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Disney's ITIL[®] Journey

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Introduction

The Walt Disney Company (TWDC) has five major segments: Studios, Consumer Products, Media Networks, Interactive Media and Theme Parks & Resorts. Glen Taylor is VP of Technology for Theme Parks & Resorts (TP&R). It is the largest division in the organization and in 2009 generated \$10.7 billion – approximately 30% of TWDC's revenue. The division currently manages 11 parks, two water parks, 42 resorts and two cruise ships.

The scale of the organization is extraordinary. Over 118 million people visit the parks every year. In comparison, the 2010 World Cup brought around 350,000 visitors to South Africa.

Theme Parks & Resorts is the only segment of TWDC that interacts face-to-face with its customers every day, 365 days a year. During peak times some parks are open and full of guests for 18 hours a day. The 42 resorts have over 36,000 rooms worldwide. Cosmic Ray's restaurant at Magic Kingdom in Orlando is the busiest quick-service restaurant in the world. Walt Disney World alone employs more than 100,000 people and runs the third-largest bus fleet in Florida.

Demand on systems and on 'cast members' (as all employees are called) is significant. The IT department employs nearly 1,000 people globally, manages contractors and consultants and works closely with TWDC's Enterprise IT team on outsourced services, such as data centre management (IBM) and service desk operations (ACS). 'Each park is like a city in itself,' Glen says. 'Nearly 45% of the entire company's applications are dedicated to TP&R. We have over 800 applications and 1,800 servers. The pressure on reliability and availability is enormous.'

Clearly, excellence in service management is critical for the organization. 'Guests have high expectations of what a Disney Parks experience should be and we are a guest-centric business. We are focused on telling the story through immersive experiences and in-the-moment interactions between guests and cast members. Technology is used to advance that story. Behind the scenes we are looking for increased efficiencies and cost reductions while all the time improving creatively and technically.'

Disney's ITIL® journey

Disney began adopting ITIL best practice in the mid-2000s. ITIL was developed by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) in the UK and is the most widely accepted approach to IT service management in the world. It provides a cohesive set of best practice, drawn from the public and private sectors internationally.

Hired by the former Chief Information Officer (CIO) to kick-start TP&R's ITIL initiative, Glen has championed the adoption of ITIL since his appointment in 2008. Already an experienced ITIL adopter, he was keen to move towards an integrated service management approach, backed up by ITIL best practice.

'ITIL aligns IT with the business and our goal was to grow into a more proactive IT organization. We were looking for an improved level of service. ITIL helped provide the tools and metrics to define the value of IT services.'

The ultimate objective of TP&R is to provide guests with 'the perfect experience.' For IT, this means 100% availability, reliability and maintainability. 'It means we have to ensure that widespread change does not result in incidents; that we are sure-footed and confident with our release management and new capabilities. We also need to ensure we manage our outsourcing contracts with the utmost professionalism. ITIL best practice provides these assurances,' Glen says.

Getting widespread adoption

Getting widespread adoption of a new method or way of working in such a large organization is no mean feat. 'With over 700 domestic IT cast, we simply can't adopt large-scale change overnight,' he explains. 'Where I talk about best practice and ITIL integration, at the start of the process, the staff only know how we do business. They are unaware of both ITIL and our interest in it. The first step is to make them

aware of our interest. This entailed marketing ITIL from the executive level down, and leveraging existing forums, including our “Lunch ‘n’ Learn” sessions and manager meetings, to raise awareness of both the issues we faced and how ITIL could help us address them more effectively. Then we used some bottom-up marketing tactics with internal social networking tools such as “BackLot”, which is a bit like our own MySpace, where we share documents and discussions.’

The next step was to instigate an educational programme from CIO level down. ‘We were aware that time was of great importance so we condensed the ITIL Foundation training from three days to two days. We also combined the training with additional topics that made the training more relevant to Disney and our segment’s specific challenges. We trained 250 people in ITIL Foundation and they elected whether or not they wanted to take the exam. We are pleased that 50% of people opted to get certified.’

But adoption of ITIL doesn’t end with education, Glen says. ‘After education we need to get buy-in and organizational commitment. To do this we selected 20 champions from across TP&R. We have put them on the path to Expert level, working through online training from itSM Solutions. It’s vital that we have a mix of people on the programme, so there are people with differing levels of responsibility.’

Choosing ITIL Experts

ITIL Experts are chosen according to four criteria. They need:

- To be able to articulate the vision for the processes they manage or work with
- To be able to learn and understand the considerable amount of information that ITIL V3 comprises
- A personality that can persuade and influence people, work collaboratively, and fight resistance
- To be able to leverage ITIL best practice and have an understanding of what is doable.

‘We look for people who demonstrate those four capabilities from a range of sources within the organization. We want people with executive control – directors and VPs – but also from the management ranks, or individual contributors, as we call them. We want people who share a passion for best practice and who can influence the people around them. We have found that people who are doubters at the beginning, but who come to find out more and are gradually converted, are the best champions.’

Glen feels it is important that his ITIL champions have a broad view of ITIL. ‘We want their commitment that they will get to Expert level because we think that all ITIL processes form part of a whole.’

‘Disney’s approach for creating inside champions to promote the value that ITIL brings in delivering a great guest experience is consistent with what Disney cast members do on a day-to-day basis,’ stated Rick Lemieux, VP of Sales and Managing Partner at itSM Solutions. ‘The use of ITIL best practices will ensure that nothing behind the scenes will impact the magic that guests experience in the theme parks or cruise ships,’ continued Lemieux.

For Disney, technology is an essential part of the customer experience. Some recent examples: TP&R works with Verizon Mobile, giving guests waiting times for their favourite rides and locations of their favourite characters at their fingertips. It has introduced a handheld device which keeps track of inventory on mobile retail carts and allows vendors to reorder dwindling supplies with a few keystrokes. It is using radio frequency identification for a global costume management system which scans what cast members choose from the racks and compares it to their role for the day to make sure they have the right items. It has also built a custom scheduling system allowing cast to swap schedules in seconds.

These ever-changing innovations, coupled with a push for increased efficiencies and cost reductions, mean ITIL’s assurance role in delivering excellent service management continues to be a vital one.

More ITIL information: www.itil-officialsite.com

Glen's advice for organizations adopting ITIL

- Don't underestimate the communication needed – it is critical to success.
- Leverage the tools and documents that already exist and don't reinvent wheels.
- Stay as practical as possible, and don't overcomplicate what is really common sense.

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