

HOW TO DELIVER NEXT GENERATION CUSTOMER SUPPORT



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FIVE BEST PRACTICES TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF TECH SUPPORT

Humanity has progressed from an agrarian culture through the industrial revolution to today's information revolution. Over the past three decades, Information Technology (IT) has revolutionized industries and businesses. Organizations are using IT in all business functions, including design, production, operations, human resources, marketing, and sales. Some use IT applications to automate 95% of their critical business functions. IT connects people across geographical boundaries, making it easier to communicate, collaborate, and educate on a global scale.

"The Federal Government Budget's total planned spending on IT in 2017 is estimated to be \$89.9 billion." *Source: White House Budget Proposal¹*

Industries including federal agencies, telecom, IT services, etc. are major contributors to growth of IT all these years. According to The US President's fiscal 2017 budget proposal, 'Federal agencies would boost their IT spending to \$89.9 billion, up 1.3 percent from fiscal 2016'. Any investment raise in IT will always have a focus towards customer support and IT service management because it directly help organizations meet their customer needs.

To overcome the growing customer demands in today's do-more-with-less business environment, organizations that rely on IT are beginning to work smarter. Some IT companies believe that cutting operating costs while improving customer satisfaction and offering quality customer support are some of the best ways to leverage the benefits of IT with less investment.

An IT organization's success is no longer driven by just product innovation and profit margins. The quality and longevity of its customer relations is now what drives growth. Tech customer support plays a major role in increasing the revenues of an organization because it is directly related to the customer support experience. To achieve lasting customer relationships, organizations must expand their tech customer service channels to meet customer demand.

Prior to the 1970s, all customer-business transactions took place face-to-face. Customers visited service kiosks in support centers to submit service inquiries or complaints. As technology evolved,



tech support was increasingly delivered via telephone, email, call center, chat, text message, website, and so on. This change in the customer support landscape has created various challenges for businesses.

Before 1970	1970-1995	1996-2000	2001-2004	2005-2007	2008-2009	After 2010
In-person	Phone	Email	Web	Chat	Mobile	Social

Image 1: Customer service evolution; Source: *The Evolution of Customer Service*, Parature.

TECH SUPPORT CHALLENGES

IT organizations realize the value of customer service, and focus on improving the quality of tech support to drive business growth. However, rapidly growing technology and changing customer demands are creating an array of challenges for businesses to deliver quality customer support. We'll discuss some of those challenges below.

The rise of omni-channel customer support

Today's customers expect personalized and seamless customer support across all channels, including email, text, telephone, Web, etc. Connecting to customers via multiple channels might look like a great way to offer powerful customer service, but it tends to challenge IT organizations that are looking to provide tech support to broad range of customers. Supporting customers in this way all the time can be costly and lead to security issues. Industry experts suggest that organizations select customer support channels based on the nature of the customer inquiry, mode of operation required, and value of the customer. Choosing the right channel to deliver quality customer service is one of the biggest challenges faced by IT businesses today.

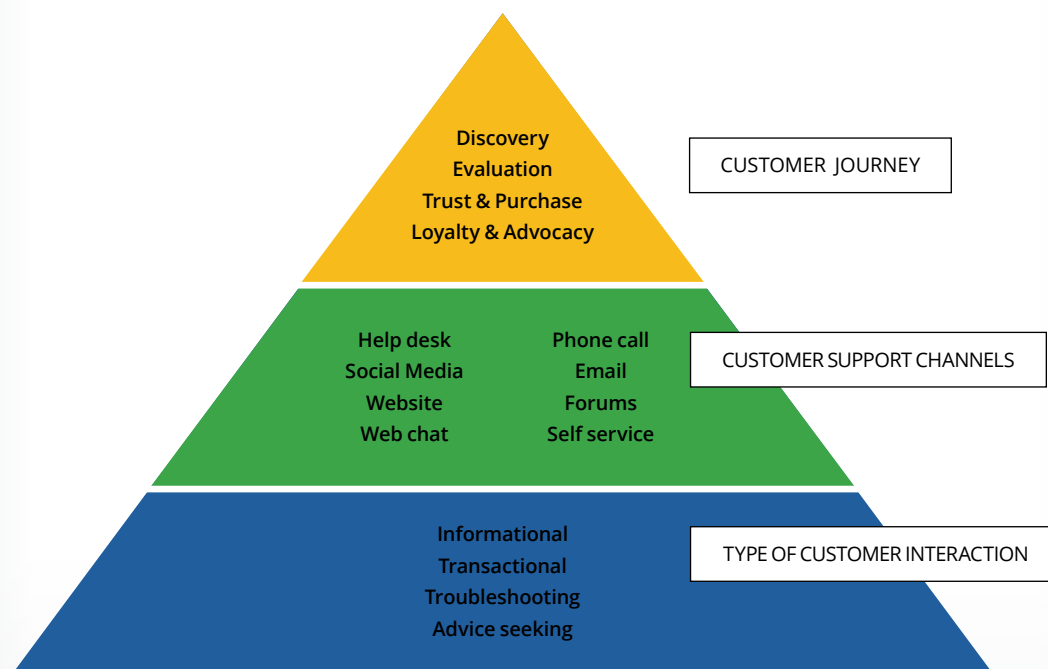


Image 2: Customer interaction pyramid; Source: *Evolve Your Customer Engagement*, Interactive Intelligence



24/7 customer support

With the increased adoption of flexible work initiatives and concepts like BYOD, the demand for anywhere, anytime support is growing. Providing tech support to customers and employees working outside the firewall of a corporate network is a potential tech support challenge. IT businesses today are also focused on the global market, so it is necessary to offer tech support to customers around the globe across various time zones. This 24/7 customer support culture presents a range of challenges to tech support, which can result in poor Quality-of-Service (QoS) due to linguistic and cultural barriers, lack of tools and training, lack of company and product knowledge, etc. Addressing these challenges and offering 24/7 customer support to customers must be a key priority for IT businesses.

Changing the technology landscape

IT organizations struggle to keep up with growing technology changes so that they may offer great customer service. The explosion of cloud and mobile technologies has utterly transformed the consumerism of IT. This shifting landscape changes customer demands and creates new challenges for internal and external tech support every day. Organizations are forced to create space to support new platforms and devices, and regularly update their training programs to improve support staff skills. Recent developments in technology, such as the evolution of IoT, smart phones, tablets, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, etc. are affecting the way technicians offer support to end-users.

Resources and budget planning

CIOs and IT managers have to keep overhead and operations costs low to meet budget constraints. According to a 2015 survey² by Business Systems, 21% of respondents cite that balancing budgets with service levels was the biggest customer service challenge in 2015. To offer proper tech support, organizations must pay for software licenses, installation, training, annual maintenance, hardware, etc. in addition to human resources and overhead costs.

Finding skilled and talented resources

Finding the right combination of skill and talent is a challenging task for any IT business. Skilled tech support professionals are in high demand, and organizations find it hard to recruit them. According to the 2015 survey³ by Business Systems mentioned above, one of the top employee engagement challenges facing hiring professionals today is empowering staff by giving them more responsibility. IT organizations must offer a creative work culture and comfortable environment to motivate and retain their best employees.

To help companies provide excellent customer support, we have put together some best practices that successful IT organizations follow. These tips are intended to help you overcome the previously mentioned tech support hurdles so that you can provide stellar customer service to internal users and external customers.



CUSTOMER SERVICE BEST PRACTICES

Improved technology has provided new ways for customers to reach out to IT support to help resolve issues. Here are the five best customer support practices that will help you address your challenges and improve the quality of your customer service.

1. Take a proactive approach toward customer support

Organize your tools and resources so that you have enough information to offer proactive customer support. Anticipate customer issues and organize your workflow so that you can deliver prompt responses. Access customer support channels, including self-service FAQs, knowledge bases, emails, and calls. Proactive customer support helps you reduce ticket resolution time and improve the customer support experience. Here are a few tips to help you be more proactive:

“Consumers prefer assistance over the following channels: Phone (61%), email (60%), live chat (57%), online knowledge base (51%), ‘click-to-call’ support automation (34%).”

Source: Econsultancy⁴

- Automate your customer support process – Employ a ticketing system that will help you automate your help desk operations, such as ticket creation, ticket routing, escalation, and reporting.
- Enable self-service – Create an FAQ section or knowledge base on your website. Set up a help desk ticketing system for your customers and employees so that they can find answers to the most common inquiries.
- Centralize ticket management – Create a centralized ticketing system that will allow your end-users to access and submit their tickets from anywhere, anytime. Technicians can make use of this centralized system and offer faster tech support by managing help desk tickets from a single pane of glass, even when they are out of the office.
- Automate ticket routing – Customize and create workflows in your ticketing system to automatically route service tickets, issues, and escalations to appropriate service technicians. Immediately assigning tickets to support personnel expedites the customer issue resolution process.
- Eliminate redundancy – Use your help desk tool to identify patterns in help desk tickets to gain information about faulty devices, sluggish processes, and technician errors. Automating the ticket resolution process helps eliminate redundant tickets, reduce unresolved tickets, and enhance workforce performance.



2. Improve reaction time

Improve reaction time by organizing your reactive communication techniques. It's as important to communicate well with customers seeking support as it is with potential customers you're attempting to convert. Improving reaction time will save your company time and money and increase customer satisfaction. Here are some simple ways to achieve this:

"It is 6-7 times more costly to attract a new customer than it is to retain an existing customer."

Source: White House Office of Consumer Affairs⁵

- Prompt auto-response – A prompt auto-response via email or phone lets end-users know you've received their ticket. Personalize your auto response with end-user name, ticket number, ticket description, category, etc. to keep the response from appearing to be spam.
- Ticket tracking and monitoring – Allow your customers to track and monitor their ticket progress status on the service request portal. Provide as much information as possible, including history to submissions, status of the ticket, technician assigned, etc. You can also send messages and emails to end-users about their ticket progress and resolution status.
- Reduce mean resolution time – Integrate smart tools and utilities like remote support software to your ticketing system to instantly launch remote control sessions from help desk tickets to reduce mean ticket resolution time.
- Offer intuitive service request portal – Customize your service request portal by asking mandatory questions. Provide drop-down choices for customers to choose the category their service request or issue will fall under. This speeds the ticket submission process, which improves overall help desk user experience.

3. Start measuring customer satisfaction index

Customer satisfaction (CSAT) index has an integral role to play in your customer support process. It helps you easily understand customer feedback. Identifying the factors that drive customer satisfaction and loyalty is crucial to your organization's growth. You can use CSAT index to measure customer experience in the product and support areas.



Area	You can define CSAT index by finding customer experience metrics on:
Product	Reliability
	Ease of use
	Features
	Performance
	Overall satisfaction
	Net Promoter Score (NPS) and recommendation
Support	Response time
	Resolution time
	Knowledge of the support technician
	Effectiveness of the solution
	Reliability of the help desk tool
	Overall satisfaction
	Net Promoter Score (NPS) and recommendation

The CSAT index can help drive product innovation and improve support quality, so organizations are wise to consistently monitor CSAT to understand their strengths and weaknesses. Some of the best ways to generate your CSAT index are:

- Send multi-channel surveys – Create survey questionnaires to send to your customers via email, help desk system, IVR, text messages, etc. to receive feedback about your product and support.
- Collect feedback via a ticketing system – Upon ticket resolution, automatically send a bundle of customized survey questionnaires to your customers based upon the ticket submitted or service requested.
- Offer IVR options to rate in-call experience – Ask your customers to rate their experience immediately after a call with support technicians.
- Collect feedback reports – Survey results will help you understand customer satisfaction and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) about your organization.



4. Effectively manage escalations and SLAs

Businesses must effectively monitor escalations and service level agreements (SLAs) to avoid problems. An SLA is a measurable goal (generally mean time) defined by an organization to deliver a service to a customer. Failing to do so could lead to a customer escalation, a scenario in which a customer query fails to be addressed by the first level of support. At this point, the customer wants someone at a higher level within the company to resolve their issue. Organizations that take customer support seriously will work hard to prioritize SLAs and escalations to keep their customers happy and loyal.

“42% of service agents are unable to efficiently resolve customer issues due to disconnected systems, archaic user interfaces and multiple applications.”

Source: Forrester Consulting⁶

To improve customer service in instances of SLAs and escalations, follow these guidelines:

- Ticket prioritization – Technicians should know products thoroughly, and understand how to prioritize issues and service requests based on their severity. They should respond promptly to customers and internal users to avoid unnecessary escalations and SLA breaches that may lead to customer dissatisfaction.
- SLA reminders and notifications – Set up auto reminders on your help desk to send notifications when a ticket is approaching its deadline. Configure customized alerts to remind you when an SLA is approaching its breach time. This will help remind support staff, technicians, and supervisors to revisit overlooked tickets.
- Auto escalations – Set up customized rules in your help desk system to automatically roll out escalations when a ticket is not resolved before its SLA due date.
- Measure agent performance – Use SLAs and escalations to measure agent performance. The number of escalations and SLA breaches on individual agents or a particular team will reveal areas where they lack knowledge and need training.



5. Build a healthy customer service culture

Your customer service team is critical to overall quality customer support. Out-of-the-box tools and customer-friendly processes are great, but excellent customer support can only come from a motivated customer support team.

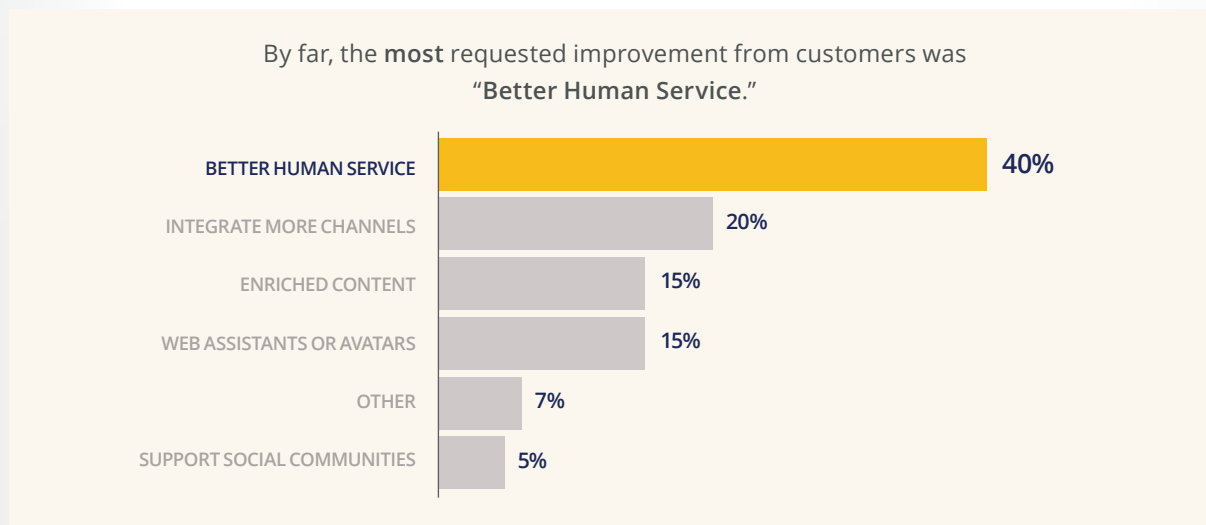


Image 3: Customer service expectations; Source: The Cost of Poor Customer Service by Genesys Global Survey

You need to create a healthy and supportive customer service culture in your organization so your valuable human resources always deliver excellent customer support. Here are few ways to do that:

- **Motivate and recognize** – Supporting customers can be stressful. Your support staff needs motivation and recognition to help manage that stress every day. Reward programs can help improve morale and job satisfaction among employees. Don't just focus on monetary benefits and incentives to motivate employees. Instead, try to recognize employees who bring value to your business every day.
- **Set achievable targets** – Set achievable daily and weekly targets for your employees that will help them measure their own success and, therefore, improve their performance.
- **Measure performance** – Using your help desk and other performance measurement tools, systematically measure support staff performance. Your findings will help you determine where they need assistance so you can provide appropriate training and guidance to improve work efficiency.
- **Keep things fresh** – Working on the same products and tools may bore your employees over time. Instead, rotate roles within the team to help motivate and engage employees by giving them new tasks and assignments.

- Always listen to the team – Your customer support staff is the closest link you have with your customers. Engage them on a regular basis to help you understand how customer expectations evolve and change. Daily interactions and periodic team meetings with your support staff will educate you about how customers perceive your products.

These are some of the best practices followed by various IT organizations to improve tech support.

SOLARWINDS WEB HELP DESK

SolarWinds® [Web Help Desk®](#) is an affordable, easy-to-use IT service desk for help desk ticketing and IT asset management. It can help you overcome customer support challenges and improve the quality of your customer service. Some of its key features include:

Feature highlights

Service request management: Streamline ticketing from request to resolution.

IT asset management: Discover and manage hardware and software assets.

Knowledge management: Centralize knowledge management with a built-in knowledge base.

IT change management: Manage change requests with automated approval workflows.

Reporting: Manage ticket status, technician performance, and customer support needs using built-in reports.

Try Web Help Desk for yourself. [Download a free 30-day trial](#) and have it up and running in less than an hour.

ABOUT SOLARWINDS:

SolarWinds provides powerful and affordable hybrid IT infrastructure management software to customers worldwide from Fortune 500® enterprises to small businesses, government agencies and educational institutions. We are committed to focusing exclusively on IT Pros, and strive to eliminate the complexity that they have been forced to accept from traditional enterprise software vendors. Regardless of where the IT asset or user sits, SolarWinds delivers products that are easy to find, buy, use, maintain, and scale while providing the power to address all key areas of the infrastructure from on premises to the Cloud. Our solutions are rooted in our deep connection to our user base, which interacts in our [thwack](#) online community to solve problems, share technology and best practices, and directly participate in our product development process. Learn more today at <http://www.solarwinds.com/>.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

1. White paper: [The Art of Organizing and Simplifying IT Support](#)
2. White paper: [Understanding the Need for a Help Desk Solution](#)
3. Video: [Introduction to Web Help Desk](#)
4. Video: [IT Asset Management with Web Help Desk](#)

REFERENCE SOURCES:

1. Statistics 1: [White House Budget Proposal 2017](#)
2. Image 1: [The Evolution of Customer Service, Parature](#)
3. Image 2: [Evolve Your Customer Engagement, Interactive Intelligence](#)
4. Statistics 2: [Customer Service 2015 Survey, Business Systems](#)
5. Statistics 3: [Customer Service 2015 Survey, Business Systems](#)
6. Statistics 4: [LivePerson's Connecting with Consumers report, Econsultancy](#)
7. Statistics 5: [White House Office of Consumer Affairs](#)
8. Statistics 6: [The Next-Generation Contact Center, Forrester Consulting](#)
9. Image 3: [The Cost of Poor Customer Service by Genesys Global Survey](#)