



## You Can't Outsource Desktop Support... Can You?

We've all gotten used to the idea of outsourcing application development. But what about the techs who support the hardware and software on users' desks? Isn't desktop support, almost by definition, an in-house function?

It's true, support technicians must be close to the users. To support high-value users, such as traders, techs may need to be within a two-minute sprint of the desk side. But that doesn't necessarily make desktop support an in-house responsibility.

Many corporations now prefer to have specialists managing desktop support, freeing CIOs to concentrate on critical, business-specific tasks. They're joining with managed-service providers to bring down costs, improve service, and reduce the pain from an important but often unappreciated service.

Managed-service providers that bring industry best practices to desktop support can reduce total cost of ownership, improve problem resolution, increase security and business continuity, and make end users more satisfied and productive. Even more important are the control and accountability that managed service provides. Some enterprises cite increased predictability of costs and service levels as major reasons to outsource.

What should you consider when selecting a managed-service provider? Of course, cost, demonstrated experience, and financial stability are key. In addition, look for a provider that can:

- Set and deliver appropriate service levels;
- Offer flexible pricing models;
- Minimize transition risk;
- Commit to continuously improving service and efficiency; and
- Integrate seamlessly with your IT staff.

Responding to growing demand from clients, Design Strategy Corporation has expanded its Managed Distributed Infrastructure Services practice. DSC is providing help desk, software support, hardware break-fix, and IMAC (installation, moves, adds, and changes) services to several large clients. It expects managed desktop support to be a major focus of activity during the next several years.

DSC's end-to-end support covers the entire technology life cycle, from strategy setting through sourcing, deployment, user support, operations, and management control. •

### In This Issue:

- You Can't Outsource Desktop Support... Can You? ▪ Q&A With Mike Yudkin
- In Demand: Enterprise Software, Database, Java Skills
- Evaluating Vendor Performance

### Q&A with Mike Yudkin

Senior Vice President Mike Yudkin heads up the Managed Distributed Infrastructure Services practice at Design Strategy Corporation. AHEAD OF THE CURVE spoke with him recently about his views on desktop support.

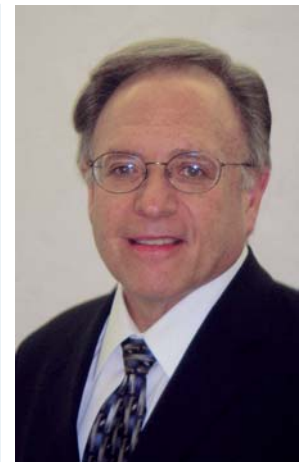
**AOTC:** Mike, what's driving the growing use of managed services for desktop support?

**MY:** A lot of companies have trouble measuring service delivery in a reliable and consistent way. Without good metrics, they have a hard time finding out how well they're doing, whether their desktop support is getting better or worse, or even what the issues are. They have no way to improve service proactively. Managed-service providers like Design Strategy can help them get a handle on this situation.

**AOTC:** What's in it for IT managers? Do they benefit from outsourcing their desktop support needs?

**MY:** They get a single point of contact for desktop support—one source who can answer all their questions, and who can't point fingers at anyone else. For the first time, IT managers can find out exactly what they're paying for.

Another thing managers like is not hearing so many complaints from end users. Higher service levels make users happier—it's that simple. And if the managed-service provider is committed to continuous improvement, they'll survey users on a regular basis to uncover any remaining "pain points," then find ways to fix these.



**AOTC:** Can you give me an example of the innovative "best practices" that Design Strategy brings to its desktop-support engagements?

**MY:** With our OneTouch support, hardware techs are trained to fix simple, common software problems. When they come to the user's desk to fix a hardware problem, they fix related software problems as well. So the user makes a single service call, deals with a single person, and is up and running faster. It's better for the techs, too—their jobs become more interesting, the cross-training makes them more upwardly mobile, and they're more likely to stay on the job. •

# Evaluating Vendor Performance

While most IT departments use outside vendors, only a small percentage use a formal performance measurement process. But evaluating vendors, especially in an ongoing relationship, is important for several reasons. It helps you decide whether to continue doing business with the vendor, and to justify your decision. Also, it lets the vendor know what aspects of performance it needs to improve. Finally, examining vendor performance tells you how well your department is managing its vendors. Sometimes complaints about a vendor turn out, on closer inspection, to arise from inconsistent oversight or from communication problems between vendor and client.

How often should performance be measured? Short projects can be evaluated after they're completed. For ongoing work, how frequently you evaluate depends on how critical the work is. Evaluation takes time and effort, both for you and the vendor. It also distracts the vendor's attention from the work itself. On the other hand, if too much time elapses between evaluations, small problems can turn into big problems before they come to your attention. For high-priority work, monthly evaluations are the norm.

## Use Objective Metrics

Wherever possible, use objective performance measures. Subjective measures tell you more about the person doing the evaluation than about the vendor. They're also prone to abuse by managers who are partial to a particular vendor, and who may not even be aware of that partiality. And when measures are subjective, you can't compare vendors who have been evaluated by two different people. >>>

Of course, objective performance measures aren't always easy to come by. If you're evaluating a quality that is hard to pin down and measure, at least make the evaluator's choices as specific as possible. For example, if the quality being measured is the vendor's willingness to admit and fix mistakes, then choices of always/usually/often/seldom/never are preferable to choices of poor/fair/good/very good/excellent. Evaluators are more likely to agree about the meaning of "always" than about the meaning of "excellent."

everyone's time and attention.

Also, if performance goals are too numerous and too detailed, it may be impossible to achieve them all, and you'll put the vendor in the position of trying to decide which goals are most important.

That's a decision you don't want the vendor to make. You need to decide which three or four qualities are most important to measure and evaluate. Choosing service goals is more of an art than a science, but here are two critical guidelines:

Evaluate outcomes, not inputs. Measure the achievement of the goal, not the way in which the vendor does its work. It's a mistake to measure inputs like hours worked, meetings attended, or management reports produced. If the vendor isn't in control of the process, that lack of control will show up in the results. On the other hand, some vendors are meticulous about the process but never succeed in producing anything. You shouldn't be giving them high marks.

Use the "line of sight" principle. Performance metrics should be relevant to the success of your project or your company, with a clear "line of sight" leading from measurement to results. Before contracting with the vendor, find out from managers and/or users what they really need. If the accuracy of the work is paramount, forget about measuring efficiency. Don't give the vendor incentives to cut corners. If the vendor's work isn't on the critical path to anything, don't measure timeliness—even if it's your personal opinion that timeliness is next to godliness. •

## The Balanced Scorecard

The qualities on which you measure a vendor's performance will depend on what kind of work the vendor is doing. Usually, they will include some of the following:

- Timeliness (response time, resolution time, project milestone completion, etc.)
- Adherence to budget
- Accuracy or quality of work
- Efficiency
- Responsiveness
- Customer satisfaction
- Ability to recoup from problems

A "balanced scorecard" approach works best with most vendors. As the saying goes, "You get what you measure." If you evaluate a vendor on a single metric—say, timeliness—then you are likely to get strict adherence to schedule at the expense of other qualities. Using several measures gives a more complete picture and provides realistic incentives to the vendor.

On the other hand, using too many metrics is like measuring too frequently—it takes up too much of

## In Demand:

### Enterprise Software, Database, Java Skills

What's hot, and what's not, in corporate IT? We asked Design Strategy Corporation recruiters to tell us what positions they filled during the third quarter of 2005. In addition to desktop support skills (see article on page 1), here's what clients were looking for:

- **Enterprise software.** About one third of the positions required analysts with skills in implementing specific enterprise applications, including modules of SAP, JD Edwards, Siebel, Cognos, and PkMS.
- **Database.** One quarter of the positions required database skills. Clients were looking for developers and database administrators who could work on in-house database applications using a variety of database management systems, including Sybase, Oracle, SQL Server, and Access.
- **Java.** The most frequently requested programming language was Java. Other programming languages requested by clients included Javascript, HTML, RPG 400, and C#.
- **Other.** The remaining positions represented a grab-bag of skills and projects. For example, clients were seeking support analysts for Lotus Notes and web-enabled applications; business analysts for financial applications; a network storage administrator; and an expert in preparing data for data warehousing. •

Demand for IT Skills:

