THE WESTON GROUP

The Weston Group

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

Helpdesk & User Support

Version 1.1

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Introduction

Overview

This SOP is designed to provide a guideline for training and execution of all Helpdesk functions at The Weston Group. The Helpdesk process is intended to be a conduit for responding to a wide variety of customer needs. As such, the Helpdesk team will Triage, Resolve or Escalate all issues they are faced with and then follow-up to see that the client is pleased with the resolution. Thus this document outlines a process and techniques to be applied regardless of the scope of the issue.

Goal

The goal of the helpdesk is to permanently solve every issue uncovered as quickly and inexpensively as possible for the client while maintaining the organizational steps necessary for large scale operations.

Basic Approach

To achieve the goal of fast and inexpensive resolution, the basic approach for the Weston Helpdesk is for problems to be screened and resolution attempted at the lowest possible level. Where an issue defies resolution, it will be escalated to more senior staff. However, The Weston Group Helpdesk is not merely a 'ticket entry' team that passes problems along to others. By training, experience, and approach, the Weston Helpdesk Team will be expected to solve over 80% of issues without outside assistance.

1st Echelon

Quick Hit

Many client questions may be answered from general knowledge or a brief web search. Questions of this nature which take less than 2 minutes can be fielded without creating a support ticket.

AutoTask Ticket

Where Quick Hit resolution is not possible, a Service Request (aka Helpdesk Ticket) will be created in the AutoTask system.

Note that in most cases, the 1st echelon technician should work to resolve this ticket his or her self. The expectation is that each technician will resolve 80% of their cases on the same business day and all of them by noon of the next day. Building up a 'pool' (e.g. over 15) of unresolved cases in a Helpdesk Technician's queue is unacceptable and may result in adverse disciplinary action.

Even in cases where the Helpdesk technician knows they are going to escalate the ticket, it is expected that any Helpdesk technician be able to identify the system and issue in order to get the case escalated to a specialist in that area. In cases where the1st echelon technician is unsure of how to escalate an issue, the Helpdesk Manager should be consulted in real-time.

2nd Echelon

2nd Echelon resources to solve a problem may include field technicians (who go on-site), the Helpdesk Manager, or software developers.

3rd Echelon

3rd Echelon resources to solve a problem could include the Account Manager, The Network Services Manager, the principal software architect, or a3rd party application vendor. Generally speaking, these persons would have broad technical knowledge and experience with the particular system(s) involved.

4th Echelon

Although rarely used, 4th echelon would involve bringing in all senior Weston leaders (including the CEO and President) who may or may not have knowledge or experience with the system(s) involved. These leaders will have to analyze, develop, or source the expertise needed to solve the problem. An example of such an event would be a large virus outbreak.

Triage

Telephone Calls

Professional Standards

Answering Technique

A professional tone and approach should be used when answering telephone calls so as to make a good first impression. Weston staff should answer all helpdesk calls by saying,

> "Weston Helpdesk, <first name> speaking, may I help you?"

Data Capture

The goal of the Helpdesk telephone answering is to solve as many problems as possible immediately and gather all the information needed for the problem to be solved later without bothering the customer again. For this service The Weston Group employs skilled IT technicians and bills for Helpdesk calls. The Weston Group and our clients expect value to be added by this process. Simply taking a message that "so and so called and wants you to call her back" does not add value nor require the services of a technician. Thus, The Weston Group expects much more data capture from our technicians than from our answering service.

Even if the technician does not have the technical expertise to solve the problem, he or she can add a lot of value by clearly identifying the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHY of the call.

Helpdesk staff should have a good, clean 8.5.x11 pad of paper ready to take notes on what the caller says. This helps us troubleshoot the issue and reduces asking callers to repeat information they have already told you. If you would rather not take paper notes, then immediately create an AutoTask ticket and start entering notes as the customer is speaking to you.

Frequently customers will not think to identify themselves or their systems. So as early as possible in the conversation, the helpdesk technician will need to identify the client and location of the caller. From that point, the individual system identification is possible.

Getting the Most Information Possible

Callers can be classified many ways, one framework is expressive vs. passive.

Expressive callers want to talk at length about the problem and probably don't want to answer questions initially. They may or may not be upset about the error or situation they've encountered, but often find it necessary to 'tell their story' at some length. Avoid interrupting them when they are speaking. Generally, once they have expressed their thoughts, they are very willing to answer questions and work through trouble-shooting with a technician. Expressive callers will generally respond positively when you've listened to them and then demonstrated a good understanding of the situation by giving them an oral recap. For example,

- "I see, so let me make sure I've got this straight, you were working in Claimpoint! and you could not add a new tag on patient # 123456789, is that correct?"

Passive callers tend to want to just say "I've got a problem" and expect someone to fix it without any further elaboration. These callers need to be kept on the telephone until the issue is well-identified. Good techniques to use with passive callers include:

- "I really want to help you with this problem, but I need to make sure I understand what system to troubleshoot before I get off the telephone with you."

- "Please bear with me, it takes me a minute to absorb things sometimes. Now could you tell me what system you were working on when this occurred?" [use of self-deprecating humor]

- "I am so glad you called about this. We need to know things like this. Could you explain it to me with a little more detail to make sure I don't miss anything."

Telephone System Routing and Hierarchy

Remote Client – Fondren Helpdesk

The Fondren helpdesk number (713-794-3329) is now forwarded to the Weston helpdesk telephone system.

Telephone Technical Skills

Just as a soldier must be technically proficient with his rifle in order to be effective, so too must a Helpdesk technician be proficient with the Weston telephone system. This includes conference calling, transfers, etc.

Creating AutoTask Ticket

When an issue cannot be immediately resolved by a Helpdesk technician, then a Service Request or 'ticket' should be created in the AutoTask system to describe and track the work requested by the client.

Voicemail

The Weston Group purposely does not utilize individual voicemail for Helpdesk office telephone extensions. That situation can lead to messages getting 'lost' or not responded to promptly if an individual member is out of the office or on vacation. We do utilize a central voicemail box to cover all Helpdesk extensions. The Helpdesk manager will designate who is responsible for checking the voicemail box every two hours at a minimum. When retrieving voicemail messages, approach it professionally by taking notes on the call before deleting the message.

Email Messages

Email messages notifying the helpdesk of issues are popular with users as they can be made very quickly. Email has the advantage of the notes being written and available for review to technicians, thus it is especially beneficial when a lot of information is included in the message. When the message is sparse, the best approach is to call the user so as to interactively ascertain required information. While a series of email exchanges is sometimes the only way to reach the client, these exchanges generally suffer because users lack the written eloquence and technical ability to describe the problem accurately, in writing.

Regardless of how many email messages are generated with the user, it is the responsibility of the Helpdesk technician to refine and consolidate the correspondence into specific work steps in an AutoTask ticket.

- Simply copying the user's email into the ticket body will generally not suffice.

- Forwarding the email to other Weston staff ("passing the buck") is not acceptable. Add value for the client and Weston!

- If Account Managers and senior leaders forward a user's email request to you at the Helpdesk, they are asking for your professional assistance to create a professional Helpdesk ticket implicitly – not to just forward the email to someone else.

Central Notification Alerts

Central Notification (CN) is a proprietary suite of applications developed by The Weston Group to monitor our clients' computer systems. When an issue occurs, CN may generate email and / or pager Alert messages to Weston personnel. The specifics of CN Alerting functionality are outside the scope of this document. The pertinent points are that you as a Helpdesk team member will be responsible for working

Triage and Troubleshooting

The word *triage* refers to the process of quickly prioritizing cases according to their urgency, the resources available, and the potential benefit achievable. The classic triage situation is an Army surgical tent where serious cases which appear hopeless may be put on hold while more savable cases are treated. Nevertheless, every case is important and will be handled as soon as possible and practical.

Troubleshooting refers to a process of identifying the cause and solution for a phenomenon or event which is undesirable.

General Troubleshooting – Cut the Problem In Half

Helpdesk technicians should seek to educate themselves on formal and informal approaches to troubleshooting. Some areas that are almost always important include:

Correctly identify the SOURCE of the problem. We expect end-users to have trouble discriminating between the source and the symptoms of a problem. We expect Helpdesk technicians to discriminate between the source and the symptoms fairly quickly and accurately.

Isolate one aspect of the problem from another and then test each to see where the problem lies. In essence, this is cutting the problem 'in half' repeatedly until the issue is clearly identified.

Make notes and diagrams as you progress to help you stay organized and visualize the situation. These help you make billing entries later as well.

In IT troubleshooting as we commonly do at The Weston Group, the first 'half' to cut is whether the issue originates from a server (aka systemic issue) or a client workstation (aka isolated).

Another 'half' we commonly face is Internet vs. LAN network issues.

A sign of poor troubleshooting is when a technician has been 'tinkering' on an issue for more than a few minutes and still cannot isolate the source in the broadest sense (e.g. LAN vs. Internet). Technicians should avoid more than a few minutes of 'tinkering' and begin a real troubleshooting process when confronted with new or unidentified issues.

Bomgar

For issues where the user is experiencing an isolated issue on their PC, or where you do not understand the systemic issue they're describing, the Bomgar tools (formerly called *Network Streaming*) offers a tremendous benefit to ourselves and our customers. This tool allows users to connect to our support web site at http://help.weston.com and then click on the link for a technician. The technician can then view their PC desktop and take control of the machine if needed. This technology works through virtually every firewall and security software we've encountered and so is fairly reliable.

Because the licensing for the Bomgar tool is limited, technicians should only be logged into the Bomgar server when they are actually on a support call with a client or expect to initiate one immediately. Remember to Log Off the Bomgar server when a support session is terminated.

Replicate the Error

Replicating the error involves the helpdesk technician stepping through the same sequence of events which the user says produced an error. Ideally, it will be performed using Bomgar to the user's PC and then letting the user perform the steps slowly while the technician observes.

Where Bomgar is not practical, then the technician can attempt similar procedures from their own workstation. This is can be especially helpful when supporting web applications that run in the browser.

NT Event Log

Often overlooked as a support resource, the NT Event Log and particularly the Application Log are where applications are supposed to log errors and events. Support technicians should always check the NT Event Log when they're not confident they've identified and described an issue fully – especially before escalating an issue to a higher support echelon.

Screen Print Document

Skillful users will know how to capture screen shots into a document and send that document to you. Users that you teach these skills to will be appreciative and become more skillful.

- Use *ALT+PrintScreen* keys to have user copy the screen shot of just current application to their clipboard.

- When connective via Remote Desktop Protocol (aka RDP, Terminal Services) the *CTRL+ALT+-* (minus) key will copy the active application on the RDP computer to your local clipboard.

- *PrintScreen* key by-itself copies the entire user screen.
- Use *CTRL+V* to paste the clipboard into a *Word* or *WordPad* document. *WordPad* is available on any Windows PC (including Server operating systems) and can store rich text and images together.

User's Oral Description

The traditional and least effective way to capture an error. It was very reasonable in 1997 but no longer.

AutoTask Tickets

Creating Tickets

Call on Critical Issues

Critical Issues should be called. For a critical or time-sensitive issue, call or page the manager of the respective support group and ensure that they are aware of the issue.

Information Requirements – All Tickets

For additional details and guidance on Work Ticket Creation, see the online training outline.

5 Ws: Who, What, Where, When, Why

Who

Client Name (Account & Contract)

Client System

Username

User Telephone

User Email

What

What was user doing? What is the business purpose of this application / activity?

What was the error generated or phenomenon encountered?

If the task is a report or information request, be specific to *what* information and *what* format is desired.
e.g. List of patients with CPT code 99999 from 1/1/2004 to 12/31/2004 for provider 012.

Where

Where is the user & application operating?

Physical location of user (e.g. remote office); server name, location, URL, etc

Specific web page, document, or file in use.
Include URL / UNC path to file whenever possible.

Where, in the application context did error occur?
e.g. on update, when creating a new record, etc.

When

When did the error occur?

When does this need to be resolved from a business perspective and from the user's preference.

Why

Not always possible to learn but can make a big difference in the speed and efficiency with which a solutions is obtained.

Without the Why, we are the pharmacist instead of the doctor. The doctor prescribes solutions, a pharmacist puts pills in a bottle. Beware of the self-diagnosing patient.

New Development / Hardware / Capabilities Projects

For projects which are more proactive and involve creation / construction of technology (as opposed to fixes), the PFiSH acronym is a good guide for information elements to enter into the project description.

PFiSH

Project Manager

Who will be the project manager and other reviewing authorities for this project.

Finish

Time or event deadline when project needs to be completed by. Be sure to allow time for the solution to be tested / revised prior to client's deadline.

Start

Time / events when project should be started. May be dependent on another item being created.

Hours

The number of billable hours expected / negotiated with the client.

Specific Procedures for creating AutoTask Tickets

For additional details and guidance on Work Ticket Creation, see the online training outline.
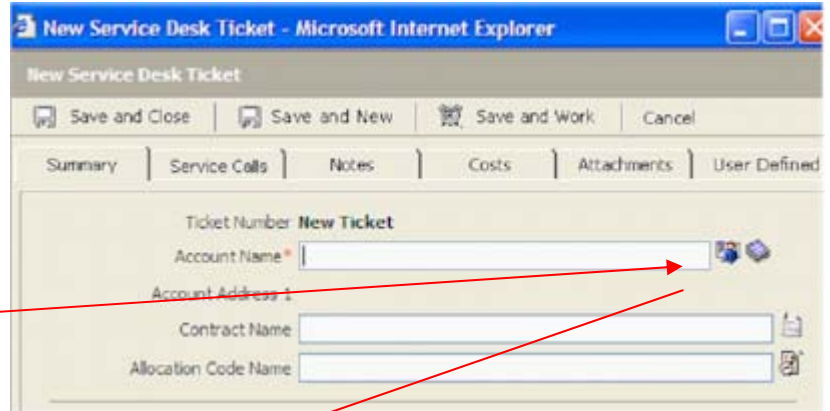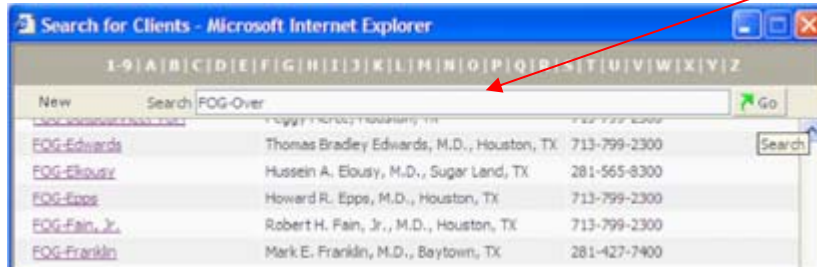
Ticket Header

Create a new ticket using the *New Service Request* button on the AutoTask toolbar.
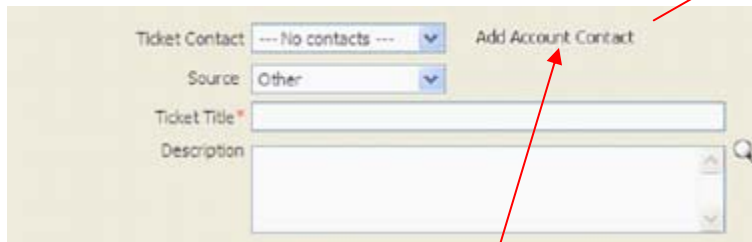

Enter the client account, contract and business information as best known. This is important because all Weston work is billed to specific entities based on these selections.
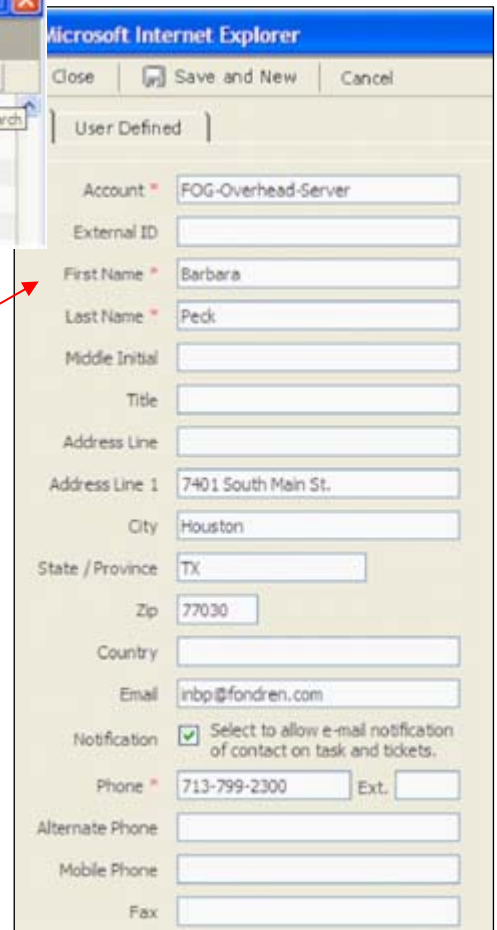

A pick list of Accounts is available using the icon on the right hand side of the dialog.

Select the client contact.
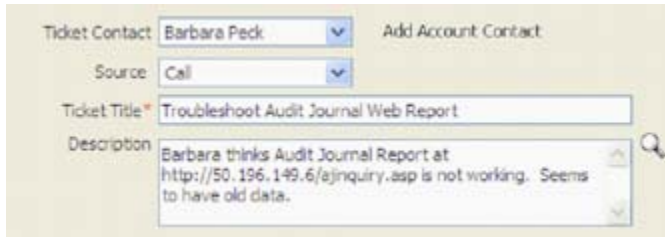
If the person is not already in the system, add their contact information to AutoTask.

Ticket Description
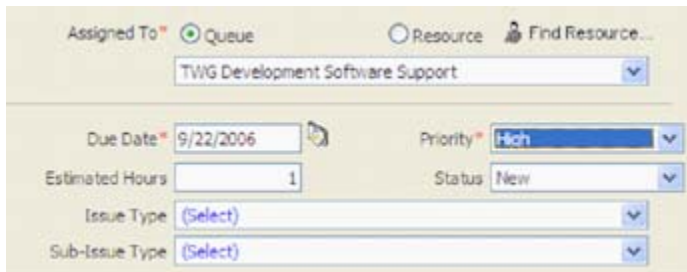
The next part is the most important – describing the **What** and **Where** that needs to be addressed.

A good description explains the current situation, describes why the situation is not satisfactory and has a *Ticket Title* that tells us what to do.

Responsibility and Due Date

Specific Departments or work teams may have specific instructions for routing issues and making assignments. In general, we want to use AutoTask queues as work containers or 'in-boxes' for specific work tasks. Assigning to a queue has a number of drawbacks in the AutoTask system because the ticket will remain traceable in that queue even as the work is assigned to an individual.

TWG Development Software Support

Issues involving Weston software, reporting, and code changes should be assigned to the *TWG Development Software Support* queue.

Application Support

Issues involving help, training, or application troubleshooting of Electronic Medical Records (EMR), Claimpoint!, GPMS, or other 3rd party application used by a client should be assigned to the *Application Support* queue.

Network Support

Issues involving server administration, systemic Internet connectivity, routers and other network issues.

Resolution Process: Communicate, Resolve, Followup or Escalate

Communication

The single biggest deficiency with new helpdesk technicians is a failure to communicate on issues. Even if the technician has all the technical knowledge needed to solve an issue, if that resolution is not communicated, the customer will tend to be dissatisfied. On the other hand, if a technician does not have the knowledge needed to solve a particular problem, not communicating that to superiors causes the problem to fester.

For additional details and guidance on entering work descriptions in AutoTask, see the Work Description Guidelines training outline.

Project / Account Manager

The Project or Account Manager should be notified whenever a new AutoTask ticket is created. Thanks to the Notification feature of AutoTask, it is simply a matter of checking some boxes and does not require creation of a separate email.

However, if the situation is time-critical, the Helpdesk technician should also page the Manager to alert them to look for the notification.

If the situation is urgent, then call the Account Manager on the telephone and speak to them in about the situation.

If there is a Project Manager separate from the Account Manager, then communications should be made with both persons.

Client

Where the client has notified you of a situation via email and the resolution may take more than an hour or two, be sure to respond to them via email to let them know that you have received their message and are acting upon it. This can be done by using the Notification tab of AutoTask when you create the ticket and entering the client's email address as free text.

When the issue is resolved, notify the client as well. For non-critical issues, email notification via AutoTask is acceptable. For critical issues and whenever possible, try to call the client and advise them orally. This positions our services in a positive light and also makes customers feel that they got good service.

Avoid speculative and non-professional communication with clients.

Remember that your billing entries are part of client communications. The client's invoice from The Weston Group will contain your description of the work and the fee for that work side-by-side. For this reason, billing entries should be written in the past tense and describe what work was done. Forward-looking statements like "*will check back tomorrow on this issue*" are inappropriate in billing entries because if you did check back the next day, the client will see that billing entry on the same invoice.

Originator - Person Who Created the Ticket

When a ticket has been escalated, forwarded, and then resolved by someone other than the person who created the ticket, it is good, professional courtesy to let the ticket originator know that the issue is resolved. Likewise, if there will be delays the situation should be communicated back to the originator. When these courtesies are followed, it stimulates an environment of professional concern and attention-to-detail that we desire at The Weston Group. When these courtesies are slighted, it stimulates the development of a 'not-my-problem' indifference to our client's problems.

Person(s) Who assisted with the ticket

The same professional courtesy should be extended to persons who provide material assistance on a ticket. Communicate when an issue is resolved, delayed, or escalated. Such persons could include another technician, a senior technical leader, a client, or a 3rd party vendor. No one enjoys working with someone who only communicates bad news and problems, so look for opportunities to communicate success and good news.

Future Reference and Documentation

You might think of documentation as 'communicating' with yourself and other Helpdesk staff in the future. We want that communication to help us solve this problem quickly. Alternatively, this documentation helps the next person working the ticket get 'up-to-speed' on the situation.

The *Internal Notes* section of an AutoTask time entry is where we want you to enter such documentation as you're working on a ticket.

Good information to put in the Internal Notes includes:

- Details on the problem and what the client may have said
- System name, IP address, etc.
- File path for files
- Troubleshooting steps you took and their outcome
- Troubleshooting steps you chose not to take due to time, etc.
- Guidance and technical notes you got from senior staff
- Technical information you got from the web or 3rd party support

Resolve

Resolution does not mean that the Helpdesk technician has tried something and hopes it is going to work. Resolution also does not mean that you email someone and "haven't heard anything back".

Having an issue resolved and marking it "Complete" in AutoTask means that:

- The source of the issue has been identified
- Any corrections needed have been made
- The changes have been tested.
- Derivative systems and users have been tested.

- The work performed has been communicated to the client.

- The client has had a chance to validate that the work performed solved the problem and did not create another problem.

Try to have clients verbalize their satisfaction with the solution provided. In the *value-added selling* process, this is the most-important step because the client affirms to themselves and to you the value of using The Weston Group. Remember, The Weston Group provides services without subscription fees, contract locks, etc – meaning that we can typically be fired by any client at any time for any reason. It is only our good name and the quality of our work that keeps clients coming back for more services from our company.

Followup Status

When your work on a ticket is substantially complete, but the criteria for resolution have not been met, set the AutoTask Ticket's status at "*Followup*".

At least once a day, you should review all your Followup status tickets and see if resolution can be completed. Examples:

- Customer contact is now in the office and has had a chance to try the application.

- An overnight restart on the server has occurred an overnight process can now be tested and validated as successful.

- Customer contact has responded to an email notification regarding completed work.

Escalate

If the Helpdesk technician cannot solve the issue due to expertise, he or she should forward the ticket in AutoTask to an area of recognized technical expertise or the Helpdesk Manager if such an area cannot be recognized. Whoever the ticket is forwarded to should be notified in the same manner described in the earlier paragraph on communications. e.g. Email notification for routine issues, pager notification for time-sensitive issues, telephone call for critical issues.

If time or other tasks are going to cause delay in working on the issue, the Helpdesk technician should forward the AutoTask ticket to a Helpdesk colleague in accordance with guidance from Helpdesk Manager.

Standards

Change Control (CC)

"Change Control" here refers to policies and processes required before a change can be made in a production system. Such measures span the range of a key to the server room, permissions on files, to having a review board that formally votes on whether a particular change can be implemented.

The topic of "Change Control" or "Change Process" is a popular in IT literature and with large IT organizations. Too often, Change Control becomes a bureaucratic quagmire which stifles innovation and progress along a number of dimensions.

While CC is a consideration, especially in more complex systems, the emphasis at The Weston Group is on Change Accomplishment, not Change Control. Thus the primary responsibility for CC is with the Account Manager. Within the context of the Helpdesk, technicians should

coordinate any changes anticipated with the Account Manager. If circumstance and urgency preclude prior approval by the Account Manager, the technician is absolutely required to document any changes were made to a system using an Email notification from the AutoTask ticket with an email copy to the Account Manager