

# **The art of error reporting. How well does IT inform its users? What are the security risks?**

## **Introduktion**

A central disruption in IT can interfere with the flow of work of many users and thus cause great annoyance. However, the situation can be made more relaxed for the user as well as for the IT support if the IT actively informs its users when a new malfunction is detected or during maintenance work. To what extent this is practiced today and with what success is examined in this White Paper.

## **Central faults stress users and IT**

Almost everyone knows the problem: The e-mail system does not work or the Internet is not available. But where is the error? Is there a central fault, or do you have to search the problem on your own computer?

Usually the neighbor is first asked if he has the same problem. If this is the case, it seems to be more of a central disruption, and the user contacts the IT support - presumably at the same time as other affected colleagues, which is why you are in the queue. And after 15 minutes, it turns out that there is actually a central disruption and the IT support is already taking care of the solution.

During this time the support staff took numerous phone calls with identical contents and received many new tickets with identical fault message. And users are annoyed about the unreliable IT.

This anger is also the case when the malfunction is caused by long-term maintenance. After all, which user reads such messages and remembers them when he encounters a fault?

The time during a malfunction in IT operation can be much more relaxed if IT proactively informs the users of known or expected malfunctions. Users do not have to search for the error long afterwards, and IT support is freed from unnecessary calls and tickets, has more time and less cost.

## **The survey**

In order to find out how well IT informs its users about known malfunctions and maintenance, a survey should be conducted first.

The survey shall be divided into two parts: In part one, the questions are asked to users, in the other part, the questions are only asked explicitly to the members of the IT support team. Half of the users come from the IT sector, while the other half comes from various fields such as marketing, sales, production, service, etc.

## **Users want to be informed comprehensively**

In the beginning, the question was asked whether the users should be informed about disturbances and maintenance work proactively, or whether they prefer to do without the information flow. The answer is clear: Users place great value on being informed proactively.

This expectation of the users also coincides with the attitude of the IT support: 100% of the polls in various industries responded that the active notification of the users about known disturbances and maintenance work is very important and meaningful.

### **The communication channels are mostly e-mail and intranet**

When asked which communication channels the IT uses to inform its users, the e-mail was most frequently mentioned, closely followed by status messages in the company intranet. This distribution is almost independent of company size and industry, or via a message on a static site on the intranet, via a bandage call when calling the service desk hotline, via a pop-up message on a screen, other method.

**SMS, Skype, message in the ticket system, telephone call, or conference, should be mentioned as other channels, whereby it should be expressly forbidden to use channels such as Skype, SMS, What's Up or other social media. This makes it easy to penetrate the company network. Faked IT malfunctions are often used for these purposes.**

In about half of the companies, IT uses only one channel to notify users.

When two channels are used at the same time, this is the most common e-mail and intranet. Rarely, a more comprehensive mix of information channels is used.

### **The users generally rate the information policy of their IT positively**

In the question of how well the users feel informed about their IT via malfunctions and maintenance work, there are predominantly positive answers.

This result is almost coincident with the assessment of IT support in the question of how well these inform their users. The idiom of the IT support thus fits very well with the external image conveyed by the users.

### **The middle class is the worst**

Comparing companies with similar size makes it no difference from which area a user comes from. Users of all disciplines evaluate the information policy of their IT in the same way. The hierarchy level also plays no role.

However, there is a dependency of the ratings on the company size. Large companies (> 10.000 employees) appear more often in the better ratings and rarely even at the worse ratings. The information policy of the IT support of these companies is therefore positively classified by their users.

Medium sized companies (1,000 - 5,000 employees) appear less frequently in the positive ratings and more often in the worse ratings. The information policy of the IT support of these companies is ranked worse in comparison with the other company sizes.

The share of small firms (<500 employees) remains roughly the same across all evaluations.

A possible interpretation of these results is that in the case of small companies, the information about current IT disturbances also flows well through "Hallway Radio". The information supply is thus never rated as inadequate, even if the IT support itself does not make a great effort. This is different in the case of large companies: central IT support can not deal with thousands of users who want to report the fault at the same time.

### **Active notification via pop-up achieves the best ratings and is safest**

An interesting picture emerges also in the evaluation of the individual notification channels. If the IT uses automatic telephone announcements, only 40% of the users feel very good to well informed. **If the IT shows pop-up messages on the screens of the users in case of malfunctions and maintenance, this proportion rises to over 80%. Obviously, users appreciate the fact that they do not have to search different sources, such as e-mails or intranets for IT messages, in the event of malfunctions. Instead, they receive this information directly on their screen.**

**Since POP-Up messages are only distributed within the company network, this method is the safest.**

**Users' ratings depend not only on the channels. Even if e-mails and the intranet were used for malfunctions or maintenance messages, users have, in some cases, assessed the information policy of their IT only with "sufficient" to "insufficient".**

This shows that the existence of the tools alone is not yet a good information policy. IT must also use it for the communication of malfunctions and maintenance work. However, it is also shown that the use of pop-up messages decreases the proportion of bad evaluations to almost zero. Obviously, the IT makes use of it in company networks in which this channel is available.

The IT must therefore actively communicate via suitable means. In medium-sized companies, this pressure on suffering does not yet seem to be high enough, or the potential for active information provision has not yet been recognized. Correspondingly, the medium-sized companies are more likely to be present in the poor ratings.

### **IT support saves costs and users are more satisfied**

Now imagine the question of how to get an optimal notification to the users over current disturbances and maintenance work on the work of the IT-support. Although no absolute figures are known, the answers from IT support people were clear:

- **Increased accessibility of the hotline:** By actively notifying the user via Pop-Up, the number of calls to the service desk during the fault phase or maintenance work is reduced, thus increasing the availability of the hotline. **Security is not compromised.**
- **Reduction of tickets:** The number of tickets newly created by users is reduced during the fault phase or maintenance work, thus reducing the workload for the service desk.
- **Higher user satisfaction:** Users feel better informed, and the reputation of IT is improved from the point of view of users.

### **Conclusion**

Disturbances in IT operations can have a very negative impact on users' satisfaction and can put IT support on additional workloads through numerous unnecessary calls and tickets.

However, this only applies if the users are not proactively supplied with information on known faults or maintenance work. As determined in the context of an online survey, users already assess the information supply from IT today as a matter of fact. But there is also a lot to improve: the middle

class has comparatively badly cut off and should consider the information supply of its users and adjust.

The transmission of messages by e-mail and intranet, but push messages as pop-up messages on the screen are significantly better evaluated by the users. For this reason, IT should consistently disseminate its messages about known disruptions and maintenance work **via pop-up messages**. According to the results of the online survey, an optimal information supply saves IT support costs and at the same time increases user satisfaction.

White Paper 2016 - Bernhard Bowitz