



Why Quality Support Makes Business Sense

An all too familiar story?

What comes to mind when you think about the times you have been in need of support from a vendor? If you tried to contact them by phone, did you have to navigate through several menus of options, ending up on hold for an extended period, only to finally reach someone who ultimately cannot answer your question? Or, using online based support, how do you feel when you get pre-defined or overly simplistic responses to your electronic requests while your specific question goes unanswered or is referred to someone else whose response time is so long (weeks) that the time for your need has passed?

Do these experiences instill any sense of customer loyalty in you? Does it encourage you to use the vendors support services in the future? Or does it reinforce your sense that once you have become a customer, you are pretty much on your own to figure things out? If the latter, it's a big loss for the vendor – they lose out on any benefit of positive customer references, effectively squelching any hope of seeing any new customer opportunities from you.

We have all become conditioned

What is interesting to observe is that both the vendor and the customer have evolved to the point where this behavior is expected. If a customer has a question or a problem, they expect their frustration to simply increase when they contact the vendor for support, decreasing the frequency of “going back to the well”. When the frustration for a particular issue reaches the threshold that they just have to contact the vendor, they may have little hope for a solution and often take the opportunity to vent if their problem is not resolved immediately.

The vendor's Support Services personnel are conditioned to focus on speed of response - but less so the speed of resolution, hoping a quick response will reduce the user frustration. Because the use of the support services is lower than it should be, the vendor has an incorrect perception of customer satisfaction. Because the frustration level of the customers that do contact support are high, the people with the most developed knowledge of the products don't last long in these dedicated support jobs due to low job gratification. So the culture of the Support team ends up being more of a bunker mentality completely separated from the goals and objectives of other parts of the company who are focused on revenue generation.

Clearly both sides have set expectations – and they aren't good, so the situation more often than not devolves into a “lose-lose” transaction. The customer doesn't get an adequate answer and the vendor doesn't gain an advocate.

What is Quality Support?

Phone initiated support simply isn't the best route to quality support, given the fact there is likely research required, and possibly even some test data that needs to be exchanged. The long and short of it - Quality Support must be driven to online mechanisms to be most effective. OR, connect users with vendor personnel that have responsibility for that specific customer from an account management perspective. This provides continuity for the user if there is follow-up required. Once this relationship is established then all forms of communication become an option for resolution; electronic, telephone, or a combination – providing the safety net the customer wants.

Unfortunately, a lot of companies do not have an adequate business process management system in place, and do not make the time to analyze what they do have to increase efficiency, streamline processes, and make sure that they are aligned to business goals and objectives.

How Business Process Management (BPM) helps you get there

Using BPM is one of the best methods to get a handle on and tune the quality of your support processes. By defining the objectives up front, designing or tuning existing processes as well as establishing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for people and processes, and then measuring against those KPIs, you gain the transparency you need to make quality business decisions regarding your support processes. The key to success is measuring what will give you the best ROI. As stated, customers are less impressed with “response time” than they are with “resolution time”. For example, measuring percentage of issues resolved against resolution time should compare favorably to customer satisfaction indicators. Another example would be to establish personal objectives for full or partial support responsibilities and generation of services revenue. Measurement of the resultant revenue should compare favorably to employee longevity and job satisfaction, aligning affected personnel with the corporate revenue objectives. Establishing objectives for account management support should increase customer loyalty.

Benefits of providing Quality Support

User benefits of quality support are obvious. The issue is resolved, achievable expectations are set for future interactions, and the user is motivated to use the services again if the need arises. For the vendor, quality support will provide additional services revenue opportunities and it creates a positive perceived value for any paid maintenance, leading to maintenance renewals. In addition, there is a much higher chance that the customer will become a reference account to assist the vendor with other sales opportunities, or even be open to case studies that will aid the vendor in the marketing arena. The key aspect is that it provides the opportunity for a longer term relationship with their customer contacts. And if these contacts move on to other career opportunities, those relationships turn into new opportunities.

It just makes sense

The simple concept is to grow revenue by helping users be successful. After building a history of issue resolution with customers, new expectations are set with regards to the quality of support interactions, driving customer loyalty. All customers know at some point they will have issues or questions about products or services purchased. But by turning these interactions into positive experiences for the user, they become revenue opportunities for the vendor both within that account, but also via customer references as part of the sales process with other prospects. That is the definition of a win-win.

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