Major Incident Management
Survival Guide
For Service Desk Managers
service desk managers, you know your job. Issues come in, you review the data, send it where it has to go, and log status in your service system. But at times, your familiar environment can erupt into a chaotic spasm of data breaches, malware attacks, hardware failures, service outages, and more. Conditions are becoming more extreme, and you have to adjust.

Major incidents occur with frightening regularity, and the familiar steps to resolution just don’t work anymore. Things go from status quo to code red in the blink of an eye. Major incidents can send all your carefully choreographed processes into chaos. Even for the seasoned service desk manager, these conditions can be overwhelming.

Systems, clouds and devices produce enough data to put the answers within your grasp, but the challenge is getting the right information to the appropriate person in a timely manner. Your service desk system just isn’t up to the task anymore.

Amidst the chaos of a major incident, established major incident processes are supposed to help pull in people and resources as you discover new issues on the path toward resolution. But as incidents have become more complex, businesses have largely not kept up.

An independent 2015 survey of more than 400 IT professionals by Dimensional Research revealed that less than 25 percent of companies have staff dedicated solely to major incident management, since employees have their regular jobs to do.

A proper communication solution will account for these changing conditions with powerful capabilities.
1. **RAPID ENGAGEMENT**

The survey of IT professionals revealed that 60 percent require more than 15 minutes just to identify who should respond to an IT issue – too long to prevent negative impact to the company.

Identifying and engaging the right person quickly is critical to rapid resolution, but so is delivering the most relevant information with minimal manual intervention. According to the survey, 76 percent of companies that have target resolution times for major incidents regularly miss those times.

2. **INTELLIGENT RESPONSES**

Notifications are great to alert people of a problem, but they’re not always actionable. Even if they are actionable, the responses usually available to the recipients are limited to yes and no, and they don’t adequately move the process forward.

More versatile messages can be tailored with more powerful and numerous responses that are specific to the event, expediting the engagement process.

3. **MULTI-MODAL SUPPORT**

Thanks to the ubiquity of mobile devices, remote doesn’t mean unavailable. With the slow wane of email and rise of text messaging along with apps such as Slack and HipChat, support for a wide range of platforms is no longer optional.

---

**How often do you breach your SLAs during major incidents?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of the time</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**You can’t hold conversations by flare gun.**

**If your alert lands in the forest and no one gets it, did you send it?**
4 INTEGRATIONS WITH OPERATIONS

If service desk managers can report less urgent events earlier, they can often prevent them from becoming major incidents. This proactive communication can save time, money, and all the other impacts of downtime, and reduce the cycle of repeated major incidents.

More than two-thirds of companies in the 2015 survey say they experience at least several major incidents per year, and 13 percent experience a major incident at least weekly.

“Every service desk system needs a communication function to make connections with incident resolution teams, executives, and other stakeholders faster and more effective.”

5 STAKEHOLDER ALIGNMENT

Communication during major incidents involves more than just the resolution process. Executives want to be informed. So do customers, partners, and often media outlets. In the survey, 87 percent of companies say executives insist on being informed throughout the process.

Failure to communicate to stakeholders can impact public perception, customer loyalty, and many other revenue-impacting metrics.

Make sure you have the right tool for the situation.

How many major incidents do you experience?

- 32% Once a year or less
- 42% At least several times a year
- 13% At least once a month
- 13% At least once a week

Disregard communication protocol at your own peril.
THE HIGH STAKES OF MAJOR INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

According to IDC, the average cost of a critical application failure is $500,000 to $1 million per hour.

And the high costs don’t apply only to industry behemoths. The Dimensional Research survey reveals that 82 percent of companies say business application downtime has significant impact on revenue, damaging IT’s reputation and causing other departments to lose faith in its ability to do the job.

”While some of these actions may be able to be provided by some of the ITSSM and monitoring tools, it is not a capability provided out of the box, as the tools need to be customized or otherwise extended to do so.”

Gartner Research, Complement IT Infrastructure Monitoring With IT Service Alerting, 2015

WHY IS MAJOR INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SO HARD?

During major incidents, traditional processes break down, replaced by chaos. The linear handoffs that resolve minor incidents become obsolete as more people and groups of people get involved.

Executives, board members, and partners want answers. Ironically, in your technology-driven job, your technology is letting you down. Meanwhile, the stakes are higher than ever because news travels to news outlets, bloggers, and customers so quickly.

Service desk systems run the gamut from homegrown software to market leaders like BMC, Cherwell and ServiceNow. As people complete work in other systems, they enter status updates in their service desk systems. Customizing these services to be sources of effective, intelligent communication is a time-consuming, technically difficult, and expensive endeavor.

Gartner Research calls out the challenges associated with IT Service Support Management systems in its December 2015 report, Complement IT Infrastructure Monitoring With IT Service Alerting. The report states, “While some of these actions may be able to be provided by some of the ITSSM and monitoring tools, it is not a capability provided out of the box, as the tools need to be customized or otherwise extended to do so.”

Service desk systems are fantastic at providing a system of record and task management. They have some simple workflow, but they fall well short of the complex functionality required during major incidents.

COMMUNICATION CAPABILITIES YOU CANNOT DO WITHOUT

Every service desk system needs a communication function to make connections with incident resolution teams, executives, and other stakeholders faster and more effective.

Best-in-class communication solutions enable service desk managers to perform several important functions:

+ **Locate people by attributes**: Create dynamic groups by querying the skills, location, credentials, or other important characteristics.
Enable compound integrations: Use notification responses to drive workflow across different critical IT systems like monitoring, workload automation, conference calls, ticket escalations, and more.

Add ticket details automatically: Auto-populate notification message fields with crucial information from the service ticket to shave valuable minutes off the resolution time.

Facilitate collaboration: Continually and automatically engage different resources and teams as the incident progresses by leveraging conference bridges, SMS, chat, and other communication channels.

Keep stakeholders in the loop: Provide technical details to IT workers and higher-level messages for other stakeholders like executives and customers.

CONCLUSION

A communication solution for the service desk must be agile enough to adjust the flow of information as conditions change. It also has to be robust enough to integrate with other systems.

IT service desk platforms enable targeted communications to create an incident from an event. But they lack the intelligence, agility, and power to manage an existing incident through its conclusion.

A robust communications platform can send targeted information to the right people and groups when circumstances get messy. It allows service desk managers to customize messages for different stakeholders with different interests. The platform can facilitate spontaneous interactions among relevant people through integrations with other systems or by initiating instant conference bridges. Finally, it automates operational components of the incident resolution processes to maximize use of available personnel.

Only an enterprise-grade communication platform can prevent you from getting into a situation you can’t easily get out of. Correlate your needs with your technology, and protect yourself.

xMatters’ cloud-based solutions enable any business process or application to trigger two-way communications (text, voice, email, etc.) throughout the extended enterprise during time-sensitive events. With over a decade of experience in rapid communication, xMatters serves more than 1,000 leading global firms to ensure business operations run smoothly and effectively during incidents such as IT failures, product recalls, natural disasters, dynamic staffing, service outages, medical emergencies and supply-chain disruption. xMatters is headquartered in San Ramon, CA with additional offices in London and Sydney.

Copyright 2016 xMatters. All rights reserved. All other products and brand names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective holders.