

Your Complete Guide to Building vs Outsourcing Your Company's Service Desk

Over the past few decades, organizations have made unparalleled strides toward improving customer experiences through a combination of technology and people skills. Even as corporations increase training, introduce products, expand services and take other bold steps to care for their customers, questions arise that demand answers, and problems pop up that need solutions. Oftentimes, a help desk or call center is necessary to be sure answers and solutions are provided efficiently and in a way that best serves the interests of the organization as a whole.

If you are digging into this report, you likely have an existing help desk or call center, or, you are in the process of planning a service desk platform. This report is designed to help you decide whether building or buying a service desk platform makes the most sense for your organization. Applicable to either type, you'll learn safeguards to ensure system accountability and organization security. We also present strategy opportunities to bring to light ways a best-of-breed service provider can do much more than simply resolve calls.

Achieving Your Vision

The strategizing is complete, and the vision for your organization's future call center or help desk is clear. It likely includes customers who get answers fast, and a knowledge set that grows as issues are managed and problems are solved. Your future customers, who started with a question or frustration, leave feeling genuinely positive about their experience with your organization. And the team behind your service desk platform brings value and productivity to your business.

The big question now becomes how to bring this vision to life. Do you build or do you buy? Do you outsource something as critical as customer experiences or do you build and staff a service desk platform within your organization? Which option makes the most sense financially, in the short term and long term? Start with the basics.

Safeguards to Build Accountability

Holding others accountable for their actions is one of the toughest and most important responsibilities a leader has. You want to assume the best in people, yet where is the track record when you are launching a new help desk or call center, or rapidly growing one with new people on board? When something goes wrong, how long will it take for the issue to get back to you so you can manage the situation? At your core, you might also be concerned about losing control, the trust of your peers or even your job if you set up a service desk platform that fails.

Whether you decide to build or buy your system, accountability must be a major priority for you — even though it can feel like a major source of stress. There is good news. When you have safeguards in place from day one, that dull ache of accountability can be greatly alleviated. Following are seven safeguards Netfor puts into place for its clients so that they feel secure in their decision to engage us and their end users have the best experience possible, one that combines empathy, awareness, knowledge and the appropriate amount of urgency. These safeguards can, and should, be applied to any service desk platform.

1. Common processes

Long before that first inquiry is fielded, a **clear service level agreement (SLA)** with your service desk team should be in place to eliminate any potential finger pointing or confusion. Your team — whether they are in house or outsourced — should own the end-to-end process, and an SLA can help clarify the process and set expectations.

The SLA should include standards indicating prescribed service levels to meet and a plan for addressing and fulfilling any additional needs that perhaps weren't anticipated at launch.

A **standard operating procedure manual** is also an invaluable safeguard to ensure accountability. This helps anyone involved in the service desk process to understand how the desk operates and who is involved to promote efficiency and the best customer experiences.

Your manual should define the roles of people on your service desk team and those of people on other teams who contribute or engage in some way with the service desk team. If a question arises, you want the single point of contact to be as close to self evident as possible. This collaboration can open doors of communication among teams and people, promoting efficiency and a sense of unity as you all work toward a common goal: fast resolution for the end user.

2. The right platform

The most valuable device in your service desk platform's toolbox is your service desk **technology**. At its core, it should support your common processes and make it possible for everyone to use and follow those processes. Whether you're diving into change management or simply keeping pace with the evolution of knowledge, having the right platform to execute your needs is vital. Crucial considerations include: licensing fees and your budget, SaaS vs on prem models, ticket management, ITIL practices and reporting.

3. Service level agreement targets

Hold your service desk team accountable by defining and measuring SLA targets, which allow you to analyze the progress of your service desk's success.

At Netfor, these targets are made up of three areas:

1. Metrics include things such as average amount of time someone waited on a call, the number of calls received daily and the number of issues resolved on a first call. These operational metrics define the key performance indicators (KPIs).

2. A combination of metrics that indicates how well you're doing as it relates to first-call resolution, call abandonment, overall end user satisfaction and call duration experience make up the **KPIs** for your system. KPIs define your organization's critical success factors (CSFs).

3. If your organization is successful at reaching **CSFs** related to customer issue resolution, maintaining customer productivity, providing a positive customer experience and providing effective support for customer calls, you have a very high chance of providing the best experience for your end users.

4. Communication

As in most arenas — business and personal — a key to ensuring help desk or call center accountability is communication. When everyone knows the rules, standards and consequences when things don't go according to plan, accountability can feel empowering.

One way to ensure open and clear communication is to develop a communication matrix among your executive, management and operational people from day one of implementation. This matrix allows these teams to buy into and contribute productively to your system.

Creating an atmosphere in which there is a combination and recognition of disparate interests — from the high-level financial and strategic C-level team, to the goal-oriented management level, to the operational team on the ground floor tackling daily problems — helps you maintain control.

5. Data ownership

Let's say you outsource your service desk, but after six months you are unhappy with how things have gone and need to end the relationship. What happens to all of the sensitive data you've passed along to the service provider? How can and will they use it?

Perhaps especially when using an outside vendor, be sure your data is protected at all times. Demand to have daily access to your data and intellectual artifacts if and when you need them.

When assessing service providers, ask about their safety technology, records and protocols. If the information the provider will be handling falls under regulated areas such as health care or finance, make sure the provider is appropriately trained and undergoes regular security audits of their data and security protocols by a third party.

6. Exit plan simplicity

To safeguard you against added fees, delayed service terminations and other pitfalls of a poorly executed contract, be sure that any outsourced service provider you consider has an exit plan in place that is looking out for you. Keep it simple. Make sure the contract includes a “no-cause” cancellation policy.

7. Low solvency risk and high experience

Is your internal team up to the task of breaking down communication silos through its service desk platform, growing a knowledge base that will grow first-call resolution rates, and consistently improving customer experiences? Are the service providers you’re talking to capable of designing and implementing a service desk platform that will fulfill your vision?

Carefully consider who you hire and trust. Make sure there is experience behind the team and a track record of success. Ask about their history. Ask for references. Ask who their current clients are and how many of them use your current platform — and how many calls a month they field. Ask the tough questions so you feel secure in your decision.

Building, Buying and Business Strategy

Once you have carefully considered all of the necessary safeguards you need to either build into your service desk platform or require of an outside vendor, a possible answer to the build vs. buy question starts to become clearer. Before you choose a path, think about the big picture — short- and long-term business strategy — and the nature of your organization’s core offering.

For example, if call center or help desk service is ingrained in your customer’s experience, you likely shouldn’t outsource. For example, Zappos spends weeks training its customer service representatives on how to keep customers happy before they are allowed to get to work. This deep dive into the Zappos model is part of their culture and success. Outsourcing its service desk platform would make no sense. Similarly, Microsoft would never outsource support of its operating system. In these cases, service and support are in the DNA of the companies. Other businesses that would not be a good fit for outsourcing include those with a hyper-niche audience that asks complex questions about complex products.

If your organization still seems like a good candidate for outsourcing, consider how contracting out your service desk platform can support your business strategy. By outsourcing, you can choose to do more than just fulfill a call center or help desk need. When you work with a top-quality service provider with the highest standards, adhering to the industry’s best practices, you are supporting your business goals, too. (If you don’t hold your provider to the highest standards, you might as well build your own service desk platform.)



Consider these available business opportunities if you choose to “buy” your service desk platform:

Capitalize on economies of scale. You likely have growth goals. Unlike an internal call center or help desk focused solely on serving your business, service desk providers such as Netfor are built to scale. As you grow, we can easily keep up. When times are slow, we can scale back accordingly. All of our processes, resources and capabilities are designed to ramp up and put on the brakes as needed.

Test new and seasonal revenue streams. Because outsourced providers are built to scale, you can test drive new service or product offerings without fear of investing more time or money in customer support than is necessary. Launch a new service and see how it performs. Based on its success, the outsourced service desk will scale accordingly. If your business ramps up on a seasonal basis (e.g., gift card purchases around the holidays) or has a temporary need (e.g., supporting a company-wide software update) your provider can shift its level of support.

Purchase necessary expertise. Proven processes and protocols help you sleep at night. Take advantage of the skills the supplier you’re partnering with has. By outsourcing, you can avoid having to hire qualified managers and subject matter experts to manage your service desk team and run the platform.

Build an internal culture of service. The best service desk platform providers can create positive change within your organization. By operating on a model that measures KPIs and works toward achieving critical success factors laid out in the service level agreement, outsourced providers support not only one team or product in your organization but instead support your organization’s service level across teams and products as a whole.

At Netfor, we hope our focus on service rubs off on all of our clients — we see it happen as our relationships with clients mature. The Netfor services implementation process ensures that process inputs and outputs align with our client organizations so that they become more service-focused organizations.

Stay focused on your core. By outsourcing your service desk platform, you can continue to do what you do best and leave the questions and issues to the experts to handle in the most professional way possible. You can keep chasing and achieving your own goals.



Welcome improvement. There is a common belief that when you engage an outsourced provider, they will do things differently than you do and its sudden presence in your space will look and feel clunky, like forcing a round peg into a square hole. If your organization doesn't need to be improved, don't outsource. Keep in mind if you continue to do things the way you are currently doing them, they will continue to bring about the same results. If you need an improvement, on the other hand, you have to commit to change things. It's not a matter of simply hiring managers to build a platform to do the job. For real improvement to happen, you need to embrace real change.

Putting it all together.

Bringing to life the vision for your organization's service desk platform is no simple task, but determining whether you should build or buy that platform is a major step in the process. Consider the pros and cons, talk to experts in the industry, and think about your business strategy. Do what you need to do to feel secure at every move.

Ready to talk?

That's good.



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