

The Importance of Professional Customer Support

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Several of our consulting clients are software companies and companies that provide service and support for their products, we always help our clients and colleagues to maximize support profits by automating the process. But to get to a profitable venture there are many things that have to happen, systems put in place, and hiring the right people to do the job.

The right people are NOT entry level people, they are the most focused, knowledgeable, and disciplined people you can find. Once you decide to go down this path of using the cream of the crop to ensure your clients are supported, you will see the profits start to come in. Now when your clients call they are ensured that their call will be answered by someone who can help them, someone who takes their business seriously and feels they are being taken most seriously.

The idea of good customer support goes beyond just “common sense”, because common sense would coach you to use automated self-service features in order to scale up to meet the growing demand for your product. You have to keep in mind that when someone calls in with a problem they want it fixed as quickly as possible and they may even be desperate to get it fixed right if the product you provide supports their business or their very job performance. Our clients expect to have a good, warm, caring, customer experience and we all want to talk to a human when we have a problem. Automated self-service systems are in place to do three things:

1. Provide a knowledgebase for our clients to use
2. Avoid using company resources to help our clients (save us money)
3. Buy us some time in the process

So these three things cause the following reactions:

1. Customers are happy that they can search for problem solutions
2. Customers are upset they have to take their time to search for solutions (“They should have been proactive in telling us about these problems”)
3. Our money and time savings are looked at as disrespect to the customer as they usually pay annual support fees and expect to be taken care of by a real person.
4. If we are buying time we are actually putting off the inevitable and we are likely violating our support agreement. I have never in my years seen a support agreement that doesn’t provide for a priority/severity level of support and a timetable for solutions.

Recently I kind of complained about Paul Greenberg’s Blog about his experience with a well known television recording company. It took me three days to understand that he was trying to tell us all about how NOT to do CRM and customer service. The treatment he received from this company is almost painfully recorded on a day by day basis and it is complete with letters, quotes, and all the things that a good CRM/Customer Support system keeps for you as you go along in the process. Here I was thinking all this should just be academic, but what Paul artfully exposed is that even multi-billion dollar companies do not always have good customer service in place. Even after he explained that this situation was being chronicled in his Blog (probably the #1 CRM Blog on the Internet) they still could not respond satisfactorily. I think they may have found their way and largely thanks to Paul’s diligence, read all about in [PGreenblog](#).

The [1to1 Blog](#) posted by Ginger Conlon this week was absolutely eye opening. We learned that over 95% of customer don’t mind being cross-sold, providing the offer is relevant. We also learned that 89% expect proactive communication and almost 90% want to be contacted via email, pretty important to say the least! Here is a quote for those who think self-service is a good idea:

“More than three quarters of respondents say they feel pushed to use self-service instead of speaking with an agent, and 66 percent say they react negatively when pushed this way. In fact, 76 percent fell less loyal or will take their business elsewhere if they feel pushed to use self-service when preferring to speak to an agent.” - [April 27, 2007 1to1](#)

Here is the most sobering revelation of all:

“According to the survey, 40 percent of consumers have stopped doing business with a company due to a poor contact center experience, and what’s more, 38 percent say that service makes the biggest impact on their loyalty to a company.” - [April 27, 2007 1to1](#)

It is hard work to find customers, and it sounds like it is even harder work to keep them as clients if you don’t take good care of them. If you want a good dose of common sense, pick up [Mack Hanan’s](#) books. I wrote a Blog a while ago on his [15 Traits of a Good Client Relationship](#).

Training is another important component of delivering good customer service. We can’t risk delivering mixed messages to our clients, we can’t risk our business to poor communication skills, we can’t risk our future business to inept handling of our process. No one is a born customer support person, we all require training. So to make it work all the managers, all the senior personnel in the company need to attend structured training, complete with tests and certification for a customer support team and process to work, everyone needs to know their role and everyone needs to know what is expected of them in response to the customer service process. If the support process is home grown, then the training should come from within also, who is best to teach than those who have created. If the process is a package installation from a consulting firm or a software development firm, they should provide classroom training to all stakeholders. I take training seriously as it is the key to successful implementation and corporate buy-in. Even wrote about it in one of [my old Blogs](#).

Leadership is probably the biggest single thing you can use to make a support program work. Someone has to lead this

incredibly important part of the business. The leader needs to be a senior person, who can personify the company and its goals, values, and brand. There needs to be a leader who reminds everyone involved that support is a very disciplined and “front and center” activity that needs to be well done, there is only room for the cream of the company and mediocrity is never allowed.

In summary I think our products should be so simple and error free that we can afford to put our best people on the support line. This means that we have to develop top notch products to begin with so we don't have to use our best resources to fix problems. I once had a CEO tell me that we couldn't afford to put our best people on the support team because we needed them to build the next product. I said if we had a product that wasn't so difficult to use and so full of bugs this wouldn't be an issue, I don't think he was pleased with me, maybe I should have been a bit less blunt. In conclusion, we can make money on support contracts by building products that don't require you to spend any time and resources fixing bugs and providing training.

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