

# Creating a Valuable Service Catalog

By Mike Tainter, Forsythe

## Do You Know What's on the Menu? A Critical Step toward Delivering Better Service

*Business says “to-MAY-to.” IT says “to-MAH-to,” but what are they really saying to each other? And how can they say it better?*

The CFO tells the CIO to work with IT to develop a program that will track the EBITDA and the ROI, all while justifying the AOQL ... and the CIO needs the COO to approve the department's new asynchronous communication server and routed internet protocol. Business says “to-MAY to.” IT says “to-MAH-to,” but what are they really saying to each other? IT and business may be able to increase their chances for more successful communications by simply creating a menu. But how? And what exactly does this mean?

Today's IT organizations face a continual challenge to align themselves with the business. Simultaneously, as the business focuses on constant updates and changes in order to stay ahead of the competition, they look to IT to provide value. The trouble is that the two groups often do not speak the same language. IT tends to use terms that the business does not understand and vice versa, creating a disconnect in understanding and expectations. Too often, IT uses technology terms to describe their services to the business, and the business attempts to learn technology-speak in order to keep pace. Conversely, the business challenges IT to provide it with a competitive advantage, but IT does not know how to translate that into IT terms and services. Getting on the same page is a critical step toward ensuring that the business is better served by a better aligned and informed IT organization.

A technique that has proven successful for many companies is to adopt a service-oriented approach in IT, where the department works with the business to understand their requirements. Successful service level management that incorporates best practices from the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) has quickly become a de facto standard for many organizations. First and foremost, however, IT must develop a catalog of services for the business—written in business terms, of course.

Think about when you go to a restaurant. The first thing you expect to receive when you sit down at a table is the menu. Within this menu, you will see all of your choices, along with a short explanation of the cuisine, itemized and categorized as appetizers, soups, salads, main courses and desserts, as well as the price you will pay for each item. All of this—along with excellent service—is why you select specific dining establishments. If you did not receive a clear menu or good service, you probably would not become a frequent diner here.

Before management ever opens their doors, they need to take care of a number of front-end responsibilities in order to ensure that their customers' dining experience will be satisfying. Management will take great care in creating their menu. They will need to hire a pleasant host or hostess to greet customers. Tables need to be set. Wait staff must be adequately trained and scheduled. Food needs to be purchased and prepared, etc. Although, when you read the menu, none of these considerations are listed—you wouldn't expect them to be—but you do expect them to be provided.

Comparing IT to a restaurant may not sound relevant. After all, how could someone relate the trials and tribulations of an IT department to serving food in a restaurant? This comparison is not about the type of business, it is about the process used to communicate with customers. A clear menu helps set expectations and puts everyone—management, staff and customers—on the same page about the items that will be served.

### Consider This

If you take the time and energy required to develop a business-friendly IT service catalog (or “menu”) upfront, then, when new hires start at your company, you will be able let them know exactly what type of services IT can provide (see Figure 1). It will be written in terms that new employees understand and based on needs employees actually have. And, subsequently, when your CEO requests heightened security for your customers' private information or increased storage needs, you will be able to offer him/her a menu of IT services that will set expectations and offer a clear picture of deliverables, timeframe, cost estimates, etc.

Please note: You will need to be cautious here because creating your business menu is only the first step in the lengthy process of aligning business and IT.

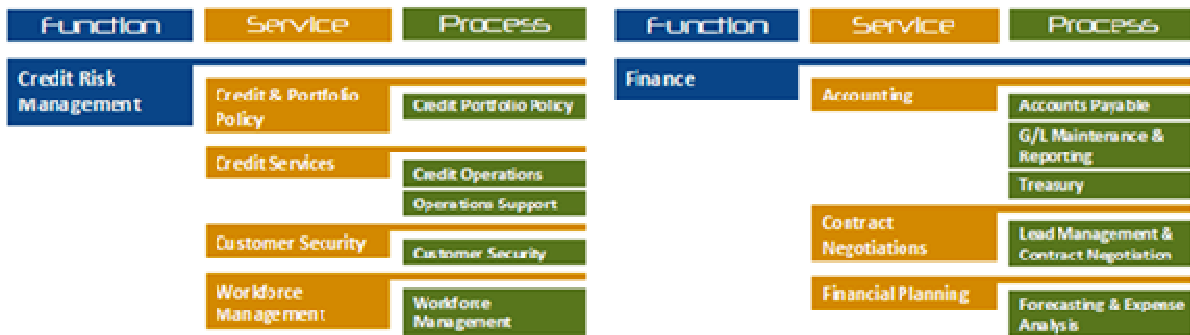


Figure 1. Business Service Catalog Example

Think about the restaurant again for a moment. In doing so, realize that in order to deliver the food on the menu, technology plays a big part. Ask yourself how this restaurant handles payment, inventory, purchasing, human resources and accounting. You will find that these services are common in most organizations and are often provided by infrastructure and applications that IT supports and delivers.

Now, let's examine some of the backend services that IT provides (see Figure 2). If you have a service catalog, does it make sense to both your internal and external customers? A lot of times, an IT service catalog contains services that are important to IT, but not to the customer. Server response times, availability targets for applications (that five 9s thing) and service names are typically aligned with the names of the applications, not with business needs. Your customers—both internal and external—cannot argue that these are actual services, and they are not in a position to dispute what they do not see every day. As a consumer of products in your own life, you do not normally consider all the technology and services required to deliver the things you purchase? For example, do average people ask about, or understand, the technology that is necessary to deliver the inventory for the lasagna they just ordered in their favorite Italian restaurant? Chances are, they take these things for granted, unless they do not get what they ordered.

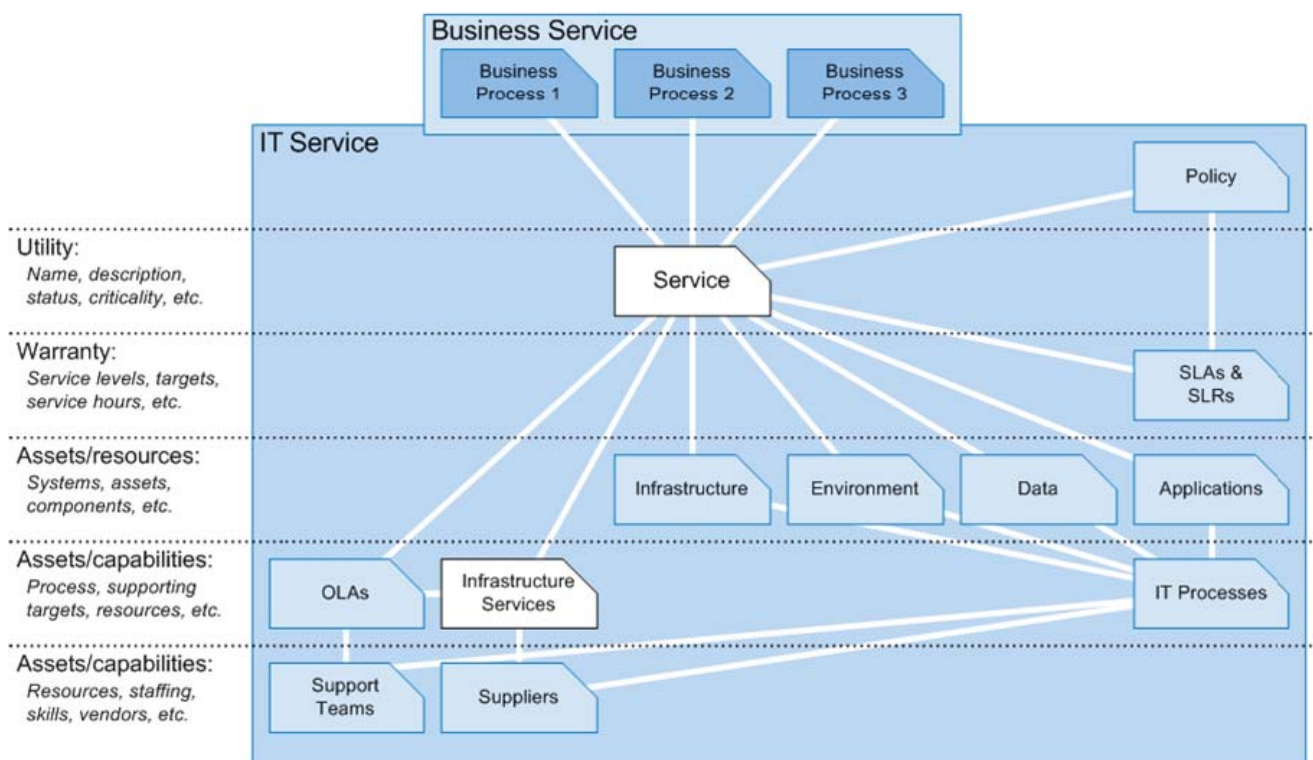


Figure 2. Service Example

## Adding Value to Business

IT organizations provide a number of components that are critical to everyday business. Activities such as email, Internet, network access, telecommunications and mobile computing technology are all necessary. However, these services that IT provides are also required for business to deliver subsequent services to their internal and external customers. Certainly, requirements that impact so many areas of business, and affect so many levels of customers down the line, need to be delivered in a unified and consistent manner.

The best way to determine what is, and is not, a necessary service is to talk to your business customers. Through this communication, business and IT can gain a greater understanding of each other in order to create a cohesive team. It does not matter what information your IT service catalog, or business menu, contains; it only matters that both sides agree and understand its true value. Once business and IT work together to create such a menu, then IT can take what they have learned to further develop it.

Steps May Include:

- Further defining requirements
- Determining what it will take to deliver services based on existing requirements
- Documenting the path to get there

Remember, simplicity is key. If you take the first step toward cataloging your services based on input and feedback from the business, you are on a path to success. Once your catalog is agreed upon between both parties, the rest of your service management program can begin to take shape. With a little effort on both parts, IT and business may finally be able to communicate with greater understanding and increased success.

## Don't stop now

Even when you've successfully attained and maintained your desired state, always look for new opportunities to update your service catalog. Don't know where to go from here? Maybe it's time for your next consultation with Forsythe consultants.

Let Forsythe help you develop and implement a valuable service catalog tailored specifically to your organization. It all begins with a conversation. Call Forsythe today.

As the director of Forsythe's IT service management (ITSM) practice, **Mike Tainter** focuses on ITSM, ITIL, operations management, process design, IT operations support system development, and IT logistical requirements for a wide variety of organizations. He may be reached at [mtainter@forsythe.com](mailto:mtainter@forsythe.com).

