

# Forbes

EDITORS' PICK | 632 views | Feb 3, 2020, 02:18pm EST

## B2B Customer Support Is A Whole Different Beast. You Need The Right Tools To Pull It Off.



**Micah Solomon** Senior Contributor 

**Entrepreneurs**

*Customer service consultant, keynote speaker. micah@micahsolomon.com*

Robert C. Johnson is both the metaphorical pilot of TeamSupport, his fast-growing Dallas-based company, and a real-life stunt pilot in airshows, flying vintage military airplanes to entertain crowds around the country.

On the ground, the company that Johnson pilots provides one of the only software solutions dedicated to B2B support, with clients that range from software and technology providers to “complex product providers” such as medical equipment suppliers. [TeamSupport](#) was founded by Johnson in 2009 after seeing a gap in the market, which we’ll hear about shortly.

But first, a bit more about that flying.



Robert C. Johnson, Co-founder and CEO, TeamSupport TEAMSUPPORT

**Robert C. Johnson, President and CEO,**

**TeamSupport:** It's true, I fly in airshows. I've been on the airshow circuit for three years now, flying classic military planes. But that's not most of the flying I do. I've been a pilot since I was 19, and I'm lucky that I'm able to use my abilities to fly for a lot of TeamSupport business.

**Micah Solomon, Senior Contributor, Forbes.com:** I'll bet it's dreamy when you get to combine two passions.

**Johnson:** I'm glad you put it that way. Because my biggest passion, other than my family, is TeamSupport.

**Solomon:** Tell me how you came up with the idea for TeamSupport, and how you turned that idea into a viable company.

**Johnson:** Enforced boredom can really spark creativity. The idea for TeamSupport coalesced for me while I was on hiatus, waiting out a year-long non-compete and no-poaching agreement with my previous firm.

**Solomon:** And that idea was....

**Johnson:** ...to build what I saw as a desperately needed solution for customer support at B2B companies, a helping hand, as it were, so such companies could stop needing to kludge their workflow together while using a generic solution that was better fitted to B2C—retail—companies. I knew the problem first-hand, because at my previous company, Sundance, which was a B2B technology company itself, there was nothing like this to be found. There were Zendesk and the other ticketing companies, but those ran into my other fundamental realization, that focusing on the support ticket was a backward way of doing things.

My belief was, and is, that it's essential to organize things around the customer, rather than the ticket, because every customer in B2B has such high value, and often is quite a complex entity. I wanted *the customer* to be the primary construct in the database, and then build the whole customer support system around that.

**Solomon:** Tell me more about why this organizing principle is particularly important in B2B.

**Johnson:** Organizing everything around individual tickets doesn't give the right picture when the customer is a company rather than an individual. In B2B, you typically need to support *multiple* individuals who work for the company. Sometimes these will be multiple individuals reporting different issues; sometimes they'll all be talking about the same issue. So you need to understand the relationship at the company level.

Plus, each interaction with a corporate customer has a potentially much-higher value. Going back to the B2C world, if I am the manufacturer of Bic pens, and one of my customers has a 29-cent pen explode in their pocket and they swear, "I'm never going to buy another Bic pen in my life," Bic will probably survive without that customer.

**Solomon:** Though, worst case, they'll start a "Bic Messed My Pants Up" Facebook page.

**Johnson:** That would be sub-optimal. But barring that, it's about \$3 a year in pen sales that Bic's going to lose. However, contrast that with the B2B vendor whose customer is buying a million dollars of software licenses from them. In that scenario, if you treat someone wrong at any level in that company's hierarchy, it could be a risk to your survival.

**Solomon:** With the stakes so high, I'd want software that not only helped me avoid mishaps, but also let me know immediately if I *had* rubbed anyone, at any level of the company, wrong: to let me know if customer dissatisfaction was brewing.

**Johnson:** Absolutely. A primary tool we've built into TeamSupport is our customer distress index or CDI. The CDI looks at all the interactions throughout the multiple contact points of a single corporate customer and compares those to all of that client's *other* customers: Is this customer having a higher level of distress than other customers? Then we'll bubble that customer up to the top for immediate attention.

**Solomon:** Is AI-assisted sentiment analysis involved in this, or is that more of a futuristic thing at this point?

**Johnson:** It's happening *now*. We've integrated with IBM's Watson for sentiment analysis. We can tell if a customer's frustrated, or if they're happy, and that plays back into the distress index.

**Solomon:** What's next for TeamSupport?

**Johnson:** A lot of growth. A lot of enhancements to our existing products, and some exciting new products that I can't *quite* talk about yet.

**Solomon:** So we should wait and retake this interview when you *can* spill the beans?

**Johnson:** Yeah....no. If we continue to do our job right, there's *always* going to be something new and exciting that I can't quite talk about. It's a great time for our business and I'm loving it.