



WHAT MAKES CUSTOMER SUPPORT “AWESOME”?

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Abstract

It's not enough to tell a company they need to have amazing or even “awesome” support. Knowing exactly what great customer support looks like and implementing that into your business can mean the difference between gaining a potential customer and losing a loyal one forever.

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What Makes Customer Support “Awesome”?

It's not enough to tell a company they need to have amazing or even “awesome” support. Knowing exactly what great customer support looks like and implementing that into your business can mean the difference between gaining a potential customer and losing a loyal one forever. So, let's go through the core elements your customer support *needs* to have if you want to nurture long-lasting relationships with customers.

The highest level of support your staff can offer is being able to solve a customer's problem, but that's too basic. There's a lot more that goes into a positive customer service experience than simply having a problem resolved.

Here's a quick rundown of the elements you need to make sure your staff is offering:

- They handle support requests in a timely manner.
- They keep the number of staff members a customer needs to interact with to a minimum.
- They are friendly.
- They go above and beyond whenever possible.

Handle Support Requests in a Timely Manner

This one should be fairly obvious. It's simple. The longer a support request goes unresolved, the more frustrated your customer becomes. Resolving a request in a timely manner should be something your company strives to improve. If your product isn't great in the first place and a customer experiences problems with it, having a support request go unanswered for an unreasonable amount of time can be the tipping point they need to cut ties with you.

Solving problems is important, but resolving a support request and having it end on a positive note should always be your number one priority. This sometimes means being upfront with a customer and telling them you cannot fulfill their request, as scary as it may seem.

If you have to choose between honesty and having an unresolved ticket put on hold for an unknown amount of time, go with honesty. Be careful with the way you tell a customer "no" though. More on that later.

Make Things Convenient for Your Customer

This point plays off of the last one. If your customer is contacting you about a problem they're having, you're already inconveniencing them. Don't make things worse by taking too long to answer, taking too long to solve the problem or passing them between staff members.

If you absolutely *have* to involve another staff member, do it right. Never do this:

“I’m sorry, but I’m not able to take care of this problem. Please contact Steve in billing at 1-800-555-5555.”

or

“I’m sorry, but I’m not able to take care of this problem. Please email Steve in billing at steve@companydomain.com.”

Instead, you should say something along the lines of this:

“I’m sorry, but this problem is outside of my comfort zone. Let me talk to Steve, our billing guy, and get back to you as soon as possible.”

If you have to, have Steve contact the customer himself. Never instruct the customer to do so. If you’re using Awesome Support, you can create a ticket for the customer and hand it off to Steve conveniently within the Awesome Support dashboard. **Make sure you tell the customer you’re passing the request on to someone else.**

Be Friendly No Matter What

This is another obvious one. Unfriendly customer support agents are detrimental to your company’s reputation. This goes double if the agent isn’t able to solve the customer’s problem and doesn’t resolve their request in a timely manner.

You need to maintain a polite and well-mannered tone throughout your interaction with a customer. You need to be as friendly as possible no matter how rude and unruly they are. We’ll learn how to navigate this minefield in a bit.

Go Above and Beyond Whenever Possible

Customer support requests typically fall into two categories at the basic level:

- Requests you're not able to solve.
- Requests for issues with the core version of your product or service that you're able to solve with ease.

However, there will be times when a customer contacts you about an unusual issue or request. This could be a request for a new feature or a fix to an unusual bug they're experiencing. These types of requests can turn average customers into loyal fans if you're able to solve them.

We'll get into how to handle requests like these later on.

Let's Get Into Specifics

We've gone over the core elements your customer support should be comprised of. Now, let's get into specifics. Here's what we'll be talking about:

- How to organize your support queue.
- How to handle feature requests properly.
- How to say "no" to a customer, the right way.
- How to handle difficult customers.
- How to go above and beyond for customers.

Organizing Your Support Queue

Learning how to organize your support queue based on priority is a must, especially if you find yourself getting overwhelmed by the number of support requests your company receives. Awesome Support has color codes you can use to create and assign labels to each ticket.

To streamline the process of dealing with a heavy support queue, handle requests in this order:

1. “Thank You” and General Messages
2. Urgent Requests
3. General Questions
4. Feature Requests

1. “Thank You” and General Messages

These are general messages of customers thanking you for your product or service. They may also be questions or other inquiries that can be answered in 30 seconds or less.

2. Urgent Requests

These are requests for urgent problems that could cause you to lose a customer if they aren’t handled as quickly as possible. Problems that fall under this category include billing requests and issues a customer is having with your product or service.

3. General Questions

These are questions you get on a regular basis or ones that are easy to answer. They include general “how do I do this” questions and pre-sales questions, such as “Does your app integrate with third-party storage services?”

Your website should have a dedicated section for a list of FAQs or a fully-featured knowledge base customers can use to solve their own problems and gain access to such information quickly. This can reduce the number of requests you receive, and it can streamline the way you handle these types of requests.

Awesome Support comes with a canned-response feature you can use for this purpose. We even allow you to build a list of FAQs, which you can fill with responses you send to customers. After you send a response to a customer, you can have the software create a FAQ for the question/response automatically with one-click. No extra work on your part.

4. Feature Requests

Feature requests are suggestions and ideas customers would like you to implement specifically for them or your global product/service. These usually aren't urgent, and you should never rush to implement a new feature simply because a customer requests it, so these go to the bottom of the queue.

How to Handle Feature Requests

You should not be tempted to implement each and every request customers ask of you, as stated before. You'll wind up with a bloated product filled with clutter and too many unnecessary "filler" features that serve very little purpose. Here's what to do instead.

Start by asking the customer why they want the feature implemented in your product. In short, what you need to do is get them to tell you about the actual problem they're having, not the magical feature they feel will solve it.

You may have a feature that already takes care of the problem, or you and your team may be able to come up with a feature that can solve the problem more efficiently than the one the customer suggested could.

It's not your job to fulfill every request your customers make. It's your job to analyze the problems they're facing and provide solutions for them.

If you know without a doubt you have no plans to implement a feature a customer requests, let them down easy:

Do This: *"I'm sorry, but we have no plans to implement this feature in our product at this time. [Provide a reasonable explanation here.] We appreciate the input and hope you continue using and enjoying [insert product name here]."*

Not That: *"No. This feature is not something we are interested in."*

Nurture customers who submit feature requests with kindness, appreciation and respect. They're your most valuable customers. They're highly engaged with you and your brand, and they take your product seriously. They're the ones who hold the most influence over what features get added and which direction(s) your company takes.

Saying "No" the Right Way

Life isn't perfect, and neither is the world of customer service. You'd be able to solve every problem your customers have in a timely manner in a perfect world. Instead, you'll find yourself having to say "no" to customers from time to time, disappointing them and possibly losing them as a loyal patron.

However, there are right ways to say "no" to a customer. Mastering the way you turn down requests from them can have a huge impact on their

perception of you despite the fact that you weren't able to solve their problem.

We already went over the importance of being honest with customers about whether or not you're able to solve a problem they're having. Basically, if you've gone through every possible option with input from other members of the support staff and even higher-ups in the company and still can't find a viable solution, you're better off being upfront with the customer.

An example of a right and wrong way to phrase this type of response:

Do This: "I'm really sorry, but we aren't able to provide a solution for you. [Insert an explanation here]."

Not That: "Thank you for contacting us. We're sorry for the inconvenience. We will contact you after we review your request and produce an appropriate solution. Thank you for your patience."

There are other times when you may need to say "no" to a customer but can spin it in a way that makes it seem as though you're saying "yes". A hard "no" can sound off putting.

These opportunities typically occur when a customer requests a feature that isn't available for the price plan they're on or asks for something your product or service does not provide in the way the customer wants. If a customer asks for a feature that's only available on plans higher than the one they have, don't simply tell them "You need to upgrade."

Do This: "This feature is available on our premium plans. You'll be able to enjoy it when you upgrade. [Click here to learn more about upgrading.](#)"

Not That: "No. This a premium-only feature."

If your customer asks for a feature your product or service has but not in the way the customer asked, be upfront about it, and present an alternative

to them. Here's an example using the question, "Do you support OneDrive?"

Do This: *"I'm sorry. We do not support OneDrive at this time. However, we do support integrations with Google Drive and Dropbox. I hope these are decent alternatives for you."*

Not That: *"No, our service does not support integration with OneDrive. We apologize for the inconvenience."*

How to Handle Unruly Customers

You can have the most "awesome" customer support staff in the world, read every self-help guide out there and make every preparation available to you, but none of it will save you from having to deal with rude and unruly customers. The first step is a mental one. You need to stay calm, cool, collected and be as polite as you can no matter how difficult or negative the customer acts.

The second step requires knowing how to apologize to customers in a way that diffuses the attitude they're giving you, even if you screwed up and "totally deserve it." Listen to the problems they're expressing to you, not the negative energy they're sending your way. Apologize to them in a way a human would. This is not the time for canned customer service responses.

Do This: *"I'm really sorry you're having to put up with this. [Explain the issue thoroughly here. This isn't the time for excuses or vague responses]."*

Not That: *"We apologize for the inconvenience. We are working on a solution and will contact you as soon as we are able to provide one."*

When you explain the issue to your customer, don't beat around the bush, even if the problem is with a third-party service your product relies. For example, if your product relies on an integration with Google Drive, don't be quick to point fingers. Take the blame.

Do This: “We are in communication with the Google Drive team and are working diligently to resolve the issue for you and the rest of our customer base.”

Not That: “Google Drive’s servers are down. We are unable to resolve the issue until the team at Google Drive gets their servers back up.”

If the problem is downtime that's affecting your entire customer base, communicate directly with your customers from one location. You can communicate with them through multiple social media platforms and even your email list, but you should have a single location customers can refer to for dedicated updates. Most companies use Twitter for this purpose (bigger companies use dedicated Twitter accounts for support purposes), but you can also use services like [Cachet](#) or [StatusPage](#).

What to Do When the Problem Accelerates

If your customer is *really* upset and experienced a major inconvenience or loss of money due to the issue they had with your product or service, consider making an offer as compensation. Offer discounts for downtime. Offer free malware removal if you have software that was infected.

If you have a specific support agent that knows how to deal with difficult customers, transfer the problem over to them. Be aware of how overwhelmed you're becoming, and know when to hand the issue over.

With all that said, it's important to note how okay it is to cut ties with a customer. You don't *need* every customer at the end of the day, especially one that's tying up the support queue. Let the customer know you aren't able to resolve their issue, and offer a refund.

How to Go Above and Beyond for Customers

Again, going above and beyond is something that can turn general customers into loyal fans. Here are a few ways you can go the extra mile for your customers.

- Respond quicker than they expect.
 - Responding within a few hours typically impresses customers. If a request can be resolved within 15 minutes, take care of it. Don't put it off.
- Give unexpected discounts.
 - Customer appreciation goes a long way. Show your most dedicated and loyal customers you care by offering discounts to them when they upgrade or based on how long they've been a customer of yours.

Customer Support Roundup

Let's wrap up by listing everything you need to take care of to optimize the way your company handles support.

1. Handle support requests in a timely manner.
2. Make things as convenient as possible for your customer.
3. Be friendly no matter how difficult a customer is.
4. Go above and beyond whenever you're able to.
5. Organize your support queue to increase how efficient your team handles requests.
6. Use feature requests as a way to discover what problems your customers are having.
7. Don't be afraid to say no to a customer, and deliver soft "nos" whenever possible.

We hope this guide has helped you learn how to optimize the way your company handles customer support. Good luck in your journey.

About Awesome Support

Awesome Support is the publisher of the free *Awesome Support* plugin for WordPress. Combined with the 18+ commercial add-ons, it is the most comprehensive Help Desk Support Plugin available for WordPress.

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