How to Put Customers at the Center of Your Business
Most companies agree that it’s important to put your customers first, but many are confused about what building a customer-centric culture really means — not to mention how to get started. A lot has changed since Wal-Mart and Nordstrom began the customer-first movement. These days it’s about more than just training your service staff that the customer is always right (although that’s important too!). It’s about teaching your support agents to go above and beyond and wow customers. And, it’s about training everyone on your team to answer phones during overflow times. It’s also about connecting your systems, how you use your data, and making service a seamless part of the way customers experience your brand. You need to turn each and every customer interaction into an opportunity for excellence.

“There is only one boss: The customer”
– Sam Walton, Wal-Mart

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To build strong relationships with customers you need to wow them at every step of the way with fast, empathetic service and quick case resolution – even for the most complicated issues. You also need to celebrate their successes just as you would your own. If your customers are consumers, send them an email on their birthday. Celebrate milestones for your business customers (like successful VC fundraising) with a custom cake and handwritten notes. Provide extra visibility by giving away their products at tradeshows or as employee gifts. Mentor customers that need help in any business area whether it is marketing, sales, event management or anything else. Don’t just be in the business of selling your products. Be in the business of helping customers succeed.
To build a customer-centric company, it’s essential to have everyone in your company interacting with customers on a regular basis. Start by training every employee at your small business to participate in customer service. Ideally everyone from the CEO to the receptionist should be able to pitch in and help with customer support during busy times. Customer service training should be part of your onboarding process and an ongoing part of every job (after all, it’s the best way to learn about your customers and products). While it may not be realistic for your office manager to help with highly technical questions, they can at least handle some of the more straightforward cases and free up agents for more complex ones. You can even offer prizes and incentives for exceptional performance. Even if learning to help with customer service isn’t currently part of your onboarding process, it’s not too late. Order some pizzas on a Friday afternoon and get everyone trained so they can jump in to help customers at a moment’s notice.

2. Practice total company support

CHECKLIST

- Make customer service training part of your onboarding process.
- Schedule everyone at your company to help with customer service on a periodic basis.
- Offer prizes and incentives to employees for helping with customer support.
Imagine this. You’ve been having trouble with a company’s product and exchanging emails with a support agent, but you still can’t get it to work. And suddenly you hear from a rep who wants to sell you something else. Are they kidding? Today’s customers expect everyone in your company to know who they are, what they’ve ordered, and whether they’ve had problems in the past. Not to mention what they said on Twitter last week. When you connect all of your support channels and the apps you use to run your business, everyone can be in the know about customers. Support agents can see order histories, open opportunities, and even shipping status. Sales know when a customer needs help. When you share customer information, product insights, and support metrics across the company, everyone can be more productive and can do a better job of building relationships – even with frustrated customers – and deliver outstanding experiences at every touchpoint.

CHECKLIST

✔️ Choose sales and customer support apps that share data bi-directionally.

✔️ Look for cloud-based solutions that are easy to deploy and start using.

✔️ Connect all the apps you use to run your business to your sales and support solutions.

3. Give everyone 360-degree customer views
When was the last time you visited your neighborhood bank teller or received a hand-written card? Many people worry that as technology becomes more sophisticated, the personalized touch will go by the wayside. People are tired of endless call trees or robotic agents that read from a script. Customers crave personalized responses – whether digital or by “hand.” Fortunately you don’t need a big team with highly customized software solutions and round the clock staffing to deliver personalized responses. If you use a customer support solution that captures interactions from every channel in one place, you’ll know your customers wherever you meet them. If you have an integrated solution, you’ll be able to see their complete history. You, or your agents, will be able to use this information in the next customer conversation. And, if you get a solution that lets you automate repetitive tasks, you can free your agents to craft personalized messages that build loyalty and reinforce your brand. Encourage agents to sign their own names to put a “face” on the communication. In today’s business, a personal touch is not just for top customers, it’s for everyone.

CHECKLIST

- Consolidate all of your support channels in one tool so you know customers wherever you meet them.
- Integrate sales and service so you maintain a record of every customer interaction, all in one place.
- Automate repetitive tasks so you can free agents to provide personalized, impactful service.
Many startups spend a lot of time and money building products that customers ultimately don’t want. Remember Pepsi A.M.? Heinz E-Z Squirt purple ketchup? Customer service feedback can help you avoid costly mistakes. Whether you have three people or 30 on your support team, they’re a crucial link to the outside world. Unlike product management or marketing teams – which only talk to customers from time to time – your agents talk to real customers every single day. They can tell you how customers are interacting with your product and if they’re having problems. These insights should drive your important product decisions. Your support cases also contain a wealth of information. If you categorize your cases carefully, you can see what modifications and features customers would like to see in your product or what the biggest pain points are.
Customers don’t like to leave a product and go to a separate site or experience when they need help. That’s why companies like Amazon are starting to add “SOS buttons” to their products. It doesn’t have to be hard. You can start as simply as adding support center links to relevant pages on your site. Or add a way for customers to log tickets within your product experience. The days when your agents clocked in and waited for calls and emails from customers will soon pass. Connected products and wearables are now being developed that initiates their own service tickets. In the future, companies will know when customers are having trouble and can reach out before they even have a chance to pick up the phone, sometimes before they even know there’s an issue.

6. Make support part of your experience

CHECKLIST

- Build links to your support center into your product so customers can access articles without leaving.
- Consider adding an SOS button to your product so customers can ask for help right when they need it.
- Look at ways to offer proactive support so you help customers before they even ask.
Ready to get excited about customers? Start putting customer service at the center of everything you do. Try Desk.com for free and see how you can turn every interaction into an opportunity for customer happiness.

FREE TRIAL

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