



I D C T E C H N O L O G Y S P O T L I G H T

The Ongoing Value of Reactive Support

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As IT environments grow in size and complexity, CIOs and IT managers are looking for support deliverables that can help maximize availability and performance while at the same time reduce the cost of IT service delivery. Although recent advancements in support services have largely focused on proactive and preventive support deliverables, IDC believes that reactive support services remain a critical component of a comprehensive IT management strategy. Reactive support can be a good option for IT assets supporting non-mission-critical business processes, therefore requiring a more basic level of support. Reactive support typically includes access to updates and patches, the ability to contact support personnel when problems occur with the covered technology, and access to tools and utilities that can help self-diagnosis and resolution. IDC research shows that reactive support services can be a suitable choice for IT organizations that require a more basic, cost-effective level of support for specific technologies in the datacenter. This Technology Spotlight discusses trends in reactive support options and highlights the role that HP plays in this important market.

Introduction

With CIOs and IT managers under increasing pressure to control their IT budgets, "do more with less" is now a permanent state of IT management. Enterprises are asking IT organizations to deliver a high level of service in the face of stagnant or even decreasing budgets, especially for legacy infrastructure — much of which is still supporting mission-critical business processes. At the same time, CIOs are struggling to move critical IT resources away from supporting non-mission-critical infrastructure to innovative projects that can drive business success.

Recent IDC research shows that IT organizations are supporting mission-critical business processes with demanding service-level agreements (SLAs) for uptime and performance. As more CIOs track "time to resolution" as a key internal performance metric, fast and efficient problem resolution is critical. Most IT organizations devote significant resources to self-diagnosis and resolution using vendor-provided tools and information to accelerate the resolutions process.

In today's complex IT environments, CIOs and IT managers also devote significant time to vendor and contract management. Fast and efficient contract management and modification are critical for IT organizations, where IT assets must be scaled up, scaled down, or reallocated quickly. In addition, IDC research finds that new technologies and processes in the consumer space are driving significant change at the enterprise service delivery level.

Reactive Support in the Modern Datacenter

Over the past five years, most support providers have focused exclusively on proactive and preventive support offerings across the datacenters. These packages and deliverables have grown significantly in popularity and customer adoption. These high-level support offerings can be a suitable choice for technology supporting mission-critical business processes that require constant availability and very high performance.

However, IDC believes that despite the growth and availability of proactive and preventive support, reactive support remains an important consideration for savvy IT organizations. In the modern datacenter, the IT environment is a complex mix of technologies and solutions that will require varying levels of support to maximize performance while managing costs. CIOs and IT managers are looking for a mix of support offerings that can meet different needs based on the specific technology and the related business processes.

Recent IDC research indicates that reactive support services can be a good option for IT assets that require a basic level of support coverage. Reactive support services will ensure access to the latest updates and patches, which are critical for new functionality. Reactive support also includes access to vendor assistance when problems occur, often with a range of response times and contract lengths. In addition, deliverables for reactive support offerings typically feature direct access to extensive tools for self-diagnosis and resolution, including online portals and even some remote diagnostics. Online tools will continue to grow in importance as they can simplify diagnosis and troubleshooting.

Key Considerations When Evaluating Reactive Support Offerings

To ensure the correct level of support across enterprise business processes, IDC recommends evaluating support contracts across all IT assets in the datacenter. While this exercise can be time consuming and tedious, it can also help improve overall IT performance by mapping IT systems to their corresponding business processes. This exercise can help CIOs select the correct level of support across all technologies in the IT environment according to the needs of the business — a critical step when they are faced with demanding internal and external SLAs.

Selecting reactive support services for the appropriate IT assets can be an effective cost management tool when rationalizing support services across the IT ecosystem. Reactive support can be especially useful for IT assets that don't require immediate resolution when problems occur. In addition, technology supporting non-mission-critical business processes can be a good candidate for reactive support.

IDC recommends that when selecting reactive support services, CIOs and IT managers should consider support providers with a comprehensive mix of offerings and deliverables and look for the following:

- Access to online knowledge base and chat forums, with the ability to contact support personnel when problems occur
- Access to the latest updates and patches for software and firmware
- A simplified support portfolio that is easy to navigate, but with a mix of reactive support packages with clearly differentiated levels of coverage
- Reactive support offerings with a variety of options for response times, coverage windows, and contract lengths
- Cross-vendor and cross-product support policies and processes, with one support provider serving as a single point of contact to simplify the support delivery process
- A robust option for support contract management and modification, preferably through an online portal that can enable self-service management and modification of support contracts and support levels

IDC expects that with these critical components in place, reactive support offerings will remain a key part of the smart CIO's toolbox to deliver high-quality, cost-effective IT management across the IT ecosystem.

Considering HP Foundation Care

HP Foundation Care is a portfolio of reactive hardware and software support services with a wide range of targeted response times, coverage windows, market-sensitive pricing options, and length-of-term options. Customers can purchase support as a set of standardized services, select an appropriate level of support for current configurations, and modify the support coverage as needs change in the future.

HP has recently simplified the Foundation Care portfolio to help customers more easily select the correct level of support for their HP IT assets. HP has reduced more than 15 service levels in Foundation Care to 5 service levels. HP customers and partners can now navigate a simplified support portfolio, with significantly less complexity, to more easily identify the appropriate support offerings.

The levels of HP Foundation Care are:

- **HP Foundation Care Call-to-Repair** — HP's highest-level commitment to resolving hardware issues within six hours of placing the call (This commitment is unmatched by other IT hardware vendors.)
- **HP Foundation Care 24x7** — HP's broadest coverage window when hardware must be serviced outside business hours, providing coverage around the clock, every day, with onsite hardware and software callback response times
- **HP Foundation Care Next Business Day** — HP's economical choice for hardware and software support, with business hour coverage and response times for hardware and software

When supporting HP ProLiant and BladeSystem servers, HP has included collaborative software assistance as a standard deliverable, enabling customers to call HP first for hardware or leading industry-standard software issues, reducing complexity for administrators. For networking equipment, component exchange is the typical service level. HP has simplified these services by incorporating support for networking software into the two exchange service levels:

- **HP Foundation Care Four Hour Exchange** service, recommended for core networking components that are critical
- **HP Foundation Care Next Business Day Exchange** service, recommended for edge networking components

HP Foundation Care utilizes an expanded portfolio of tools focused on infrastructure monitoring, management, and support. It offers secure single sign-on access to product and HP support information specific to a customer's IT environment. HP Foundation Care is designed for IT staff who deploy, manage, and support systems, as well as HP Authorized Partners that support IT infrastructure on behalf of their customers. These tools give HP customers full control to organize their IT environment and to more easily monitor and manage devices, events, and support status. Users can auto-populate the list of devices managed and add devices manually. Users can share device information with HP or HP Authorized Partners to help expedite support and system recommendations.

Challenges

IDC believes that to ensure a high level of reactive support delivery, HP should focus on maintaining and improving support delivery when customers contact HP directly for support. With expanded access to tools for self-diagnosis and resolution through reactive support, most IT organizations have attempted a number of potential solutions before reaching out to support providers directly for assistance. Support personnel should recognize these situations and help IT staff achieve resolution without starting over at the beginning. As customer interactions with support staff decrease, the importance of each interaction increases substantially. All support interactions must be high-quality, high-value engagements to maintain high customer satisfaction and improve customer loyalty.

IDC anticipates that HP will continue to improve and expand the support deliverables available through Foundation Care, especially for non-HP software and hardware. When problems occur, IT organizations often struggle to coordinate support efforts in complex, heterogeneous IT landscapes — with most CIOs looking for solutions that can "just make it work." HP has consistently demonstrated success working with hardware and software vendors to deliver integrated support across multiple technologies. IDC expects that HP will utilize that advantage to expand those capabilities in Foundation Care going forward.

Conclusion

With rapid expansion into cloud, mobile, and big data initiatives, CIOs and IT managers face multiple challenges maintaining existing technology while preparing complex IT environments for new technology deployment and adoption. Robust reactive support services for appropriate IT assets can help IT organizations more effectively manage IT maintenance and support costs while minimizing unplanned downtime and keeping IT assets up to date in terms of security and functionality. IDC believes that reactive support services will remain a key component of a well-rounded IT strategy for IT organizations that require a broad mix of support across the datacenter.

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