Tomorrow-Ready ITSM

An ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES® (EMA™) White Paper
Prepared for ServiceNow
By Valerie O’Connell
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ITSM that’s ready when tomorrow happens today
In ancient times—February 2020—EMA research found that more than 50% of IT leaders surveyed were considering new ITSM platforms in the near future. The future arrived with a bang as IT organizations turbo-pivoted to deliver and support unprecedented levels and types of services to a global workplace suddenly working from home.

Overnight, ITSM organizations aimed existing platforms, people, and processes at the moving target of unprecedented and unpredictable change. Their aim has been surprisingly good. Although there have been some public glitches, the move from fire drill to productivity has largely avoided chaos as an interim step—but success has been neither universal nor smooth.

From competitive advantage to competitive table stakes
Organizations that were advanced in their digital transformation agendas were also well-placed to take these changes in stride. Across industries and organizations of all sizes, change is the new normal. Always a desirable attribute, the ability to support the business in a rolling sequence of scenarios is now a baseline requirement. That ability, which was formerly seen as a competitive advantage, has been promoted to competitive table stakes.

EMA research indicates that the installed base of ITSM platforms and solutions is a very mature one. More than half have been in place for three years or more, with 20% passing the five-year mark. If half of EMA’s survey base was exploring new options back in February of 2020, it is logical to assume that the experiences since that time will swell the ranks of ITSM shoppers in the near future (1-2 years).

What should they be looking for? Of course, they should be looking first at their own environments, objectives, advantages, and challenges to formulate requirements specific to the needs of their organizations. It is a mistake to choose a solution primarily because it has been named a winner, crowned in the vacuum of pure theory and features. When EMA ranks vendor solutions, it does so within the context of use cases and requirements rather than against static feature weightings.

However, there are foundational characteristics and attributes that can inform the vendor selection process. The goal is an ITSM function that facilitates today’s business and is continually tomorrow-ready no matter what tomorrow may bring or how often tomorrow changes its mind.
Three strategic considerations for tomorrow-ready ITSM

Beyond the specifics of platform or solution functionality, there are three overarching strategic areas of consideration:

**Ongoing transformation and innovation** – The phrase “get back to normal” presents an understandable but wrong-headed sentiment. There is no going back. Normal is a state of change. Organizations have the opportunity to not only do better now, but to do things differently. EMA research finds that scalability, extensibility, and ease of both integration and use are the primary attributes of a successful, agile, strategic ITSM investment decision.

**Automation** – Part cliché, part mandate, the drive to do more with less has been a constant presence in IT since the earliest mainframe. The challenge remains current; the opportunities change with time. Technology and vision are finally on par. With automation today, ITSM organizations have the chance to radically alter and redefine the types, quality, and speed of service it offers and supports—using the same or fewer resources. EMA research shows that automation can be a double-edged sword. ITSM platforms must be capable of vigorously incorporating automation while pacing implementation to an organization’s ability to productively consume it.

**End-user experience and productivity** – As the lines between business and IT rapidly blur, end-user experience has become almost indistinguishable from productivity. ITSM platforms need to deliver services that are meaningful in purpose and excellent in execution to both internal and external users. Whether offering non-IT functionality in enterprise service management (ESM) offerings, a range of self-service capabilities, or the DevOps advantage of bringing code closer to its performance, ITSM solutions must be flexible and innovative to consistently meet and exceed user expectations for service excellence.

Relying heavily on recent EMA field research, this paper explores details for each of these key strategic considerations. It assumes that ITSM is logically positioned to drive innovation, unite automation initiatives, and unify collaborative, cross-functional processes. However, the ability to execute requires a strategic vision and valuation of the ITSM function and an ITSM platform that is ready when tomorrow happens today.

**Ongoing transformation and innovation**

Digital transformation is now business as usual. Acknowledged as a journey rather than a destination, this is one trip that guarantees constant change for ITSM as well as IT. For that reason, the need to be easily adaptable, extensible, and scalable both vertically and horizontally is driving the current interest in new ITSM platforms.

The installed ITSM base is a mature one. More than half have been in place longer than three years, with almost 20% topping the five-year mark. For many, it is time to investigate and find a new ITSM platform. ITSM practitioners on this hunt are in agreement: Across industries and companies of all sizes, change is both the primary driver and leading requirement.

ITSM platforms need to easily accommodate new technologies as they become available and new services as they are required. For example, almost 90% of organizations are currently using their ITSM platforms in support of non-IT services. Some are new at ESM (enterprise service management) and many have been at it for years. All of them experience increased demand for these services. Success breeds success and success breeds increased demand.
ESM and other innovative uses of ITSM platforms

In the field research effort, “ESM: the (R)evolution of ITSM,” EMA explored the characteristics that make an ITSM platform suitable for ESM. Seventy percent of the respondents noted that the ability to use ITSM for non-IT services was an active consideration in choosing their current solution. Asked to name the factors that are most important in making an ITSM platform suitable to non-IT uses, they averaged six major areas apiece. When limited to selecting the top three, it was ease of integration, ease of use, analytics reporting, scalability, and collaboration that topped the list (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Integration leads when asked, “What factors are most important in making an ITSM platform suitable to non-IT uses? Choose no more than three.”

Although success rates are almost universally high for ESM initiatives and the benefits achieved are both significant and recurring, there are challenges. Respondents freely shared the challenges of resources (skills, people, and budget), as well as the organizational troika of resistance to change, conflict in IT, and politics. However, when asked to select only one as the chief impediment to progress, technical issues left the others in the statistical dust.

The top technical challenges faced were:

- Integration requirements
- Data access, availability, completeness, and accuracy
- More customization needed than expected
- Information security and compliance concerns
- The ITSM platform wasn’t as adaptable as we thought
Allowed to choose three responses, respondents had a quite unified view of what needs to be done to make ITSM suitable for non-IT use cases like ESM (Figure 2). By a large margin, IT professionals prefer to get these capabilities directly from their ITSM vendor as add-ons or as out-of-the-box capabilities. Next in line comes a good selection of well-vetted partner solutions from which to choose.

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<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>Data integration</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workflows</td>
<td>44%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved portal capabilities</td>
<td>44%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information security</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Custom configuration</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vendor supplied out-of-the-box capabilities</td>
<td>19%</td>
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Figure 2: What has to be done to make ITSM suitable to non-IT uses?

When using internal resources, EMA research shows that when it comes to building out non-IT services on the ITSM platform, organizations don’t turn first to DevOps. Overwhelmingly, they use business analysts on the IT team and non-IT business stakeholders to do the job. This requirement places the spotlight on how easy an ITSM platform is to extend and modify by point-and-click wizards and other low code/no code approaches.

Although it may not be the flashiest of topics when it comes to looking at new ITSM platforms, the technical factors at work behind the scenes are critical. The eternal IT basics of ease of integrations, ease of use, extensibility, and scalability are of first importance. Features and functions may come and go as matters of interest, but technical excellence is really job #1 for an ITSM platform’s ability to stay current over time, adapting vigorously to changes as they come.
**Automation**

EMA’s research “Automation, AI, and Analytics: Reinventing ITSM” took an ITSM-centric view of the state and impact of these advances on service and support. Automation and AI/analytics are increasingly flip sides of the same coin in ITSM. The potent combination of knowing and doing is at issue. When AI and analytics inform actions that can be taken automatically, without human intervention, the impact on productivity, efficiency, and the ability to innovate can be transformative.

As Figure 3 demonstrates, automation is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. There is a wide spectrum of cultural willingness to leave the human element out of the automation equation. For the 48% of respondents who will only allow actions to be taken with human oversight, there is a trust issue. Even though reason argues that a never-bored, never-varying machine will outperform a person for predictable and understandable sets of causes and actions, there is a reluctance to go all in on the AI/automation combo.

| Automation is actively being expanded throughout the IT infrastructure | 18% |
| Complex processes have been automated | 8% |
| Some multi-step processes have been automated | 19% |
| Simple tasks have been automated | 22% |
| Automation is in the planning phase | 30% |
| Nothing is automated and we aren’t planning to automate anytime soon | 4% |

Figure 3: To what degree have you implemented automation in your organization?

EMA research clearly shows that, as experience establishes the reliability of the technologies, the willingness to take action on AI/analytics-informed decisions, recommendations, and predictions increases dramatically. As it does, so also does the impact on so many aspects of business and service performance, including cost savings and productivity. However important it is that an ITSM platform welcome and facilitate automation, it is also a plus for the level of automation to scale with the audience.
**ITSM automation no-brainers**

The shining star of automation in the ITSM world is cross-functional workflows. When barriers of systems, policy, interests, and information are subsumed by an automated process, all kinds of benefits ensue. The most obvious could be correctly guessed: increased efficiency, savings of cost and time, and improved service. The unintended consequences are almost always substantial benefits, including: improved user experience, better collaboration between groups and functions, process streamlining, service innovation, and increased business/IT alignment.

In fact, when asked about the benefits of automation in ITSM, a panel of 400 global IT leaders weighed in with an average of six unique benefits and areas of improvement each. Forced to choose their “favorite,” the results, as shown in Figure 4, are benefits sure to move CIOs and business stakeholders as well as ITSM practitioners.

![Figure 4: Top benefits of automation as reported by 400 ITSM practitioners.](chart)

- **Cost savings across IT**: 28%
- **Improved IT operational efficiencies**: 25%
- **Improved end-user/customer satisfaction**: 21%
- **Improved quality of delivered services**: 18%
- **Improved business outcomes for IT services**: 8%
If workflow automation is the shining star of ITSM automation, then bots and virtual agents (VA) are the workhorses. Bringing new levels and quality of self-service, they literally sweep away hundreds, or even thousands, of boring hours spent on routine, repetitive, predictable work that machines can do. As enterprises are actively learning, VAs and bots can do a lot—and do it well.

When asked to describe deployment of bots or VAs, EMA research identified only 5% of a global respondent base that is not taking advantage of these advances. Use of VAs and bots is nearly universal, and on the rise in numbers and in the degree of service sophistication.

![Figure 5: Which statement best describes your deployment of virtual agents and/or AI bots?](image)

Advances in machine learning (ML) and natural language understanding (NLU) make virtual agents the logical first stop in any ITSM scenario. Of course, the fantastic benefits they offer only happen if the VA gets used. Users hold that key, so it makes sense to offer a range of channels for interacting with it.

Experience and research agree that the more conversational and intuitive VAs are, the greater the productivity gains. EMA has spoken with ITSM practitioners who report slashing live agent interaction by as much as 80% and doing so with a vastly improved level of first-ask resolution. What’s more, when done well, users increasingly prefer the convenience and efficiency of always-on VA service.
End-user experience and productivity

Users are where work happens, wherever users may be. As recent events demonstrate, the how of work is as changeable as the where. Changing work patterns of a remote workforce place increased demands on ITSM, as well as IT in general. High-performing IT services are fundamental to high-performing workers. There is no walk down the hall substitute for collaboration that is ongoing and asynchronous.

Even before the shakeups of 2020, end-user experience was on the rise as a C-level matter of interest. Now, it is almost synonymous with productivity. Beyond the obvious role it plays in supporting users with requests, inquiries, and problems, ITSM serves as the logical hub of innovation in service excellence.

Increasingly, ITSM platforms and organizations need to deliver services that are meaningful to both internal and external users. Especially in industries that rely on knowledge workers, enterprises understand the business value of employee satisfaction.

Viewing the end user as a customer requires ITSM solutions that are flexible enough to accommodate the many innovations that move the needle of end-user satisfaction and engagement. ITSM platforms can greatly and continually improve the end-user experience with capabilities such as:

- **Unified portal** – If an ITSM team could do only one thing to make life as an employee better than average, a unified portal might be it. Available on desktop and mobile, a single, unified portal by which users can access help, information, resources, and information across functions simplifies the act of being an employee. It removes the burden of having to know which group to ask for what and when from the employee, clearing the path to resolution that is painless as well as quick.

- **AI and workflow automation** – AI technologies, including the whole range of ML and NLU/P, when used with advanced analytics and automation can revolutionize the user's experience of seeking and receiving support. A major part of this improvement is the ability to break down the barriers between functions and siloed systems of information. To the extent that they can get what they need by speaking or texting as they do in everyday life, they will adopt and maximize self-service options. As they do, their satisfaction rises and ITSM agents are freed to do more challenging, rewarding work.

- **Role-based tailored access and workspace** – Part of serving the end-user is knowing who they are and what they need to do. An ITSM agent needs a vastly different set of capabilities than an HR professional needs. When a user's access to ITSM functions is tailored to their interests, both productivity and satisfaction increase.

- **Dashboards and reporting** – Executives and managers are users too. They thrive on information and insight. A flexible ITSM platform can provide a full range of dashboards and reports that show metrics that matter to each distinct audience or user. In turn, this information drives improvements in quality and types of service delivered.

- **DevOps** – A less obvious end-user connection is the relationship of DevOps to ITSM. The connection of these functions brings developers closer to the destination of the code they write. The distance between intended and actual performance is shortened when there is a clear line of sight between developers and the performance of their code. This partnering, though not visible to end-users, can have a dramatic effect on their experience.

As ITSM organizations play an ever more central role in enterprises, the platform itself can serve as either a drag on end-user experience or an accelerant to employee satisfaction.
EMA Perspective

Obviously, it takes executive support, organizational vision, and a corporate culture that values employee satisfaction to make a first-rate ITSM function (increasingly cloud-based). It must be provisioned with the people and processes that enable service excellence. However, the ITSM solution or platform selection is a major factor in delivering on that excellence.

Each organization needs to run its due diligence based on a realistic understanding of its own unique requirements, resources, and limitations. However, EMA advises that they approach vendor selection from an aspirational viewpoint, bringing to the search a readiness to meet an uncertain future with robust adaptability. The selection of a new ITSM platform has enduring implications for enterprise health and growth.

It’s easy to get disoriented in a sea of features and dueling vendor proclamations. Treating the three broad areas covered in this paper as strategic mandates will reduce the noise and focus attention. At the end of the day, ITSM is a lot more about service and people than it is about IT.

Asked to rate the top benefits received from their ITSM-related technologies, the global panel of ITSM practitioners responded with a people-heavy list. In order of ranking, the top benefits cited are:

1. Increased IT personnel productivity
2. IT cost savings
3. Higher customer/end-user satisfaction
4. Better collaboration across all IT groups
5. Improved collaboration between IT and business
6. New or improved cross-organizational services
7. Reduced unplanned IT work
8. Increased agent job satisfaction

When it comes to ITSM, the benefits are real and most often personal.

ITSM is logically positioned to drive innovation, unite automation initiatives, and unify collaborative, cross-functional processes. Execution on this potential requires a strategic vision and valuation of the ITSM function coupled with an ITSM platform that is ready when tomorrow happens today.
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Founded in 1996, Enterprise Management Associates (EMA) is a leading industry analyst firm that provides deep insight across the full spectrum of IT and data management technologies. EMA analysts leverage a unique combination of practical experience, insight into industry best practices, and in-depth knowledge of current and planned vendor solutions to help EMA’s clients achieve their goals. Learn more about EMA research, analysis, and consulting services for enterprise line of business users, IT professionals and IT vendors at www.enterprisemanagement.com or blogs.enterprisemanagement.com. You can also follow EMA on Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn.

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Corporate Headquarters:
1995 North 57th Court, Suite 120
Boulder, CO 80301
Phone: +1 303.543.9500
www.enterprisemanagement.com