

Half Price Books Selects Hornbill's Supportworks ITSM for Service Management Desk



Leading US bookstore chain invests in service desk management system to support over 1000 users across its stores and operations

In 1972, Half Price Books opened its first store in a converted laundry in Dallas, Texas. Co-founders Ken Gjemre and Pat Anderson stocked the store with more than 2,000 books from their personal libraries. Half Price Books was created with the idea of offering a great product at a great price. Today, Half Price Books is America's favorite new and used bookstore chain with nearly 100 stores in 14 states, with each store carrying a unique variety of new and used books, music, movies and games. The company continues to grow having opened new stores in Missouri, Ohio, Kentucky and Texas within the past year.

The store buys and sells anything printed or recorded except yesterday's newspaper. The rapid growth of the company in recent years has seen increased investment in technologies to underpin the business and sales operations. Half Price Books has deployed many new systems to support its retail network, including new point of sale systems as well as continually enhancing its existing purchasing, distribution and stock management software.

Such developments have highlighted the need for an effective system to enable the IT team to provide a support service to over 1000 staff working across its stores, head office administration and e-commerce operations. The Company has invested in Supportworks ITSM, a comprehensive service desk management system from Hornbill Systems.

Improving Services

Bob DuPuy, MIS Director at Half Price Books explains: "The catalyst to implement a service desk solution was the implementation of enterprise-wide software and hardware enhancement to support our retail operations. We had a rudimentary system to provide support to end users but quickly realized that there was a lot more that we could do to support our users, and ultimately the business."

Having studied Foundation stage ITIL, DuPuy realized that being able to adopt ITIL best practice was essential for Half Price Books to move forward. He reviewed the PinkVerify™ certified list of candidates, of which Hornbill Systems was one. Following a demonstration, the MIS team were united in their decision that Hornbill's was the solution that best met their needs.

"Hornbill's demonstration of Supportworks ITSM ticked all the boxes," said DuPuy, "The Company was competitive on pricing with good local representation. The Hornbill representative also really impressed us with his knowledge and competence, and we were amazed at how user-friendly the solution was."

Business Benefits

- Workflow processes enabled system changes to be planned and rolled out efficiently across the stores
- Service desk can support user inquiries resulting from changes made across the enterprise
- Adoption of ITIL processes enables the IT team to be more efficient
- Improved access to management information from automatic and on-demand reports
- Centralized service desk is able to support wide range of applications and specialist systems used across the company
- Self-service web option accessible to users across stores
- IT team are able to meet SLAs agreed with departments

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Bob DuPuy
MIS Director
Half Price Books

A Quick Win in 2006

Following the implementation, the MIS team was able to quickly benefit from Supportworks ITSM when implementing a major revision in its POS system, used across the stores. The IT service team at Half Price Books is responsible not just for the support to IT systems, but also for installations across all of the stores.

In 2006, a new integrated credit and debit card authorization system at checkouts was to be introduced - prior to this, there was no integration with their cash registers. This required a major software and hardware installation to be rolled out across all stores - with the added pressure of needing to be completed by November 2006, to meet the peak Christmas sales period. This required each store to be visited by service desk engineers to complete the installation.

"We coordinated the entire project using the workflow from within Supportworks ITSM and attribute much of the project success to this factor. Using workflow processes enabled us to undertake rigorous planning prior to implementation, and we were able to achieve the results while also ensuring that service calls were well managed."

Record Christmas Sales in 2006

Following the successful deployment of the new Credit Card Processing system, the stores counted record sales. Managers reported that the new software enabled sales to be processed faster, resulting in shorter checkout lines and more sales.

Significant Challenges Met in 2007

A consequence of the Credit Card integration project was the first-ever requirement to meet Payment Card Industry (PCI) requirements in 2007. Numerous proactive changes in POS systems in the stores were required to support a new password management scheme, under the new PCI security requirements.

Included in this was the implementation of a tool called the Self-Service Password Reset Manager (SSRPM), which allows users to reset their own password on the Windows logon screen. Prior to these changes, most users in the stores had used a generic Windows account. The result of this was that the service desk had to handle new types of service calls in volume, since the changes were global and every user was affected.

"The PCI requirements created additional challenges for the IT team. Having Supportworks ITSM in place helped us to respond to enterprise level changes in our security and infrastructure that the new requirements demanded," said DuPuy.

Strong advocates of the benefits of Supportworks ITSM are also the developers within the company. With many different applications used across the company - both in stores, administration, stock and purchasing - there are always constant maintenance and fixes that need to be implemented. These are all well documented and scheduled using Supportworks ITSM.

Half Price Books also uses a complex arrangement of Microsoft MSMQ and SQL Server replication to synchronize data between stores and the head office. This enables management in the head office and all district and regional offices to have an accurate picture of sales and buys by the next day. The processes used require ongoing support from the service desk team. If they are unable to resolve the call themselves, they will escalate this to second level.

Introducing SLAs

According to DuPuy since implementing Supportworks ITSM the IT team has also made significant progress in setting out and adhering to SLAs. The team has committed to providing set response times to requests from internal departments. Working with Regional Managers responsible for the stores - some of which are open until 11pm at night - has resulted in agreed support hours being introduced.

"The stores on the west coast may be open until 11pm, which is actually the equivalent of 1am for the service desk. By introducing Service Level Agreements we have been able to provide an agreed service support until 7pm, with an after-hours escalation number for emergencies," explained DuPuy.

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Half Price Books has planned for 2008 a major rollout of a new Wide Area Network across all of its stores and operations. According to DuPuy Supportworks ITSM's workflow procedures will again be critical to the success of the project, which will again be managed and implemented by the IT service team.

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