

Sunrise Sostenuto ITSM

If you think you know all there is to know about helpdesk - or more accurately ITSM - software, then stand to be corrected. With Sostenuto developer Sunrise, best known for its established if now slightly ageing Enterprise product, has rewritten the rulebook with a pure browser-based application built on an underlying CORBA-Java distributed architecture.

This is not simply a "web-ised" version of Sunrise Enterprise but a completely new product in every sense. The idea is that there are inherent cost-benefits attached to deploying an entirely web-based product, such as a high level of process automation and simple user interface, both saving time and therefore costs. And whereas most helpdesk software deployments involve rolling out that software to multiple sites, with Sostenuto it needs only a single upgrade on one machine. A URL is then sent to all the clients enabling them to download the Java runtime module necessary to run the software. That, plus a copy of Internet Explorer is all that is required for a user to get up and running. Meanwhile, at the server end, a

SQL Server database plus a web server such as Microsoft IIS needs to be in place.

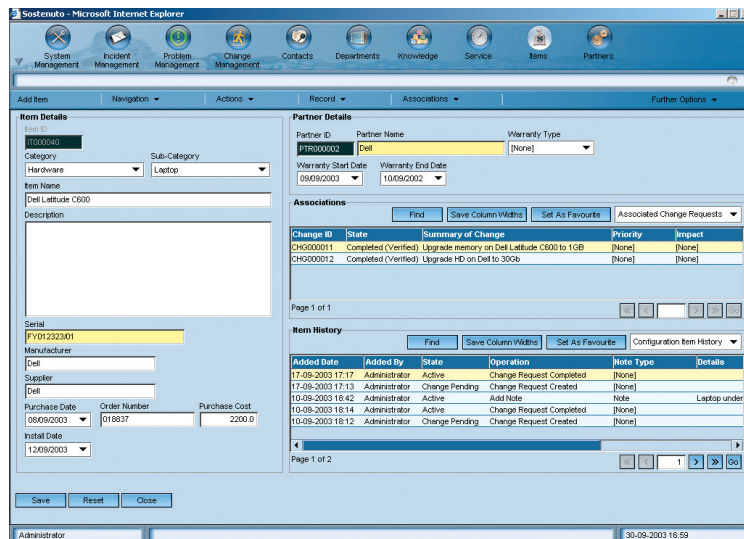
For many years now it could be argued that the helpdesk software market has remained largely static, even predictable. With Sostenuto however, Sunrise is changing the approach of service management software development, while maintaining all of the key features you would expect to find in a helpdesk product. Whereas the common, modular approach is relatively rigid in terms of how it forces you to work in a particular way (and can be expensive to boot) Sostenuto has been developed from the ground up as a framework, as well as a set of ITSM-specific tools. This means that, in practice, you can treat it as a "me too" product if that's what you need and it will willingly oblige. At the same time, should you wish to explore the - very extensive - limits of the software, you will find that your imagination is really the only limit.

If this sounds a little scary then you can take some comfort in the knowledge that Sunrise already has some "early-adopters" using the product in

ways they hadn't even envisaged themselves, or even that they entirely understand, but the customers are very happy. In some ways the situation is analogous to when Lotus introduced Notes (which became a phenomenal success of course) and spent the first 12 months trying to work out what it actually did for a living!

But it's as a relatively straightforward, fully featured ITSM product that Sostenuto presents itself on first acquaintance. The big differences lay beneath the surface. Sostenuto is based around the idea of configured services, rather than true hard-coded modules, or sub-applications with a view to being almost infinitely flexible.

A pre-defined set of services is provided, which include familiar helpdesk areas such as Incident Management, Problem Management, Change Management and Contact Management. These appear on a menu bar running along the top of the browser screen with a number of windows below that varying in type and function depending on the service, and features thereof, being accessed. Importantly, Sunrise has



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taken all the best Windows-GUI features such as "drag and drop" and incorporated them into the browser interface. All too often, a browser-based application can lack real functionality but this isn't the case at all here.

In addition to the default set provided, any services can be created. Services are effectively a series of configurations that define the presentation, behaviour, location and security features of the information associated with that service, which itself is defined by one or more configurable "Lifecycles". Basically, a lifecycle dictates which operations can be performed on a service request/task and when these operations can be performed, such as creation/deletion and updates.

Access to those operations is further controlled by the security model. Security is a key feature of the software, with a common, multi-tiered methodology running throughout the product, regardless of service type. Operations performed on a service request/task may change the state of that service request/task and it is these "states" that represent key milestones throughout the

lifetime of the service request/task, from creation to deletion. Each lifecycle is triggered-off by specific criteria you define when configuring the service. For example, when setting up an Incident Management service, you might define a category field to represent the category of the incident being reported. This category may represent a software issue, hardware issue or network issue, for example. When defining lifecycles, you can define different operations based on the type of category, where the category acts as the trigger for a lifecycle and what criteria must be met for that lifecycle to be initiated, such as "category equals software". You then specify the operations that can be performed for that lifecycle and so on.

At the heart of a service is the workflow. This defines the order in which information is captured, specifically the control of screens that are displayed in response to user operations and events. The workflow specifies which operation/event will display a certain screen or populate the details on the current screen. It is activated upon the selection of a service, defining which screen is dis-

played first and subsequently in response to those user operations/events. Underpinning all events within Sostenuo is a business rules engine that enables the software to react to events and programme schedules so that field updates, operations and notifications can be performed automatically when a rule is triggered. That automation process is something the IT industry has been evangelising about for years, yet we're still looking at a largely "manual" world today.

While Sostenuo might sound somewhat complicated in theory, in use this complexity is largely transparent - it's all down to the configuration. And because of Sunrise's limitless service configuration approach, you can 'start off simple' and keep on evolving the system as dictated by user demands and timescales - classic future proofing, in other words. **SW**

Product: Sostenuo ITSM
Supplier: Sunrise
Telephone: +44 (0) 20 8391 9000
Website: www.sunrisew.com
Pricing: From under £20000 for a 10-user licence.