Why Customer Support Matters When Evaluating Technology for Your Board

Written by William Tam on October 14, 2019

Imagine attending a board meeting with 12 directors in the boardroom. Soon after the meeting commences, you have trouble retrieving the presentation notes on your laptop — and you have no secondary backup. You are desperate for help. Yet you can't leave the room since this meeting is important, and your participation is required for all items on the agenda.

Now consider your options for help:

1. Call a support hotline? *How long will it take before you can get through the automated phone maze and speak to a real support agent?*

2. Email the software vendor? *How long will you have to wait before someone replies?*

3. Contact in-house IT support? *Where are they? How much do they know about this specific application?*

CHALLENGES WITH EXPLAINING YOUR ISSUE

The internet has changed the way software vendors provide customer support. Software and mobile apps on our devices are getting updated more often. With software evolving at such a rapid pace, it presents a challenge for both end-users and product specialists. End-users can struggle to keep up, adding complexity for product specialists who might have a hard time supporting them as well. Traditional methods for getting help over the phone or by email are not as effective anymore. Here are the reasons why:

*   Describing complex issues can sometimes be challenging, both verbally or in writing. However, a screenshot or a quick video can often explain the problem in seconds. As they say: "A picture is worth a thousand words."

*   The variable sound quality of phone calls makes it difficult for operators to understand your question, especially when most call centres now are not locally based.

*   Email is slow. It's not about how long it takes to send and receive emails; it's about the time it takes to receive a human response to your question. **Studies find that the average response time for customer service related emails is 12 hours.**

Therefore, when evaluating technology solutions for enterprise use, it is vital that you choose a vendor with a modern support model that is up to speed with your business and the needs of your end-users. This is particularly important for solutions like board portals, where the use cases are often high-stakes, and the end-users are senior executives and board members.

GETTING HELP FASTER AND EASIER

The advent of modern customer helpdesk solutions enables service providers to monitor and act on support requests via multiple communication channels. End-users can now seek support via social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter), instant messaging apps (e.g. WhatsApp, iMessage), live chat, etc. in addition to traditional phone calls and emails.

Among all of the support channels, live chat is the most ideal in many circumstances. When the chat service is integrated into the software application, it provides a familiar chat experience (like texting

people in your immediate social network) without the need for installing other apps. Also, the support conversation is in context. Most live chat services support the sending of images so you can share screenshots. Some can even launch a screen sharing session right within the chat. Apple is an excellent example of providing chat support to its customers.

Here are some benefits of live chat:

1. TRANSPARENT WAIT TIME

Most live chat systems display how many customers are waiting in the queue ahead of you and/or suggest an approximate waiting time. When a support agent is ready to assist you, you will receive a push notification. You can enter your question in advance so the support person can understand your issue as soon as they become available.

2. A BETTER EXPERIENCE

With live chat, you don't need to look for the phone number or email address of your vendor's customer support team. The chat service is often made available either directly within the application or via the vendor's helpdesk portal where conversations can be initiated with a single click. When the conversation is over, you will have the option to receive a copy of the transcript by email. This is useful when a discussion involves instructions or steps to follow.

3. HIGHER AVAILABILITY

Support agents can manage multiple customer live chat conversations at a time while they wait for the other parties to type. This increases support agents' productivity, thus reducing the average queue time for customers. In parallel, it improves the availability of real-time support.

4. UNOBTRUSIVE

If you are a company secretary facilitating a board meeting, it would be difficult for you to leave the meeting to call for help. Live chat allows users to discreetly seek help without disrupting the meeting.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Even with the advancement of technology, traditional support channels such as telephone hotlines and email won't be going away anytime soon. Given the unique characteristics of board technology users, vendors have to be flexible when providing customer support so that their end-users can expect practical and timely help in particular scenarios or situations.

When evaluating board portal solutions, it is crucial that the customer support aspect of the service is not overlooked. Remember to engage your end-users. Seek out their opinions and expectations. Because no matter how great a piece of software is, it won't be put to good use if it is not adopted properly by your users. A good exercise is to spot-check your shortlisted vendors' customer support (e.g. by calling their support hotline during business hours and see if somebody picks up) to ensure the service is provided as advertised. Finally, it also helps if the software is inherently intuitive so that your end-users can use it with minimal training and assistance.your end-users can use it with minimal training and assistance.

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