✎ 2013 Incident and Problem Tools Review

⊕ BEST IN CLASS:
Incident & Problem Management 2013

TOPdesk
Service Management Simplified

TOPDESK: "The inclusion of the Kanban-style resourcing board, but also the way in which tasks can be placed and moved about really made this stand out, in terms of the way that innovation within a tool can really make processes less cumbersome."

"Incident and Problem Management are such mainstays of an ITSM tool; it is quite hard to find a way to dig through the differentiators. The process and the related workflows themselves are so seemingly straight forward, are there really any ways to improve?

This review bought out nuances and features to help make a couple of mature processes look exciting again. These tools do more than just provide a mechanism to move an incident or a problem from A to B. It looks to improve the lifecycle, and practice the points of the Process Certification that vendors put themselves through."

Also Featured

- Axios *assyst*

- BMC FootPrints

- Cherwell Service Management

- Nexthink

Review by Ros Satar

Ros Satar is a Blogger and Analyst for The ITSM Review. Her journey in ITIL/ITSM began in 2005 when she jumped into the deep end of Configuration Management. When not knee deep in paper and having a love/hate relationship with her many gadgets, she can be found putting in time at various sporting publications.

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News, Reviews and Resources for ITSM Professionals.

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INTRODUCTION

Incident and Problem Management are such mainstays of an ITSM tool, it is quite hard to find a way to dig through the differentiators.

The process and the related workflows themselves are so seemingly straight forward, are there really any ways to improve?

Not only that, but it has to be looked at in the context of the trends in the industry to focus on the end-user's experience. That's all fine when we take a look at the options available to an end-user logging an incident from a self-service portal.

But in reality, people still call service desks.

The answer is – there are ways to improve, and in many ways they are subtle features that make tools stand out.

This review bought out nuances and features to help make a couple of mature processes look exciting again.

• Stylish use of forms, questions and linkage to knowledge bases
• Resourcing and task planning
• Real-time end-user analytics

These tools do more than just provide a mechanism to move an incident or a problem from A to B.

It looks to improve the lifecycle, and practice the points of the Process Certification that vendors put themselves through.

A word should be said, though, about the knowledge levels of the people who market these products day in, day out.

I would like to share an insightful tweet from Forrester's Stephen Mann:

> **Stephen Mann** @stephenmann · Follow
>
> Are we at a point where we think more about the quality of a software vendor's people than we do the product when "judging" them? #random
>
> 10:56 AM - 13 Mar 2013

In both the reviews I have done, it is always good to work from qualified consultants who have a very good understanding of balancing what the tool can do, functionally, against what the real world sometimes requires.

The devil for all these tools is in the detail of the customisation – any tool, with dedicated customisation, and knowledge, pragmatic consultancy can get the best out of any record-pushing mechanism.

Having replaced many a tool in large-scale ITSM deployments, I often recognised shortcomings in both the outgoing and the incoming tool-set.

But the key remains – can the vendor impart a sense of comfort that they not only understand their tool, the processes that need to be translated to workflow, but can they identify ways to improve?

Having people who not only understand the tool, but also recognise the need to encompass evolving best practices goes a long way to make a tool stand out from its peers in the crowd.

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OVERVIEW

Axios SYSTEMS	As you would expect from an established vendor, the capability of moving through Incident and Problem management has everything it needs to tick the process boxes.
bmcsoftware	BMC FootPrints have taken on board customer feedback, and even observations from previous reviews to make subtle but very noticeable adjustments to their interface. The result is a tool that offers more intuitive investigation diagnostics as calls are being logged, and is continually looking to improve. FootPrints is getting a real benefit from being part of the larger BMC brand, but is fast establishing itself as a tool to appeal across the entire market-place.
CHERWELL SOFTWARE	As with FootPrints, the inclusion of diagnostic forms, within records, linked to the categories makes Cherwell stand out when logging Incidents, in particular.
nexthink change your perspective	This tool deserves to stand apart from its Service Management cousins. It adds a unique element, which can truly help drive efficiencies, especially where Problem Management is concerned. With the right business drivers and strategic vision, not to mention strong partnership with some of the ITSM industry big-hitters, Nexthink's real-time end-user analysis can help in so many more service management disciplines. I feel we have only scratched the surface of its potential.
TOPdesk Service Management Simplified	The inclusion of the Kanban-style resourcing board, but also the way in which tasks can be placed and moved about really made this stand out, in terms of the way that innovation within a tool can really make processes less cumbersome. **BEST IN CLASS:** Incident & Problem Management 2013

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MARKET POSITIONING

For the purposes of this review, vendors were classified based on their primary market focus, and product capabilities.

Vendor	Target Market Size	Specialist ITSM Functions	Discovery Own Tool/Third Party Integration	Event Management & Monitoring Own Tool/Third Party Integration	Real-Time End-User Analytics
Axios *assyst*	Large Very Large	•	Own	Third Party Integration	
BMC FootPrints	Medium Large	•	Own	Own (via Integration)	
Cherwell Service Management	Small Medium Large Very Large	•	Own	Third Party Integration	
Nexthink	Small Medium Large Very Large		Own	Third Party Integration	•
TOPdesk	Small Medium Large	•	Own	Third Party Integration	

COMPETITIVE OVERVIEW

The table below shows a high level overview of the competitive differences between the tools

• Elevator Pitch – An independent assessment of what this module has to offer
• Strengths – key positive points, highlighted during the review
• Weaknesses – areas perceived to be lacking, during the review

Vendor	Elevator Pitch	Strengths	Weaknesses
Axios SYSTEMS	A tidy interface, driven by product hierarchies, and backed up with a potentially powerful CMDB. Work put in to customise the Info Zone, Guidance and FAQs can make the job of the Service Desk, Analysts, and even the end user interaction easier	• Crisp and clean interface, with not much clutter • From a self-service point of view, a nice touch in walking end users through investigation before logging a ticket • For those logging directly with the service desk, pulls in pre-populated forms and guidance to make that role easier/ more efficient	• Very much rooted in the technical – with the product hierarchy very comprehensive. Would be nice to see perhaps an incorporation of more business language • The ability to record an analysts time against a charge code also seems to drive a specific cost as well – whilst this could just be a notional cost, some form of correlation between the two, removing the need for the analysts to know financials as well as resolving an incident, might be more beneficial • There are some elements of earlier ITIL iterations in the tool, as nothing is taken out which could be cumbersome to customise out

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COMPETITIVE OVERVIEW (cont.)

Vendor	Elevator Pitch	Strengths	Weaknesses
bmcsoftware	An improved interface and comprehensive coverage of Incident and Problem Management, with some added innovation to make scheduling work a little easier for Service Desks and support staff alike.	• Logging by Type, Category and Symptom adds a meaningful level of granularity • Incorporates an availability of resource's view by integrating to Outlook Exchange • Subscription function for end users for major incidents, as well as pop ups for potential SLA breaches	• Design elements behind the scenes are still largely text based
CHERWELL SOFTWARE™	Cherwell use intelligent interfaces and well constructed forms to automate the basics of the processes in a comprehensive and informative way	• Core stages of process management as part of the user interface • In-context configuration mapping that makes handling concurrent incident and problem mapping very easy • Potential depth of customisation in terms of use of forms (Specifics) lends itself to improving/ enhancing investigation and first-time fix	• While promotion to a Major Incident, automatic raising of a Problem, linkage to the Global Alerts feature and the ability for users to indicate they are affected too from Self Service is great, that indication is linked to the automatically linked problem record, not the Major Incident • Customers seem to have indicated interest in linkage to the Major Incident as an out-of-the-box capability and it would make sense to provide it.
nexthink change your perspective	If systems management monitoring takes care of servers, Nexthink presents you all you need to know about the end-user side of the coin.Nexthink sits apart from the nuts and bolts of Service Management tooling, but offers guidance to analysts to help expedite resolution with real-time End-user IT Analytics, integrated into major ITSM tools to significantly reduce problem diagnosis times	• Lightweight kernel-driven footprint on end-user targets helps define trouble spots in real time • Complements existing IT Service Management deployments	• With so much technical capability, it needs a very strong balancing hand of strategy to get the best of a combination of this product, a service management suite, and server monitoring collaboration
TOPdesk Service Management Simplified	TOPdesk adds Kanban-type resource scheduling to add a new dimension onto Incident and Problem Management	• The Plan Board incorporates a Kanban style approach to scheduling tasks to help drive efficient resourcing • Keywords trigger standard solutions, linking into a two-tire Knowledge base (for Analysts and End Users) • Task Board for individual support staff can be sliced and diced by the most time critical events	• Sometimes "over-customisability" can rear its head in reviews – just because it is possible to have 7 different priorities, it does not mean it is a good practice to do so. • Some terminology (which can be changed with a little more detailed knowledge) can be a little cumbersome – For Objects for Assets

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CUSTOMERS

Approximate number of customers for each vendor:

• **Axios** *assyst* – 1000+
• **BMC FootPrints** – Approximately 1000 customers across Europe and 5000 worldwide
• **Cherwell Service Management** – 400+
• **Nexthink** – 400
• **TOPdesk** – 3150 approximate TOPdesk Enterprise customers, →5000+ unique customers in total

Vendor	Functionality	Innovation	Analysis
Axios	A tidy interface with a lot of focus on driving the product hierarchies for categorisation.	Pre-populated forms and scripted guidance for the service desk. Chat function for support staff to collaborate.	Axios focus on ways to automate as much as possible.Backed up with a very comprehensive CMDB structure at its core, work put into the configuration of a system up front will reap rewards in efficiency down the line.
bmcsoftware	Great to see a vendor improve from customer (and analyst) feedback and the result is a modern looking tool that handles the "bread and butter" tasks of Incident and Problem efficiently.	FootPrints links to Microsoft Exchange to display a view of the support staff resources and allocation of repetitive tasks. Logging by Type, Category and potentially Symptom adds an appealing level of granularity.	BMC FootPrints is not alone in exploring and incorporating a view of the support staff resources, and it is evolving to be a very smart looking, mid-market offering that can punch above its weight.
CHERWELL SOFTWARE	Cherwell add a number of features that make the process speedier – and their Specifics forms provide a great touch in terms of initial investigation.	Cherwell get the balance right, with customisable features (forms and macros) and include a breadcrumb trail throughout the lifecycle of the record.	Cherwell recognise that it is not just IT functions that need to use the tool – the Impact and Urgency in business language (Incident) and their other features all make it a roundly comprehensive tool to appeal to organisations of all sizes.
nexthink change your perspective	Nexthink is not a traditional ITSM tool. Instead it offers a chance for support analysts to proactively resolve issues faster by means of End-User real-time analytics.	It's power comes from being able to assess elements from an end-user perspective, and integrates with existing ITSM tools to provide a comprehensive view of an end-user's machine.	There are a number of ways that Nexthink and ITSM tools can co-exist – Nexthink is a powerful enabler for much more proactive incident and problem resolution.
TOPdesk Service Management Simplified	TOPdesk use wizards and key word matching to help drive efficient Incident and Problem logging and resolution.	TOPdesk takes resource planning to another level, planning shift patterns, and operating a Kanban style method of dragging and dropping tasks to less loaded support staff.	The whole combination of the resource board, the way their task board can focus on the most pressing first, and their links to Knowledge Management made this a very attractive tool to review,There were some configuration niggles which can all be customised (some more easily than others) but it is certainly heading in the right direction.

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Deep Dive

Further details for each vendor can be found by using the links below:

• Axios *assyst*
• BMC FootPrints
• Cherwell Service Management
• Nexthink
• TOPdesk

DISCLAIMER, SCOPE & LIMITATIONS

The information contained in this review is based on sources and information believed to be accurate as of the time it was created. Therefore, the completeness and current accuracy of the information provided cannot be guaranteed. Readers should therefore use the contents of this review as a general guideline and not as the ultimate source of truth.

Similarly, this review is not based on rigorous and exhaustive technical study. The ITSM Review recommends that readers complete a thorough live evaluation before investing in technology.

This is a paid review. That is, the vendors included in this review paid to participate in exchange for all results and analysis being published free of charge without registration. For further information please read the 'Group Tests' section on our Disclosure page.

FULL REVIEW ONLINE AT

http://www.theitsmreview.com/2013/04/incident-problem-review/