TEAM SUPPORT
COLLABORATIVE CUSTOMER SUPPORT SOFTWARE

ITIL vs. CUSTOMER SUPPORT: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

INTRODUCTION

OUR STORY

As veterans of the software and customer service industries, we shared the same pains as today's customer service teams do.

Over the course of our tech jobs—as CEO, software developers, and customer support professionals—we watched in frustration as communication consistently broke down within teams and across departments.

We knew there had to be a better way. And that's why, in 2009, we created TeamSupport. Drawing upon industry best practices honed in numerous workplaces, our product today is widely considered one of the best in the field.

There is a great deal of confusion about the difference between customer support software and programs built for ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library). ITIL is a term that gets thrown around as if it is synonymous with customer support. This is not true. The differences may seem subtle but are extremely important to the real needs of your business. The key difference is that ITIL software is designed for IT departments, whereas Customer Support software is designed for customer service and support departments. Think Internal vs External help desk.

The confusion between ITIL and customer support has been fueled by the interchangeable way terms such as help desk and customer support have been used in the past. Historically a help desk was a pathway for internal support, typically for IT problems, while customer support was external facing, dealing with the individuals and companies that buy your product.

Wikipedia offers these definitions for ITIL and customer support:

ITIL: A set of practices for IT service management (ITSM) that focuses on aligning IT services with the needs of the business.

Customer Support: A range of customer services to assist customers in making cost effective and correct use of a product. It includes assistance in planning, installation, training, troubleshooting, maintenance, and upgrading of a product.

These definitions help to see that ITIL has a different focus and a different user base than customer support software. In fact, there is no such thing as ITIL software, only various applications created to make the stages of ITIL easier to implement and maintain. Customer support software, on the other hand, is often an all-in-one package for companies that have customers requiring assistance with products or services.

ITIL and Customer Support: A Difference in Perspective

ITIL

ITIL was developed during a time when information technology was becoming a major part of modern business practices. It was (and still is) common for business owners and managers to desire automation, not just for their factories, but for the white collar work force as well. IT departments responded with both commercial and in-house software to support different needs.

Over time these applications needed updating and upgrading. These changes and updates needed to be managed. The applications needed to work together without errors. Eventually, software configuration became more complex, requiring further digitally-based management. The IT department had become a strategic partner within the business, and ITIL was born.

ITIL is actually represented as a set of best practices split into 5 volumes:

- Service Strategy: understanding business objectives and internal needs
- Service Design: turning strategy into a plan for delivering the objectives
- Service Transition: developing/improving capabilities with new services
- Service Operation: managing the services in a supported environment
- Continual Service Improvement: incremental and large scale improvement

In short, ITIL is more a business philosophy or process than an actual software.

ITIL IS MORE A BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY OR PROCESS THAN AN ACTUAL SOFTWARE, IT FOCUSES ON STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT OF BUSINESS IT NEEDS

CUSTOMER SUPPORT FOCUSES ON MANAGING CUSTOMER INFORMATION, PROVIDING ASSISTANCE, AND TROUBLESHOOTING USE OF PRODUCTS & SERVICES

Customer Support

Customer support is a different ballgame. The focus is on managing customer information, providing assistance to buyers of a product or service, and troubleshooting problems in the use of those products and services. It is an outward focused practice that calls for collaboration from many departments, not just IT, and is often integrated with a customer relationship management (CRM) application, since the focus is very much on customers.

Customer support involves ticket management, multichannel interactivity, and tracking and trending of customer issues. Certain concepts are typically involved:

- Multi-channel support: phone, email, chat, remote, on-site, or through social media
- Self-service support, assisted support, and proactive support
- An ever-evolving knowledgebase of known issues and resolutions
- Product and Version tracking
- Bug fixes and feature requests (for software and tech companies)

Customer support utilizes software to ensure customer's problems are resolved in a timely fashion - a customer support/service help desk is most concerned about end user needs. An IT help desk uses ITIL to manage information delivery and defined processes – it is most concerned with corporate strategy and internal functions.

Customer support software may feed into another application to support internal IT functions along with external customer support, especially if your product or service is IT-related, but that is as close as it will get to being true ITIL.

Shared Features

Customer support and ITIL do share a few features and benefits that are at the heart of the confusion between the two types of service.

Incident Management

Both can refer to a process called Incident Management. This usually

involves some form of issue tracking, troubleshooting, and problem resolution. An incident represents a single issue with the product or system that must be fixed. Much of this can be automated so nothing falls through the cracks and every ticket is completed and closed.

Information gathered for an incident is similar in both customer support and ITIL:

*   Basic user (customer) information
*   Details of the problem the user (customer) is having
*   Diagnostic steps taken to identify the problem
*   Troubleshooting steps taken to resolve the problem
*   Comparisons to known issues and known resolutions
*   Tracking of all incoming problems

While incident management in ITIL may look more closely related to project management than to issue management, both ITIL and customer support incident management are very similar.

Ticket Escalation

Tickets for issues that cannot be resolved right away can be escalated to a different group for resolution. In IT this can mean a higher tier of troubleshooting and investigation of a single software program, configuration of multiple software programs, or the entire system. More than one software engineer or designer may collaborate on resolving the issue.

In customer support this includes the same groups, but is broadened to include multiple departments and product lines. It may include software either as a stand-alone product or as part of a product (such as software that operates a device). But it can

DID YOU KNOW?

TeamSupport customer service software is 100% collaborative, so your entire team works together, which helps in training new support reps!

also include mechanical or electrical failures, failures in design or materials, or even requests for new features or customizations. Multiple departments may be involved in issue resolution from engineers to designers.

SLA Management

Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are often part of both customer support processes and ITIL processes. The right software will notify you of deadlines for each client's agreement and provide other services tied to meeting the SLA. For ITIL, this may be a timeline negotiated per department instead of terms agreed to with outside customers.

Where ITIL Goes Further

ITIL, as stated before, is concentrated on the internal management of the organization's IT and helps position IT as a partner in business strategy. It goes beyond incident reporting and ticket escalation, and manages continual improvement of IT services and applications, including new services to either enhance or take over specific business functions, to smooth transitions between processes or systems.

ITIL is often involved on the front end, helping to design business strategy and processes according to available infrastructure and technology. Customer support typically only takes place at the back end after the product or service has been sold.

CONCLUSION

ITIL FOCUSES INTERNALLY ON YOUR BUSINESS

CUSTOMER SUPPORT FOCUSES EXTERNALLY ON YOUR CUSTOMER

ITIL focuses internally on your business. Customer support focuses externally on your customer.

If what you need to manage is limited to internal IT including configuration and release management, software geared toward ITIL will serve you best. Even the processes that are similar to customer support are more specialized to the IT department, such as ticket escalation.

If you need to manage external customers to whom you sell a product or service, and are looking for software to help you keep

track of customer, contact, and ticket details, then customer support software, like TeamSupport, is the best option for you. Customer support software has the tools you need to engage with your customers through whatever channel they prefer, and integrates easily with CRM and sales software to enhance your ability to improve customer satisfaction and enhance sales. Choosing the right customer service software will also allow you to track feature requests as well as products/versions and inventory.

For internal-facing ITIL, there are plenty of great vendors out there to help you.

For external-facing customer support, TeamSupport is the best software to do the job.

To Learn more about TeamSupport customer-centric software, visit us at www.teamsupport.com