[HELP DESK INTERNSHIP]

This report covers a host of generic topics concerning the internship position at the University of Montana’s Faculty IT Help Desk in the School of Business Administration. This report is written from the perspective of the intern and is meant to show an overall picture of the organization and the placement of the intern within that organization.
Background

The University of Montana has no shortage of Help Desks around campus. It seems like every major building on campus as got a little station where a knowledgeable representative can be found and used as a resource for various needs; and the School of Business Administration (SOBA) in the Gallagher Business Building is no exception. Many would say that SOBA actually has three Help Desks: SOBA Central, the Advising Office, and the Faculty IT Help Desk. This report will cover the Faculty IT Help Desk, and I will often refer to it as “The Help Desk.”

Because SOBA is so technology driven it makes sense to have technicians available during working hours to be on call in the case of technological failure or annoyance. Every classroom has a projector run by a computer, many of which have dual displays. Every large lecture hall in the Business School has a wireless microphone and an audio system to match it. With rare exceptions, each member of SOBA faculty or staff has a Hewlett-Packard computer with dual displays, printers, accessories, and a host of program installation needs (no pun intended). To complicate things further, nearly every piece of technology in the Business Building needs to be networked, integrated, and often synchronized; needless to say, this can get tricky.

Products/Services

At the SOBA Help Desk, service is the product. Yes, interns like me deal with products all the time, but we don’t produce them or sell them; actually we have very little control over the material we work with. Technology products distributed in the School of Business are, more often than not, ordered in large lots without direct input of technicians; therefore the drumbeat of a Help Desk intern is service. A great Help Desk technician (intern) will be knowledgeable, courteous, and fast; our sales technique comes in the form of customer satisfaction alone. Because our track record shows that we accomplish the tasks
charged to us, I see little possibility of this work being outsourced any time soon. To be frank, I believe that SOBA will have good uses for Help Desk interns for a very long time to come.

Because the School of Business Administration is funded by students and the Faculty Help Desk is not intended for students to use, the pricing connection is often missed. Many uninitiated students would tell you that “the faculty receive free tech support.” Ironically, that confused student is actually partially footing the bill for the services described. Yet, if the students are the chief customers of SOBA, and the Faculty of SOBA depend of the technology services provided from the Help Desk, then one could make the argument that the Help Desk is a support function to students, distant though it may be.

Though very scant, the SOBA Help Desk is promoted on the School Business website. Hidden in the footer of a few webpages one can see a reference to us via our online ticketing system called Spiceworks. When clicked, a member of the faculty or staff can use their standard SOBA credentials to log-in to a system designed to help problems get solved. The ticketing system is basically a message board where help-seekers can submit a “ticket” describing their problem. These “tickets” are received in kind by interns like me, who process them and respond by posting a message. While the SOBA website’s reference to the Spiceworks system does promote the work done at the Help Desk, it is a poor excuse for promotion and frankly, it’s not enough; I would at least like to see a phone number when running a basic search for “SOBA Help Desk” or “Gallagher Help Desk.”

But how much traditional promotion is necessary for a station like the SOBA Help Desk? The phone number for the Help Desk is listed on every pink directory sheet given to every member of the faculty and staff. What’s more is that every member of faculty or staff at SOBA who uses an e mail address had to, at some point, have had a personal appointment with a member of the Help Desk to have their main machine integrated with their SOBA e mail account. For some, this may have been years ago, but they likely remember the encounter and know where to find us if they need to. The bread and butter of
“marketing” at the SOBA Help Desk is the propagation of success stories by way of word of mouth communication. We aim to deliver high quality service with the expectation that our customers will talk about us positively and keep us around; and so far, there’s enough work to keep the staff at the Help Desk busy – most of the time.

Target Market

To the intern, it’s often seen as ironic that a professor has problems with their technology. After all, aren’t the professors supposed to be smarter than the students? Of course, this is laughable to any of us who have been in the real world for any reasonable amount of time because we know that specialization in the workplace is key to success; just ask Adam Smith. Why would a professor of finance need to know that a video cable tends to break down over time? Why would a marketing researcher be required to set up a network printer? Why, indeed? Plainly put, the target market for the SOBA Help Desk are the people who work within the Business Building who have better things to do than set-up and maintain technology. As a student paying for this service I’m glad that a professor’s salary doesn’t pay for them to be tech-experts, what a waste that would be! It is much better to have an intern making minimum wage do technology related work; besides they’re glad to do it!

Financial Strength

Regardless of the financial stability of the University of Montana, or for that matter SOBA, the Faculty Help Desk is at risk of failure. While this is unlikely, it’s important to recognize that much of IT is outsourced, much of which is offshore. Gone are the days when a local repair person was the only option. Today, help is only a phone call, or a text away. Because the computer systems at SOBA are mainly Microsoft Windows based, “Remote Desktop” can be used, giving a web-based technician the power to move the mouse and operate the keyboard of the machine in peril from anywhere in the
world; as long as there is an internet connection. That last part is key, and is one of the major factors which improve the likelihood of retention of the SOBA Help Desk, yet there are several other important topics which give the organization financial strength.

Firstly and most importantly is the clear fact that much of IT must be separated from the internet. This is obvious because the internet doesn’t always work and in those times, nearby technicians truly are the only remedy. Also it’s foolhardy to expect a web-based technician to be able to carry a computer to an office, listen to a funny sound inside a machine, or change a projector bulb. On top of all that is the security risk associated with connecting to tech support on every issue. Often times Help Desk technicians have access to very sensitive material and hold the power to cause massive digital damage to a customer’s machine. The fact that faculty and staff are usually looking over a technician’s shoulder helps keep everybody honest; as well as provides teaching opportunities when appropriate. In short, having live people in house provides benefits unlikely to be surpassed by virtual counterparts.

Human Resources

Okay, let’s be honest, interns don’t usually make much money. At the Help Desk, this axiom holds true to the tune of minimum wage. But that shouldn’t be too discouraging given the fact that many other benefits exist at the SOBA Help Desk.

To lead off, interns are allowed to do homework while at work. Most places of business frown at activities which don’t apply to the job, but at the SOBA Help Desk, if there is nothing to do, homework is king. Another strong benefit to working at the Help Desk is that the hours are very flexible. Given that all interns are students and the Help Desk manager is a student, it’s understood that classes are important and need to come before a work schedule. Generally speaking, the job is very friendly to students and at times, allows them to get ahead of their studies while at work. But these are not the greatest benefits at the SOBA Help Desk.
The greatest benefit of working at the SOBA Help Desk comes in the form of career opportunities. This is a bit misleading at first because I don’t mean “career opportunities at the Help Desk;” –no, those don’t really exist. What I mean is that working at the SOBA Help Desk provides career opportunities elsewhere. A rookie student starts work at the Help Desk without much knowledge of the systems at SOBA, yet by the end of a single semester that student can confidently navigate dozens of systems and technologies with fluidity. When that notion is coupled with the fact that customer service is held in highest regard, one can say that the Help Desk is in the business of pumping out market professionals, and that is a very worthy benefit indeed.

**Company Organization**

The organization of the Help Desk is somewhat plain. There is a manager who oversees the technicians, a few full-time specialists who manage highly specialized technologies, and an upper manager who oversees them all. It is common for technicians to ask questions to specialists and managers directly, yet that’s often not necessary. Most normally technicians will lean on each other or internet resources for answers. Memos and updates are disseminated to all who carry the Help Desk banner; usually these messages come from the management or specialists and rarely does a technician get involved in that at all. Each week a meeting is held wherein the details of big topics which came up during the week are discussed. Sometimes it becomes prudent to outline the weekly meeting and send it out to the technicians who use the outline to continue ongoing projects.

**Future Plans**

Centered on customer service, the Help Desk’s future plans entail further promoting themselves as competent and friendly members of the SOBA community. Ambiguous though it may be, this plan does have some direction, namely the Help Desk Technician’s Manual, which I am directly a part of. The Help
Desk Technician’s Manual will be an evolving document which includes resources on commonly executed tasks and behaviors of technicians who are so heavily relied upon by faculty and staff. This resource will guide even the most novice of interns down a pathway to ultimate at the Help Desk so long as they abide by its wisdom. As the technologies change, customer service will remain and the future of the Help Desk will undoubtedly continue to depend on that as its core competency.

Conclusion

Having had much experience in the world of computers and IT, I can confidently say that my time spent at the SOBA Help Desk thus far has been both meaningful and worthy of my time. I feel that this experience is allowing me to both hone my skills in IT, and give me a platform to work on my scholastics while getting paid. This job has been a no-lose scenario from day one, and it will continue to be for all those interns to come as long as customer service is the primary focus of this job. The days can be long, and certainly there have been times when I’ve found myself drowning in calls, but normally this is not the case. On an average day, an intern can study, answer a few calls, and solve a few problems with a smile; if there is a better internship for students of information systems I am unaware of it.