

Corporate Express

Corporate Express is one of the leading business essentials suppliers in Australia and New Zealand. With its highly-valued business methodology of simplifying procurement processes and reducing business costs for its customers, the company has been one of Australasia's fastest growing companies over the last five years. Corporate Express offers business customers a single source of supply for business essentials. These include IT solutions, office and computer supplies and promotional and marketing material. Corporate Express also supplies business furniture, liquor, coffee and kitchen supplies; print services; and janitorial supplies.

Corporate Express has over 2,000 staff in 49 locations across Australia and New Zealand, all linked to central computer systems. It relies heavily on its help desk support teams for both its internal and external clients.

Once the solution was implemented Corporate Express gained unprecedented internal and external customer satisfaction levels as well as an estimated 20 percent improvement in service management operational efficiencies.

Corporate Express was experiencing many of the pains that typically afflict rapidly-growing organizations, especially on their IT systems. In the last three years, the company has grown extremely quickly and expects growth to continue. Corporate Express urgently needed to upgrade its IT system to support its transition into a large corporate entity.

According to Derek Brown, Network and Operations Manager for Corporate Express, nowhere was that more apparent than in its service management systems and processes. "Although we could see that the business would continue to grow, we were unable to expand the IT support teams at the same rate. We realized we needed a technology-driven solution to increase our efficiency immediately. We needed to be able to work smarter, not harder, and we wanted to bring IT operations in line with the rest of our corporate goals of efficiency and best practice in all areas of the business," he said.

At that time, Corporate Express was using a legacy service management process based on an IBM AIX box which Brown found outdated and very limited in scope. Because of the large number of manual processes involved, this legacy system was hindering the technical support team's ability to deliver the desired levels of quality service.

"The existing help desk solution wasn't scalable or up-to-date," he said. "It was both cumbersome and time-consuming, and certainly wasn't going to support the goals of the business moving forward. We realized that we needed to put some best practice structure around our IT support."

"When it comes to service management, best practice means implementing a solution that adheres to the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) guidelines. We wanted a solution which was fully compliant with ITIL framework so we could deliver best practice service management and support processes," Brown said.

To achieve this goal, Corporate Express needed a tool with extended capabilities from its previous solution. The company wanted a single interface for processes including change management, problem management, configuration management and service level management. It also had to fully integrate with an Altiris software deployment and asset management solution.

There were also challenges for Brown and the project management team in satisfying the varied interests of different work groups within the company's corporate structure. "We needed to get everyone on the same page," Brown said. "It would be fair to say that people on different teams were working to different agendas. We needed to align all of the teams to focus on a common purpose with a clearly defined set of processes that would facilitate the delivery of high quality service in the management of our IT systems."

In late 2003, the senior management at Corporate Express agreed to fund the implementation of a new service management solution based on the ITIL guidelines. The deadline was to have the system up and running by the end of the first quarter of 2004.

Brown said that the company has activated the Service Call Management, Change Management, Problem Management, Service Level Management and Configuration Management components of Service Desk. It is still finalizing the Service Level Management functionality.

"We went 'live' in early March. Essentially, these fundamental ITIL processes were available out of the box. We migrated about 400 outstanding calls over a weekend." Since the introduction, Brown estimates that the Service Desk solution has improved efficiency by about 20 percent. It has also introduced significantly improved functionalities to Service Desk operations thereby allowing Corporate Express to be far more proactive in its service management delivery.

"The best feedback we have received is from the level of buy-in by the internal and external clients which has far exceeded our expectations. If people resist it vigorously, there is something wrong. We have had none of that," Brown said. "The support teams, almost without exception, have bought into the solution, the process changes and the fact they can see it helping them deliver better customer service. It also helps them manage their workloads better."

For example, the project teams now raise service orders in Service Desk if there are any project activities that the service engineers need to do. "They can then juggle those priorities with their own day-to-day work and production support-type priorities which is something they could never do before."