and the more productive the workforce will be. The more the platform supports agent efficiency, the more effectively support costs can be managed.

In recent years, several trends—such as the proliferation of cloud, virtualization and mobile devices—have fundamentally altered the technology landscape. However, in spite of the important role they play in an organization, many organizations are still running a service desk platform that's the same or similar to the one they'd been using a decade ago. These organizations are incurring high costs, inhibited business support, slow response, lost productivity and more because of these legacy platforms.

Even organizations that have moved to a new SaaS platform have found that the underlying technology is effectively the same, just delivered through an on-demand model. Consequently, high cost of ownership, limited applicability and rigid workflows continue to plague today's organizations. Unless IT teams stop repeating these same mistakes and start managing their service desk in a fundamentally different way, they'll continue to be plagued by high costs and poor performance.

Why are these existing platforms hurting today's businesses? In the following section, we'll outline the evolution of platforms in the segment and describe some of the shortcomings that continue to confront customers today.

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## The evolution of the service desk

Following is an overview of the generations of service desk platforms that have been deployed over the past 15 to 20 years:

- **First generation.** Lacking commercial alternatives, many large enterprises developed and deployed their own application logic for tracking and managing tickets. While this rudimentary service desk functionality enabled organizations to improve their service management capabilities, this

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functionality came at a high cost, not only due to the upfront effort required to develop the system, but due to the resources required to support this environment over the life of the deployment.

- **Second generation.** The first commercial service desk offerings represented substantial advancements over the prior build-your-own approach, and so established what would come to be a huge market over time. These second generation solutions delivered workflows, rules engines, databases and application code. Deployed on premise, these platforms required large internal development teams and extensive coding in order to meet the ongoing needs of the support organization and the business.
- **Third generation.** In recent years, the concept of hosted service desk platforms has started to gain increased market acceptance. Because these solutions are hosted, they eliminate the need for customers to have to deploy and manage the service desk platform hardware, software and underlying infrastructure. However, in essence these are hosted versions of second generation platforms. Consequently, they still present many of the same challenges, including requiring extensive development work and modification to align with specific business needs.

In short, while each generation has brought advancements, some key obstacles persist. These traditional service desk platforms require coding in order to be customized to the specific needs of the organization. This complex, development-intensive model typically leads to extremely lengthy deployment cycles, with many initiatives spanning four months or more.

Further, this complexity doesn't just affect up-front deployments, but also any and all changes that arise after deployment, and, as we've clearly seen in the last couple of years, change just keeps coming faster. Thus, for example, if business changes warrant the development of a new, chained approval cycle, the support team and its developers may need to build custom code, scripts, active links and filters—and conduct all the testing and quality assurance efforts associated with this work—before the new capability can be rolled out.

Consequently, many organizations are paying dearly for their service management platforms, which are difficult to adapt to changing needs and are costly to support on an ongoing basis.

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## Why legacy generations aren't cutting it

Many legacy platforms were procured and deployed a decade ago, a time when IT budgets were at a peak not seen since in most organizations. Today, lean budgets represent the new norm. These financial realities and the following factors have left service desks languishing in many organizations:

- **Hitting an upgrade wall.** Too often, these platforms have had extensive customization work done on top of them. If an organization upgrades to a new version of its service desk platform, the IT team will have to undertake not only an extensive upgrade effort, including training users, and so on, but all the custom code developed also will need to be revised to accommodate the new version. Consequently, many organizations are stuck with platforms that are two or three major releases behind the vendor's current offering.

- **Shrinking developer pool.** Given the proprietary nature of service desk coding, the development expertise organizations require is dwindling. Older developers are retiring and not being replaced, because younger developers are focused on modern, more broadly applicable platforms and languages. In the wake of budget cuts, internal development resources dwindle, which further exacerbates these challenges. As a result, the expertise needed for development and maintenance is getting increasingly rare—and expensive.
- **Changing expectations.** When you consider the widespread move to the cloud, it is clear the expectations of management changes. Given the existence of IT Management-as-a Service solutions—cloud-based offerings that provide integrated service management and monitoring capabilities—executives are understandably impatient with six-month rollout schedules for a single service desk module. When so many cloud services can be spun up on demand, executives grow increasingly leery of large upfront software and hardware purchases. Instead, executives prioritize the strategic business services that can provide fast wins against business objectives, deferring any investments in the legacy service desk.

All these current factors serve to lead to a vicious cycle of both high costs and lack of investment in innovation.

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## The fourth-generation service desk: What it is and why it's so critical

The service desk is and will remain a vital business function. However, this service can't continue to be supported in the same way. Instead, service management needs to be administered in accordance with modern technology models and current economic realities. The fourth-generation service management platforms available today offer a true break from the challenges of the past. These platforms deliver a range of benefits, following are just a few.

### **Increase operational agility**

Organizations of every size need to get more nimble, and the service management solution can either be a big hindrance or vital ally in meeting this objective. Service management platforms that force organizations to pay expensive development talent for customization and maintenance clearly fall into the adversary camp. On the other hand, tools that can be deployed quickly and easily, configured by non-technical users, and efficiently adapted as business needs change will prove invaluable in fostering the agility organizations need today.

To meet current business requirements, organizations need a fourth-generation service desk platform, one that delivers the following attributes:

- **Fast deployment.** Rather than having to do a lot of process engineering, fourth-generation service desk platforms enable you to leverage automated, pre-configured processes—effectively jump starting the bulk of the work needed to get your service desk running.

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- **Easy configuration.** As opposed to prior generation solutions that require labor-intensive custom coding, fourth-generation platforms let your team use an intuitive point-and-click interface to configure the platform to the specific needs of your business. With these platforms, any IT team member can make these configuration changes using simple, logical business rules.
- **Flexible adaptation.** As needs change, fourth-generation platforms can easily be tailored to new business requirements. Users can adapt workflows, approval processes, escalations and more—all via a graphical user interface.
- **Smooth upgrades.** By leveraging a fourth-generation SaaS-based tool that doesn't require custom coding, organizations enjoy a seamless upgrade path. As the SaaS platform is enhanced, you'll be able to leverage new capabilities automatically, as opposed to having to do development, testing, rollouts and training on a new platform version.

#### Focus on your core objectives

Is your IT group in the business of building service desk tools? Or is that a role that's been forced upon your organization by your prior service management platforms—and a distraction from your strategic charter? If the latter, does it really make sense to have teams of people dedicated to customizing a service desk platform for years to come?

Fundamentally, the objective of the service management platform is managing tickets and changes to the infrastructure. IT management has to ask, does investing millions of dollars and vast amounts of staff time on building and customizing an on-premise service desk platform make sense? If not, look for fourth-generation tools that are easy to configure to the needs of your business, without having to do laborious coding.

With fourth-generation SaaS platforms, organizations can eliminate the time, cost, effort and distraction associated with running and supporting service management platforms internally, while still getting all the key service management capabilities required.

#### Benefit from a SaaS model—and mindset

Migrating to a SaaS-based fourth-generation service management platform represents a critical opportunity. Running a service management system in house takes the time and effort of database administrators (DBAs), system administrators and application specialists focused on configuring, administering and customizing the platform. Ultimately, IT organizations dedicate a lot of specialized team members just to keep the tool running.

Beyond the fact that these resources can't be focused on more strategic efforts, having shared internal resources can also pose complications when modifications or updates to the tool are needed. For example, a given DBA will typically be responsible for supporting the database associated with the service management platform, as well as many other databases. If an urgent update arises, that DBA may have a hard time getting away from other responsibilities to help in a timely manner or may not be available at all if the organization is inadequately staffed.

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Further, it's important to realize that the potential benefits don't just stem from the attributes inherent in SaaS, but also from the changed mindset that comes when migrating to a SaaS model. When organizations move from on-premise to SaaS, there is a natural move away from a customization

mindset. Where in the past, organizations may have dedicated significant time and resources to customizing a sales force automation (SFA) platform, that isn't a serious consideration when running SaaS-based SFA. Similarly, you wouldn't want to invest time and money customizing a SaaS-based service desk.

When you evaluate a SaaS platform, you focus on addressing core requirements. When SaaS is adopted, an IT staff naturally thinks less about how to customize the platform, and more about how to adapt core functionality to the specifics of the business. Instead of laundry lists of extensive development projects, organizations using SaaS focus on fully exploiting the capabilities available. With SaaS, we know enhancements will continue to be made to the platform—and that new capabilities will show up automatically, without upgrades, testing, training and all the other efforts associated with updating legacy service desk platforms.

Further, this mindset shift also extends to end users, who tend to more readily comply with policies and standards when SaaS platforms are employed.

### **Eliminate point solutions and operational silos**

In the past, service desk platforms operated entirely independently of other IT management platforms, such as monitoring. Exacerbating matters is that, as technology infrastructures in organizations expanded, so did the number of tools used to manage them. In many service provider and enterprise organizations, a complex mix of point solutions and legacy platforms needed to be bought, deployed and maintained. Further, because these systems weren't integrated, it was difficult and time consuming to keep appropriate staff informed, pinpoint issues and determine optimization strategies.

Fourth-generation service desk platforms are now offered as part of complete IT Management-as-a-Service solutions. ITMaaS solutions represent cloud-based offerings that deliver the essential management tools that IT teams need to access and view an entire IT environment, track and analyze performance, and ultimately improve performance and availability. When organizations leverage ITMaaS, they can use a unified platform and eliminate disparate legacy and point platforms. This can significantly reduce the time, cost and effort associated with platform support.

The integrated capabilities of ITMaaS solutions can yield other time savings as well. For example, organizations can leverage a monitoring platform that offers automated discovery capabilities that can feed information into a CMDB that is shared by the service desk platform. Consequently, your service desk agents can always leverage current configuration information when troubleshooting—while they minimize the time and effort required to manually update the CMDB.

Further, this integration enabled by ITMaaS offerings yields better information and more actionable insights. For example, performance and availability information collected from target systems can automatically generate service desk incidents, allowing service desk personnel to start to address issues—before they have an adverse impact on the business.

### **Easily leverage ITIL**

When it comes to service management, we have a broadly adopted, recognized and effective standard: ITIL. By leveraging ITIL concepts, organizations have been proven to enjoy significant operational improvements. On the other hand, it can take considerable up-front investment and extensive

customization work in order to adapt a legacy service desk platform to new ITIL processes. Too often, organizations that go down this path have to make huge investments, only to see incremental improvements.

Ultimately, it's important that your organization leverage ITIL, but do so in a practical way. Toward that end, look for a fourth-generation platform that has core ITIL best practices embedded—complete with pre-built workflows that are fully integrated and available for you to use immediately. These solutions equip you with action-based workflows built on ITIL standards to manage, coordinate and optimize all aspects of service delivery, from initial request submission to case close. Compared to many legacy solutions, which have been retrofitted to align with ITIL, it is important to find a fourth-generation platform has been built on an ITIL foundation from the outset of development.

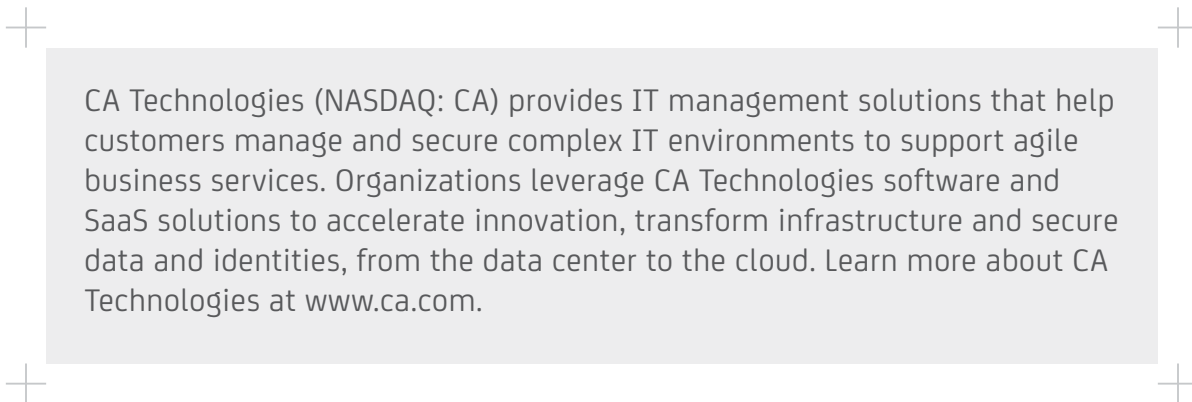
With these capabilities, fourth-generation platforms help you reduce the up-front investment typically associated with ITIL initiatives—and at the same time boost the chances of your organization gaining the most benefit from these endeavors.

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## Conclusion

While many advancements have been delivered over the course of the service management industry's evolution, in many ways, each subsequent generation has repeated some core and critical flaws. Consequently, even as they've upgraded to new platforms, organizations have continued to be hampered by the same challenges and obstacles. With the advent of modern fourth-generation platforms, organizations finally have an opportunity to avoid the mistakes of the past and realize a host of critical business objectives—including improving services levels, reducing costs and increasing organizational agility.

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