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Cost Center or Profit Center? What B2B Support Truly Means to Your Business

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There are two types of viewpoints when it comes to B2B (business-to-business) customer support. The first approaches B2B customer support as a cost center, or a necessary expense for running a business. After all, having a support team is required for your product, and it's just something you need to have.

The second posits that B2B customer support is a profit center. Support may be part of a successful business, but that is because they are a part of a greater revenue-generating team. Their interactions with customers are not merely a process that needs to happen; instead, they view their conversations as potential opportunities to drive revenue, strengthen customer relationships and reduce churn.

How do you know which approach your business takes? And if it's as a profit center, whether your support team is operating as such on all of its channels? Let us

evaluate the key support channels with examples of how a cost center and a profit center approach them.

Ticket management (email and form)

- **Cost center:** A B2B support team is only doing their job well when a ticket queue is empty. When a ticket comes in, it needs a response ASAP, even if the full context or resources to answer the ticket are unavailable. We simply need to get the ticket closed and move on to the next one. And we certainly can't spend any time following up with the customer to make sure the resolution is satisfactory. We'll just deal with them if they submit a new ticket. After all, leadership cares mainly about how many tickets we closed today, not how many problems we solved.

- **Profit center:** Tickets in the B2B industry are important touch points in customer relationships. If a customer is submitting a ticket via email or form, their issue may be complex and likely require a visual component. Assign the ticket to an agent who is familiar with that account and let them suggest the right course of action. That agent will stick with the customer until the issue is resolved. And in the course of the dialogue, may uncover an opportunity to upgrade their account – an upselling opportunity – and that can only be determined by taking time to find out what the *real* problem is and fix it!

Phone

- **Cost center:** We need to keep wait time down, so we get customers off the phone as fast as we can. Have agents suggest a few common solutions, and if none work, tell the customer to submit a ticket and move on. After all, the lower the call time, the more calls each agent can take per hour, and we can lower our staffing cost. It's all about saving money, right?

- **Profit center:** Helping a customer over the phone has many benefits. Not only can you get to know them far better than email or chat, but you can pick up on subtle audio cues and take action. If a customer has an issue that does not seem like a big deal in writing, but they have an urgent tone in their voice, you can dig deeper into figuring out the total scope of the issue, solve it immediately and completely. And all of that extra effort and time will go a long way in ensuring they stay a customer. We've all heard the saying, "Do it right

the first time." Getting the problems solved in one conversation, even if it takes a bit more time, means that the customer won't have to call back in, mitigating frustration and enhancing satisfaction.

Live chat

- **Cost center:** We provide live chat because a lot of our customers requested it, but it's not a channel we focus on. Most of the questions are simple, like asking for a phone number or order update, and we get to those when we can. Chat is not a priority because it's not a channel for solving "real" problems, like we get through email and phone. We do not feature it as a key part of our support solution.

- **Profit center:** Live chat may not be a channel for complex issues, but it's often the first channel a customer interacts with when they are new to your business. We have a chat button on every key support page of our site to ensure customers know how to contact us right away for answers, even if our response is, "We do not know, but we will look into it and follow up as soon as possible." The ability to conveniently contact support when something goes wrong, especially via chat, is an essential part of reducing customer churn and increasing customer satisfaction.

Self-service

- **Cost center:** There is no way we are going to offer support outside of normal business hours, but we face a huge ticket queue and a lot of voicemails each morning. So, we are going to take some of the scripted templates we have for responding to tickets and put them online for our customers to find. This way when we are not around, customers can fumble through the documents and solve their own problems.

- **Profit center:** Self-service is a great channel for letting customers educate themselves on not only how to solve a problem but also about your entire business. Sure, it can reduce ticket and phone volume which helps save money, but often self-service is considered a last resort or a supplementary resource for customers. Agents who utilize B2B customer support software that allows for self-service content to be quickly inserted into ticket or chat

conversations can solve problems *and* increase self-service awareness at the same time.

Visual support

- **Cost center:** Solving a customer problem via screen share or video chat is too much work. There are so many variables involved. And some of our agent workstations are kind of a mess, so we would have to clean things up to be more visually appealing. What if we run into technical issues trying to connect to customers? We do not have time for that. By the time one screen share or video chat happens, we could have closed a half dozen tickets.

- **Profit center:** Especially in this decade where working and providing support remotely has become commonplace, we recognize that the benefits of visual support far outweigh any negatives. Leading B2B customer support software solutions provide visual support options with no additional cost, and this technology can turn complex email chains into 15-minute screen share conversations. The time savings of properly leveraging visual support is huge, so much so that some customers view it as an essential support feature and do not want to be supported in any other way once they see the power of these tactics.

Viewing customer support as a profit center and not a cost center can have a major impact on the success of your support operations, enhance customer relationships, and, yes, drive profits to the bottom line through reduced churn, upselling, and the value proposition for new clients.

Robert Johnson

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A recognized business leader and entrepreneur, Robert currently serves on the Board of Directors of Dallas Angel Network, a venture capital fund that supports entrepreneurs launching innovative new business ventures. He also has served as a mentor and investor with Tech Wildcatters, a Dallas-based mentor-driven seed accelerator focused on B2B and B2B2C technology that has been named one of

Forbes' Top 10 seed accelerators. He also previously served on the Board of Directors of Gale Force Petroleum Corporation (TSX Venture: GFP), a public oil and gas company. Robert currently sits on the Board of Directors for Blossom Street Ventures. a venture capital fund focused on helping technology companies grow. An alumnus of Colgate University in Hamilton, New York, Robert serves on Colgate's Alumni Council and is actively involved in its Thought Into Action Institute, which pairs up-and-coming student entrepreneurs with alumni mentors to support them in developing a new business or nonprofit, and with the Entrepreneurs of New York (ENY) Fund, which helps advance the for-profit and nonprofit business ideas of Colgate students and alumni.

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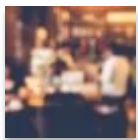
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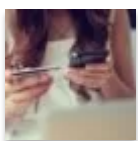

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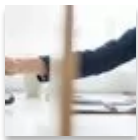
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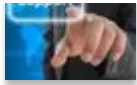10 Ways to Boost Customer Engagement With Your Restaurant

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