THETA

The Higher Education Technology Agenda

Towards 2020: Preparing to support the future university from the IT front line

It is always difficult to predict the future. Sometimes we get it right. The Daily mail reported on a comment from Bill Gates predicting the future 20 years forward, suggesting LCD televisions, Siri-style voice recognition, YouTube, Wikipedia, and card-less payments. It might seem an obvious outcome now, but it was a big call in 1987. And sometimes we don't get predictions right. Gates also predicted that nobody would need more than 640k RAM in a PC, and by 2006 the issue of SPAM would be solved. Predictions are opinions, and the more knowledgeable people are in the field, the more weight can be put on the outcomes.

A number of knowledgeable individuals and groups around the globe have put effort into developing their own and collective opinions around the future of the IT Service Desk and IT support. This presentation analyses a number of opinions in the search for common ground to give us all some guidance on what sort of environment we will exist in, and how best we can position our support arrangements to survive and thrive toward 2020.

Looking back five years saw the emergence of the Apple iPad, the iPhone 4, and android beginning to outsell apple. If we can be assured of anything in the future, it is that change will continue at a rapid pace. BYOD was big a few years back, and was the buzz word for anyone who wanted to sound important. Today, BYOD is just another device. We can't determine who we give support to based on whether or not they have an asset barcode on their device, because most times they won't, especially if they are a student. In a forward looking paper from the Service Desk Institute in the UK, technology will be a customer led choice. Locking down supported models will become an ever increasing challenge as we approach an 'any device' environment. So BYOD or no BYOD, we are already experiencing the growth of consumer technologies at our service points, and the trend is set to continue.

Let's add to our 'any device' world now, and acknowledge the push for 'any time' services as students connect 24/7. An EDUCAUSE review suggests increasing pressures on 'normal' operating hours, as access to online services grows, and increasing pressure is placed on 'anywhere, anytime' learning. From a service desk perspective, this doesn't mean around the

clock phone support – yet. What it does mean is increased tier 0 resources through knowledge bases and other self-help and self-service resources. Will this increase in self-service resources see an end to the service desk analyst? Not from the opinion of our knowledgeable experts. Automation will certainly have its place and will grow, but the availability of a service desk analyst gives the business the choice on how best to manage their time, be it self-service, or a friendly voice. There will still be a place for a Service Desk in 2020, but its role will evolve. As for those students bringing their own devices, there is an upside. It can allow for more accessible connection to classes bringing a richer more meaningful interaction with their learning. A sign of true value.

Many sources, including Gartner and SDI, agree that a future Service Desk will be the interface which adds business value, rather than fixes problems. They will define themselves as an integral part in the service value chain, and will link technological innovation with business efficiency and effectiveness. Internal IT areas have always struggled with services which cross silo boundaries. Strong integrated processes help, and good relationships at key points across the organisational structure are essential, but getting over this to provide business value is key. Changes to the higher education sector emphasise this prediction of 'value add' above all others.

Looking to the future cannot be complete without understanding the environment you operate in, and in the case of higher education in Australia, the future is turbulent. Deregulation and proposed changes highlighted in the 2014 federal budget will see increases in student fees, and increases in competition. In this environment, universities will become more like a business, and to survive it is imperative that we, IT, add value. We might deal in incidents, problems and changes, but we need to add value to learning and teaching, research, and value propositions for our future students. This is not a choice, but is critical to our very existence.

This presentation will consider our future in this new world, with all of the wisdom from the collective experts, and determine the opportunities to add true business value… and what will happen if we don't.

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