

## College Board

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Gaining control of the incident lifecycle should ultimately translate to improved service levels. That was the attraction of ITIL for Jim Strande, vice president of software engineering for the College Board, the organization that administers standardized tests such as the SAT. He didn't have a formal service-level agreement with the business for IT operations, but it was clear that he wasn't meeting its expectations about maintenance of the company's website.

Even though Strande's IT department had achieved 99.9 percent uptime, that still left around nine hours a year when the site was down. Almost always, these interruptions occurred during the 40 or 50 days when the College Board either registers test takers or reports scores—the time the business most needed the site to be up.

Strande turned to ITIL to assess his department's operations. The review helped him understand that the IT group did not sufficiently track the causes of incidents. In ITIL lingo, they didn't distinguish between incidents (nonstandard occurrences of any kind) and problems (underlying flaws in IT systems, often identified as a result of multiple incidents). As a result, problems with the website were left unresolved and incidents were recurring.

Using the methodology outlined in the ITIL service support book, Strande reorganized and clearly delineated the incident and problem-management functions within the operations group, training the staff to respond in specific ways to key events. For example, if the website loses its connection to its credit card processor, service desk staff now know the root cause and the correct response: The telecommunications switch between the College Board and the processor must be reset and the server that handles the transactions must be recycled. Overall, there have been fewer recurring problems, Strande says, leading to improved service levels.

"Since ITIL is only a framework, it puts you in a situation where you need to rely on somebody to fill in the gaps," says Strande. The College Board used consultants to help with its ITIL implementation.