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Review: OneDesk Has Centralized Collaboration, Social Media Monitoring

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OneDesk is a souped-up project management tool designed from the ground up for team collaboration and participation from external users.

OneDesk touts itself as social software designed to connect employees, partners and customers. In essence, it is a suite of applications designed to help businesses perform project management with an emphasis on collaboration and social media monitoring.

The unified product and services platform includes help desk support and the ability to track feedback from the top social media sites. Its comprehensive project management tools offer a place to share and track ideas, issues, requirements, roadmaps and even calendars. Moreover, customer service management capabilities and a customer portal allow companies to translate these items into actionable tasks as part of the internal project management process. You can see the full list of capabilities here.

The online service works entirely from a Flash applet loaded from a Web browser and is designed like a PC-based software application. This Flash-based heritage means there is no right mouse-click, and OneDesk will not load on devices that don't support Flash – such as an iPad tablet. There are other considerations to this approach that we shall discuss later.

Due to the sheer depth of the software, I will focus mainly on its social media monitoring capabilities and its use for project collaboration.

Project Collaboration

One of the core features OneDesk offers is in the area of project management. In that vein, the service allows for Microsoft Project files to be imported to get started quickly. I found the ability to put the product roadmap onto a timeline very useful, providing visibility into the decision-making process as well as providing a sense of continuity with the various assigned tasks. It is possible to use drag-and-drop to create links between tasks, and rapidly zooming in (and out) of the project Gantt chart can be done using a handy slider that functions as a variable time-scale.

The unique strength of OneDesk lies in its ability to facilitate collaboration with both internal and external users. Inputs can come from social media monitoring (more on this in the next section), be manually keyed into OneDesk, via email and through the customer portal. I particularly liked how each task can be tagged and assigned to different team members, including project items such as "Feedback," "Idea" and "Ticket." The seamless link between the various components was excellent, and illustrates how OneDesk has been designed

from the ground up with a multi-user environment and multiple projects in mind.

Finally, a "Home" section offers a view of one's current to-do tasks and calendar. New appointments can be added in the calendar, which is available in daily, weekly or monthly views. In the event of inadvertent mistakes, it will probably be reassuring to know that all actions are tracked. To see a full list of updates, simply go to the Charts tab under the "Activities" subsection.

Social Media Monitoring

OneDesk offers social monitoring to help companies monitor Facebook, Twitter and blogs based on the presence of specific keywords. Searches can be filtered based on their source, or individual entries removed so as not to clutter up the page. The number of mentions is also plotted on a couple of graphs at the top of the page for an overview.

More interestingly, specific entries can be acted upon by tagging them as an idea, problem, question, compliment, lead and/or feedback. There is no limit on how many times an entry can be tagged; users can click on "feedback" three times to create three entries. This is useful in assigning the same feedback to three individual team members, for example.

In practice, I found the social media search works well with product names or terms that are unique. Clicking on the "Save" button also saves them along the top, where they can be subsequently accessed with a single mouse click.

I would have preferred more results being downloaded, as opposed to new pages only being loaded when they are clicked on. Having to wait for each page to load can be frustrating when trying to browse quickly through the list. Do note that the icons to act upon social media entries only appear when viewing a saved search; they do not appear during a normal search.

There are many specialized social media monitoring tools out there, and the one in OneDesk is hardly the best. Overall though, I found it to be a very usable tool and a good gateway to translate social media feedback as actionable items into OneDesk.

Rolling out OneDesk

OneDesk is full-featured software that will take time to master properly. The OneDesk team appears to be aware of this challenge, and has prepared a number of guided video tours that you can access from here, as well as a detailed OneDesk User Guide. In addition, callouts with explanation also appear when using the various features for the first time, including hover tips that appear when you place your mouse cursor over items of interest.

When testing OneDesk, a slight frustration is the presence of occasional lags. This could be due to my physical location outside the U.S. – far from the Ashburn, Va., Amazon facility where OneDesk is hosted. To be clear, the experience wasn't bad, but the occasional jitters were enough to remind me that I was dealing with an Internet-connected app.

Fortunately, OneDesk is also available as an on-premise solution, or as a private cloud on Amazon EC2 with S3 access. These options should overcome latency issues, while the former will also help organizations meet

compliance requirements.

Another aspect that may not be controllable by the OneDesk team is the stability of the Flash platform. I encountered at least one occasion that the scroll bar interface became nearly inoperable. Restarting Chrome by closing all my browser instances and reloading OneDesk solved the problem.

The requirements for rolling out OneDesk are nothing more than a browser with Flash support. Based on my tests, a resolution of 1024 or higher is required for an optimal experience.

Wrapping up: Worth a Try

At $30 per user per month, OneDesk isn't considered expensive, though it is not cheap enough for companies to hop on without careful consideration either. Fortunately, it is possible to test OneDesk by setting up a free account using a credit card. The free account is limited to three members and projects and offers lower attachment storage of 100MB.

Overall, the service worked great and delivers on its promise of facilitating collaboration between employees, customers and partners. It also offers decent social media monitoring and excellent project management capabilities and brings an entire plethora of modern tools for businesses. Don't dive straight in though, as some form of training will be probably required to properly leverage the admittedly impressive capabilities that OneDesk brings to the table.

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