From cost centre to critical revenue driver

How to build an elevated customer support department that drives business growth

SentiSum

SentiSum on elevating the contact centre

SentiSum is an artificial intelligence-powered SaaS platform that uncovers multi-level topics & sentiment insights on every support ticket, survey and review. We're built for customer support leaders to deliver actionable insights across the organisation, improve customer-centric collaboration, and create organisational efficiency.

We regularly publish insightful content for support leaders on our blog at www.sentisum.com/library.

We would like to thank the contributors of this ebook:
Augie Ray, Annette Franz, Sean Mckee, Graham Johnston, Nicholas Zeisler, Edward Deason, Richard Jeffreys, and Megan Bowen. Ben Goodey edited this book.

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Any questions? Please contact contact@sentisum.com

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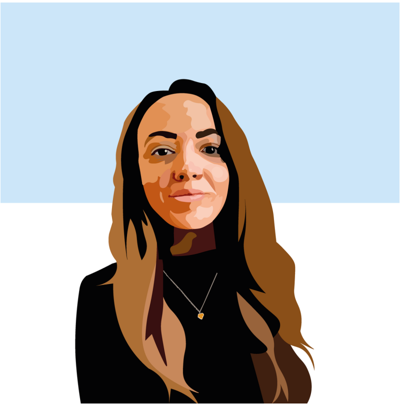
Contributors

This book would not have been possible without conversations with the following people



Alice Godfrey, Ex-Head of Support, Zava

Augie Ray, VP Analyst of CX, Gartner

Edward Deason, Head of Customer Service, Pret

Sean Mckee, Ex-Director of CX, Schuh

Megan Bowen, Chief Customer Officer, Refine Labs

Nicholas Zeisler, Zeisler Consulting, Ex-Director of CX, HP

Additional thanks to Richard Jeffreys, Former Managing Director at Standard Charted Bank, and Graham Johnston, Head of Omnichannel at Three for their contributions.

Chapter one

Building a company culture that values the customer

1 Building a company culture that values the customer

Building a customer-centric culture is vital to shifting the contact-centre from ‘cost’ to ‘value’ because you need buy-in and respect. In this chapter we address two sides to customer-centric leadership. First, we take a look at the steps you can take to change how employees act respond to customers. We then address the elephant in the room: are customer support and experience specialists just bad at selling their value? With three major changes to how you sell your projects internally, you'll put your projects top of the list.

Three E’s to building a culture that puts the customer first

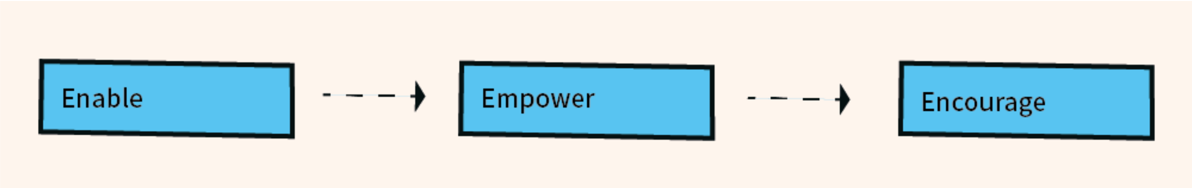
Turning the contact centre into a critical revenue driver takes a significant reframing. The first step on this journey is to create a culture that values the customer from the ground up. A customer-centric culture is one that clearly understands that happy customers spend more, stay longer, send you new customers and are less costly to serve.

Nicholas Zeisler, Principal at Zeisler Consulting, has a three element framework for building an organisation that's customer-focused. The first is enablement.

Enablement

No team can be customer-focused without the right tools to do so. To lead and drive the right culture, you must go further than employee benefits. A great culture doesn’t start with free beer and a ping pong table in the break room. It’s started by hiring a team with clear goals and empowering them to do their job properly.

Nicholas Zeisler, the ex-Director of Customer Experience at HP, suggests moving beyond the human element of employee care. Contact centre employees who are not well-equipped take more time on administrative work and can't be present at work. They feel frustrated and can't focus on customer service, and beyond that, the frustration leads to low morale and low engagement.



"We in leadership have to make sure we equip our team properly. It's not just for our employees' happiness, it also makes them more efficient when they have the proper tools."
Nicholas Zeisler, CCXP

Empowering staff with tools that make them efficient and not overwhelmed with administrative work, frees up employee time to do what they do best: empathise with the customer.

Empowerment

Empowerment is the second element leaders must focus on to build a customer-centric culture.

Even with the greatest tools in the world, frontline employees without authority are severely hindered in their quest for customer service excellence. With enablement, your teams are efficient and equipped to deliver an exceptional customer experience. But, if your customer support team can't offer a refund or must always escalate to a supervisor, then they are not empowered to build a strong customer relationship.

A lack of empowerment cuts against a customer-centric culture. It sews distrust and can lead to emotionally disengaged employees. On the other hand, employees that feel engaged and efficient can spend time uncovering the root cause of the customer's complaints and clearing up the subsequent symptoms.

Empowering a team through operational procedure is one way to create a customer-centric culture. Another is by enabling customer service agents to delight customers with gifts and rewards, flipping the script from problem-solving to relationship building.

Alice Godfrey, ex-Head of Support at Zava and customer support consultant for fast-growing startups, suggests the use of low-risk tools like Huggg.

"Huggg is an app that you can use to send little gifts to people. It could just be a coffee that's sent to them via a code on their phone. If you can implement that within your team, that's a really good thing that provides autonomy but is risk-restricted.

A lot of the time in customer service you're just fixing negative problems, but this brings joy to the agent's day and the customer. You always get a response that says, "wow, thank you. You don't know how much that means to me."
Alice Godfrey, Founder, Bloomic

Pret a Manger, the UK sandwich chain uses a similar strategy. In-store baristas are given a daily budget that allows them to offer a customer who looks like they need a boost a free item. A customer having a bad day gets an on the house coffee or sandwich, creating customer delight and instilling the value of customer service amongst employees.

This low-risk, high-value strategy solves two customer service pain points: agent motivation and customer satisfaction.

Encouragement

Enablement provides the tools your team needs to do their job well, and empowerment gives them the authority to leverage those tools on behalf of the customer at any moment.

Encouragement, the third element to building a customer-centric culture, is where leaders can significantly move the needle on change. You must encourage employees to think in a customer-centric way, and to do so you must lead by example.

The first step is to prioritise process improvement and infrastructure change that puts the customer first. A contact-centre that drives revenue invests in projects that primarily benefit the customer and, subsequently, create opportunities for upselling, retention and advocacy.

In chapter three, we address the necessary transformations and investment opportunities you must embrace, but here we state that prioritisation of projects that improve the customer's experience sends signals to your employees that the customer matters most.

Step two of encouragement is to involve leadership in your voice of the customer program. A powerful way to get customer insights that align your business to customer needs is to interact with your product in the same way customers do.

Set aside time each month for you and your team to use your products. Leaders who do this publicly, encourage others to do so, too. It's one thing to see a dedicated voice of the customer team do this, but another to see leadership across the organisation also participating.

In the contact centre, directors and managers should periodically take on the role of the customer service agent and talk to customers.

Selling the value of customer service internally

We, as customer service champions, inherently understand the value of the support department. It's a core element in the customer journey that has endless opportunity for client retention and business improvement. However, it's not always clear to the wider business. There's an entrenched shadow over customer support that shows the function as a necessary evil rather than an opportunity to drive revenue.

We've seen that with a touch of internal selling, this can change. Here are three ways you can use to sell the value of your department within your organisation.

Lifting the veil of abstraction

First and foremost, it's time to drop the buzzwords: NPS, CSAT, CES, QA, escalation, and so on. Abstract concepts like these make it hard for the rest of your organisation to understand the value of the work.

Cementing customer support as a key business unit means changing the mindset of the right people. Decision-makers in your organisation need to understand that customer support has value, as an insight channel, revenue driver and loyalty creator.

How do you flip the mindset of those that matter? Here's three tried and testing techniques:

"The people making the decisions need to understand that customer service is the only pure route to what's actually going on with your customer."
Alice Godfrey, Founder, Bloomic

- ### Put support on camera

Make a Google Hangout or Zoom call that's accessible to everyone in the business each week. For example, every week between 2:00-4:00pm on a Tuesday set up a computer and have one of the advisors sit and take calls as normal. Encourage everyone in your organisation to attend, on mute, so they can listen first hand to the customer-agent interaction.Hearing customer insight first hand is a powerful way for marketing and product professionals to generate ideas for their roadmap. It'll also show off the work of a support agent so they feel appreciated and empowered.

- **Get the C-suite on the phones**

Go one step further than a video call by bringing in your organisation's leadership team once a month to take customer support queries. Even if only for an hour or two a month, it sets the tone that customers are a tangible asset to be appreciated and learned from, and that customer support is a function for relationship building and driving future revenue.

- **Make support an onboarding process**

Companies worldwide are starting to incorporate customer service in the onboarding process. For example, every new Pret a Manger team member spends their first week working in-store.

“I spent my first week of Pret in my local shop and it's incredible to see what our baristas can do. I was amazed the first day I worked on the register and there would be people walking through the door. And by the time the customer got to the checkout, their drink had already been made. Our baristas have this phenomenal memory for each customer's favourite orders. And it is such an incredible experience

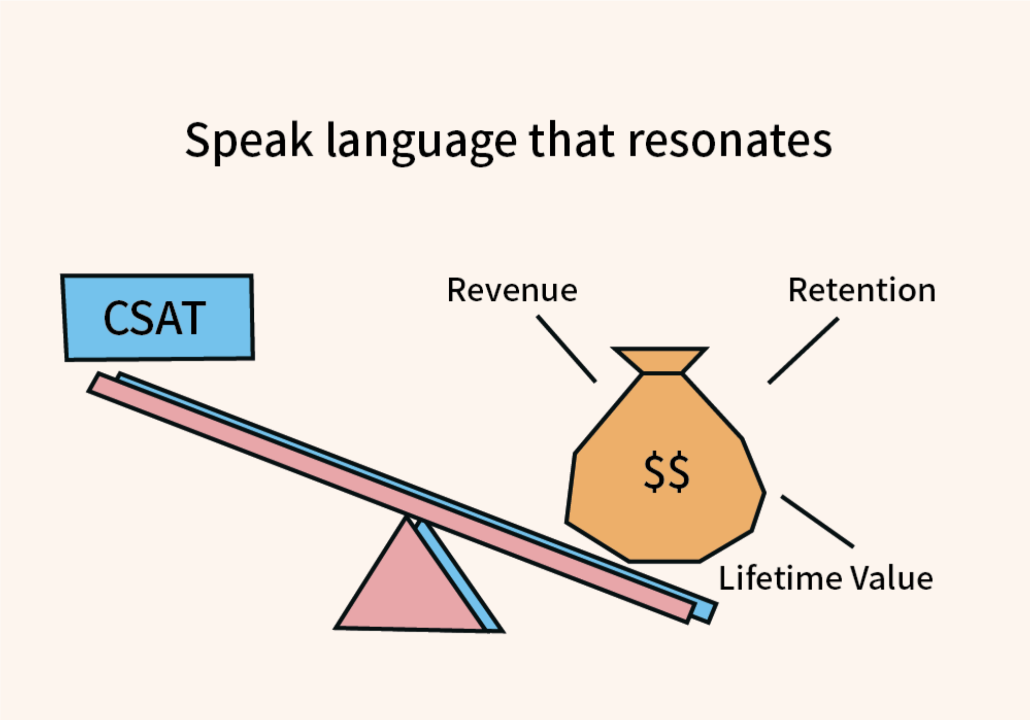
It's what makes Pret, Pret. It's part of our fun, it's part of our experience, and it's part of the kinds of relationships that our staff build with our customers.”
Edward Deason, Head of Customer Service, Pret a Manger.

If you want to build a customer-centric culture that appreciates customer service, having every employee go through a tangible customer interaction is a powerful method of doing so.

Speak the language of the business: revenue

So frequently customer experience and support teams feel hard done by. No one seems to understand their value and they’re overlooked for project investment.

As customer support leaders, we must not lose sight of the fact that just because we are convinced of the value of customer experience it doesn't mean that others are, too. As it comes around to picking projects for next year, selling the value of improved customer satisfaction and net promoter scores is vital to getting the budget.



Other departments must link their outcomes to the business bottom line, and so should we. Tying increases to our customer-centric KPIs to revenue helps your leadership peers to internalise the value of your project. We suggest investing time in linking your KPI outcomes to the bottom line so that you can walk into the meeting and say with certainty that happier customers spend more, stay longer, have a lower cost to serve, recommend more, and will increase our market share.

“When I start talking about let's raise our NPS or CSAT, what will happen is that nobody will ever say "I don't care". Nobody ever says that. We all know that we want to improve it. But when it really comes time to make hard financial decisions, when our leaders are looking at the 100 proposed projects and 90 of them have a hard ROI associated with them, and I show up and say, "Hey, we should do this to improve net promoter score", I will typically lose."
Augie Ray, VP Analyst, Gartner

Be prepared with evidence

Before you begin to link operational data to customer feedback, bring existing research to the table. Harvard Business Review quantified the value of customer experience in 2014. They found that after controlling for other factors that drive repeat purchases:

In transaction-based businesses: Customers with the best past experiences spend 140% more than those with the poorest past experiences.

I**n subscription-based businesses:** Customers with the best past experiences have a 74% chance of remaining a member for at least another year; customers with the worst experiences have a 43% chance of being a member one year later. In fact, those who gave the highest CX scores were likely to remain members for another six years.

Take research like this to your team and let the rest of your company know that, as customer support leader, you are the frontline to driving positive experiences and helping the organisation improve negative ones.

Doing internal research is more work, but the payoff is higher because it’s the context is concrete. We suggest taking your customer value metrics like customer lifetime value, order value, repurchase rate, and ensuring they’re linked to individual consumers. Match these metrics to survey results and customer sentiment derived from support tickets, and understand whether low customer experience metrics do indeed correlate with lower customer value.

Speaking bottom-line language is convincing because that’s what the C-Suite cares about. They're used to evaluating projects based on monetary figures. If this doesn’t get buy-in, nothing will.

Chapter two

Delivering transformative customer insights

2 Delivering transformative customer insights

Customer support is uniquely in touch with the customer’s needs. But extracting that information in a way that other department leaders can trust is difficult.

In this chapter we address why insights from the frontline are so valuable and what makes insight actionable. We then dive into an actionable guide of our own that should set you on a path to uncovering actionable customer feedback that drives tangible business value.

Why are insights important? And, to who?

The power of customer support for the rest of the company stems from your proximity to the customer’s voice. Every customer call, chat, email, review and survey holds valuable information on customer behaviours and frictions. Customer support tickets, in particular, deliver best in class customer insights. They come in high volumes and are rich with unsolicited (and therefore unbiased) customer insight.

Almost every department in a customer-centric business needs customer insight to operate effectively. The marketing department wants to understand what’s driving buzz around the brand so they can double down on it in marketing campaigns. The buying department needs insight to understand which product ingredient drives friction so they can change suppliers. And, the procurement department wants feedback on which third party suppliers are underperforming so they can request changes.

Let's take the example of an eCommerce furniture store (like Habitat or MADE). Their customer reviews and support tickets might reveal that their high-quality products are frequently arriving late or damaged. In the context of the customer journey, the delivery touchpoint is negatively affecting their customers and causing churn. Armed with this insight, the furniture store can contact their delivery partners, insist on improvements, or change suppliers altogether.

What data should you collect?

Whether you are running surveys or analysing reviews, it can be hard to know what data will be most impactful. Surveys stink of bias, and support tickets come in such high volumes it can be hard to tag them consistently.

There are two valuable pieces of data to collect across every customer feedback channel: topic volume and sentiment.

- **Reason for contact volume (especially when linked to customer outcomes)**

Topic volume tells you how frequently a topic was mentioned by customers. You'll need to find categories that are common amongst the data so you can sort each data point into them. You will find that sub-categories are very useful. Second and third level topic categories will help you uncover hidden insight which is often the most insightful for business transformation.

Furthermore, linking topics to operational data like customer churn can give you a clear picture of which problems need solving first. For example, let's say at a software company like Grammarly, 100 customer support tickets a month mention 'product complexity' as a problem. Thanks to your subcategorisation, you discovered that 70% of those chats specifically mention difficulty understanding the login process. If you could subsequently see that those users were disengaged and likely didn't carry forward their subscription to the next month, your product team quickly builds the impetus to prioritise a redesign of the user login experience.

In this way, topic volume drives forward product improvement and improves your businesses bottom-line growth.

- **Sentiment level (especially severity)**

Using natural language processing technology, you can contextualise free-text data whatever the volume. Understanding that 50% of NPS survey answers mentioned the same problem is one part of the puzzle, but knowing whether that topic was mostly negative or positive (and to what degree it caused anxiety and frustration) will provide transparency on the causes of customer pain.

How to make sure insights are actionable

Insights without action are a waste. As customer support leaders, it's our job to make sure other department leaders can confidently listen to the insights we hand them. To be a critical revenue-driver, customer support needs to deliver actionable customer feedback.

WHAT MAKES

ACTIONABLE INSIGHT

Contextualised

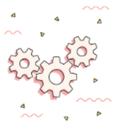
Insight should clearly show data around its priority. After surveying your customers, a driver analysis will tell you how important each topic or touchpoint has been to customer satisfaction levels.

Insightful

New is everything. For example, knowing that CSAT is low is non-insightful. But, knowing customers who considered their post-sale experience bad churn faster is insightful.

Timely

Fresh insight wins. Organisations frequently run voice of the customer programmes for a few months, then take months to analyse the data. The speed at which consumer needs change makes this insight largely useless.



Granular

While timely insights are important, a granular level of detail is the shortcut to a solution. When receiving customer insights, leaders across your organisation want to be able to understand the root cause of those insights so they can quickly curtail them.

Statistically significant

Qualitative feedback is awesome but it suffers from the 'small sample' problem. We suggest turning your qualitative customer feedback into something statistically significant using data tagging of topic and sentiment.

Unbiased

Any type of bias that has crept into your customer feedback analysis results should make you wary to report them. There are two main buckets of customer survey bias to avoid: selection bias and response bias. But, bias also depends on the questions you ask and how you ask them.

RETAIN AND GROW YOUR CUSTOMERS WITH UNBIASED INSIGHT

Providing managers with actionable insights and sentiment feedback is empowering. It creates energy: encouraging agile ways of working and making customer-centricity easy.

It drives the right focus on product direction and digital services. Most importantly, it allows leaders to pivot customer service from being a low-value cost centre to a higher value, commercially focused, business-aligned unit."
Richard Jeffreys, Managing Director, Standard Chartered

Six things that make insight actionable

To make the data you uncover actionable, it needs to be insightful and reliable:

1. Contextualised

Without context on priority and impact of a customer painpoint, it's hard to know how important it is to take action on.

Insight should clearly show data around its priority. Some insights cause more customer friction than others, and some cause a little bit of friction but for many more people. After surveying your customers, a driver analysis will tell you how important each topic or touchpoint has been those customer's satisfaction level.

For example, knowing a customer's satisfaction rating is 'unsatisfied' is not actionable alone. But, knowing the drivers of dissatisfaction (say, 'late delivery' or 'damaged item') and then which of those drivers is most painful for the customer (you could analyse correlations between the drivers and customer churn to see which driver really impact the customer), is easier to prioritise and take action on.

2. Insightful vs. Non-Insightful Insight

New is everything. Insightful means uncovering something of which people weren't yet aware. For example, knowing that CSAT is low is non-insightful. But, knowing CSAT is low in people +65 years old and they frequently complain about being confused at the checkout process is insightful. The insightful data can be used to make the checkout process easier for this group of customers, increasing conversion rates and driving real business value.

3. Insight timeliness

The fresher the data the better. Organisations frequently will run voice of the customer programmes for a few months, then take a few months to sift through the data, only to provide customer insight six months later. The speed at which consumer needs change makes this insight largely useless—by then the damage to customer satisfaction is already done.

Customer support conversations are high frequency, so by nature, they're always fresh. Using a ticket tagging or artificial intelligence software, you're now able to uncover customer insights from that data in near real-time. So the collection and analytics of the data are near-instantaneous.

Reporting these insights with department leaders across your organisation is transformative. They'll quickly see what's causing customer churn and your fast speed-to-insight will make solutions more proactive.

4. Granular insights—the devil is in the detail

While timely insights are important, a granular level of detail is the shortcut to a solution. When receiving customer insights, leaders across your organisation want to be able to understand the root cause of those insights so they can quickly curtail them.
Returning to our example of an eCommerce furniture retailer, non-granular insights look like, 'customer couldn't checkout'. Whereas, granular insights look like, 'Paypal isn't working'. This is a real example from a SentiSum customer who was then able to tackle the problem head-on before other customers were affected.

To uncover granular insights, we suggest using multi-level data tagging, for example, "Checkout problem" → "Payment Issue" → "Paypal Not Working". Hierarchical tagging of customer tickets, feedback and reviews allows any user to start at a high level and then dig deeper into the root cause of the problem.

5. Statistically significant insight

Qualitative feedback (live chat logs, reviews and free-text survey fields) is the most valuable for product improvement. It's easy to get hung up on quantitative measures like CSAT or NPS, but they're likely non-insightful without understanding the drivers of the measure.

"Finding ways to get qualitative feedback and surfacing qualitative trends, in my experience, has been the most valuable for actually making changes to a product or an operational process to improve the experience."
Megan Bowen, Chief Customer Officer, Refine Labs

However, qualitative feedback suffers from the 'small sample' problem that tends to create biased and untrustable insight. As a customer support leader, we suggest turning your qualitative customer feedback into something statistically significant. Whether that's tagging the topic of each support ticket at scale as they come in, or using software that does so, knowing that 1,000 customers face the same issue with a touchpoint is ten times more valuable than one or two survey answers.

6. Unbiased insight

Survey bias is a well-researched topic. In the context of customer feedback surveys, bias is a “systematic error introduced into sampling or testing by selecting or encouraging one outcome or answer over others.” That “encouragement” towards a specific outcome is what leads to survey bias, where you may only be getting one type of customer's perspective.

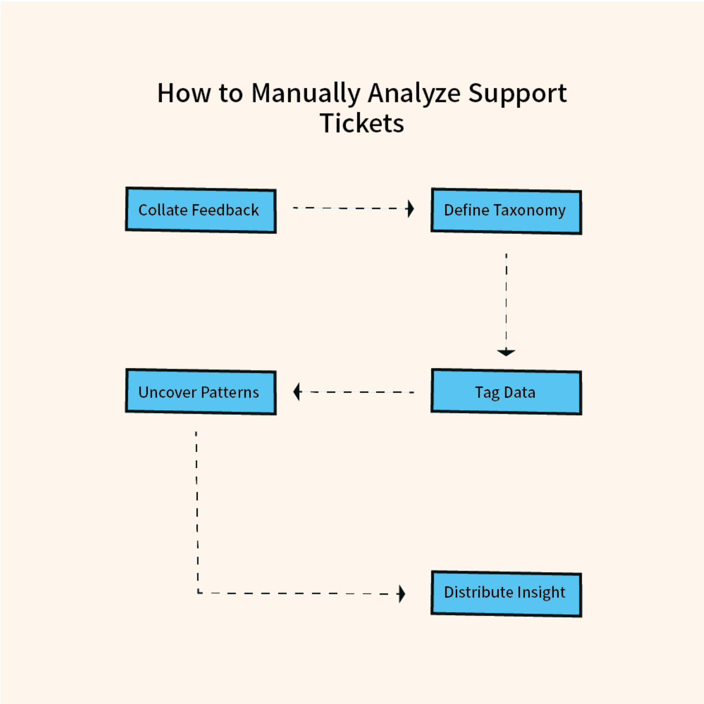
Any type of bias that has crept into your customer feedback analysis results should make you wary to report them. There are two main buckets of customer survey bias to avoid so that you don’t fall into the trap of basing business decisions off of skewed survey results:

Selection bias, where the results are skewed a certain way because you’ve only captured feedback from a certain segment of your audience. We see this frequently with customer surveys because when on average just 1% of customers fill out your survey, we must question who that 1% is. If they have similar characteristics then your results are no longer representative.

Response bias, where there’s something about how the actual survey questionnaire is constructed that encourages a certain type of answer, leading to measurement error. One example is when a questionnaire is so long that your customers answer later questions inaccurately, just to finish the survey quickly and claim their reward.

Following these five rules will improve the quality of the customer feedback you and your team reports. By consistently delivering actionable customer feedback, the contact-centre will quickly contribute to business improvement and begin to cement itself as a critical revenue driver.

How to analyse customer feedback from support tickets—for low ticket volume customer support teams



Once you've determined what data to collect and how, the data needs to be transformed into insight that your business can confidently use to inform its roadmap.

This can be complex at a meaningful scale and we suggest using automation software to produce the most actionable results. However, if you have under 1,000 support tickets a month then the ROI is likely not there for you yet, you'll make solid progress following these steps:

Collate your feedback data

Create a spreadsheet with the support ticket logs alongside that customer's key metadata (like average order value, length of time as a customer, date of feedback and source).

Feedback	Channel	Customer Since	Monthly Value	Feedback Date	Customer ID	Department (1), e.g. product	Feedback Theme (1), e.g. Delivery
Hi Jane, I have not received the box, and the tracking page says they have returned the box to the sender. Please could you process a refund for this box. Thank you, Sarah.	Live Web Chat	06/09/2019	£72.50	06/10/2020	203456	☐	☑

Your support ticket management software should help you uncover the metadata, and you can export your support chat logs as qualitative feedback.

Download our <u>spreadsheet example</u> to get you started.

Decide on your taxonomy

Categorising feedback isn't always easy. Choose topics that are granular enough to be insightful but high level enough that you can draw out similarities. When dealing with high volumes of unstructured free text (such as customer support ticket logs) you'll want to create both high-level themes and more granular sub-categories.

Start with feedback type so that you can deliver the feedback to the right team. Here are some examples:

- Feature request
- Product bug
- Third-party provider issue

Now go further to provide granularity. Here are some theme examples with sub-categories beneath them:

- Delivery
  - Packaging
  - Delay
  - Damage
  - Packaging
  - Tracking
- Order process
  - Discount not working
  - Failed payment
  - Credit not applied
- Ease of payment
  - Payment provider failed
  - Card expired
- Website issues
  - Product availability
  - Display issues
  - Slow load time
- Staff service
  - Rude staff
  - Helpful customer service

We suggest scanning through a handful of customer conversations to get a feel for your themes and categories. High volumes are important for actionability, so you'll want to research beforehand to ensure you cover all bases.

Start tagging the data

Now that your data is in an excel spreadsheet, it's time to get stuck in. We suggest one person doing this task to ensure objectivity—two people may interpret the same piece of text differently, categorising it differently.

Analyse row by row, and add the category and theme for that data point in the spreadsheet. Use the tick box method so that each conversation can be tagged with multiple themes and topics. Being a rich source of customer feedback, your customers are likely to mention multiple causes of customer friction.

This task can be time-consuming with high volumes of data. It's especially time-consuming if you choose to expand your research beyond customer support tickets, to survey results and customer reviews. Because actionability is a key consideration, you are likely to only be able to analyse small ticket volumes in a way that's timely and accurate.

For large volumes of tickets, we suggest using automated NLP software.

Look for patterns and share your insights

Apply filters to your spreadsheet to reveal which topics are mentioned in the highest volumes, and send the data off to the relevant team. The popularity of the theme and category can be a clear indicator of what needs prioritisation.

When it comes to sharing your findings, who, how and when must be considered. Reporting should be simple for anyone to understand, so make sure to label the meaning of your chosen taxonomy. Share your findings as quickly as possible to ensure the data is more actionable, and add the volume of topic data to prove statistical significance.

How to analyse customer feedback from support tickets—automation for high ticket volume customer support teams

Contact centre automation is the future, although partly due to the continued positioning of the contact centre as a cost-driver. The key trends in automation include self-service, chatbots, knowledge-base automation, personalisation and insight generation.

Automating the process for support ticket analytics helps to provide the objectivity and speed-to-insight needed for insights that back business transformation.

Support ticket management platforms rarely have effective automated tagging built into them. When they do they're usually rule-based, tagging support tickets in a way that's non-granular and naive.

Take automation a step further and drive real business value with machine learning. The most interesting customer-churn reduction use cases for machine learning ticket analytics include:

- **Real-time anomaly detection:** AI brings speed to high volumes of customer feedback. So if a discount code fails or a delivery partner of yours sees a spike in late deliveries, you can be proactive and prevent further customer complaints.
- **Vendor quality management:** External partners have an impact on your customer's experience, but are hard to influence. Putting customer feedback & AI together allows you to quantify a partners impact, so you can say 'this week, +500 support tickets were due to late deliveries', and ask them to fix it.
- **Build a knowledge-base:** Every company has a set of questions that gets asked again and again. With voice of the customer analytics across all your customer feedback, you can uncover them, quantify them, and prioritise which questions should be addressed in your knowledge base.
- **Optimise conversion rates:** Inform your product roadmap by understanding the key drivers of customer friction. Machine learning helps you to uncover reasons for contact at a granular level, so you can prioritise the changes that get in the way of purchases.

The difference between rule-based and machine learning-based automated ticket tagging

Rule-based ticket tagging allows you to set up certain 'rules' to guide an automated task. For instance, you may set your ticket management software to tag every support ticket that contains the word 'return' with the tag 'refund request'. This would significantly reduce the time spent tagging the data but would be inaccurate some of the time. For example, you wouldn't have a tag on a conversation discussing a refund request that didn't mention the word 'return'.

On the other hand, machine learning-based ticket tagging wouldn't need rules to tag data accurately. Using NLP, it would understand that the sentence, "hey, I need to give this item back because it's broken", is within the topic of both 'refunds' and 'damaged item', tagging it with multiple and topics.

After training an AI model on your historical data, a machine learning model could tag customer support tickets and categorise them accurately in real-time.

Use cases for AI & Support Tickets

Chapter three

Leveraging the contact centre for support-driven growth

3 Support-driven growth: leveraging the contact centre

Shifting the narrative of the contact centre from a cost to value requires infrastructural transformation. Everything must change, from the characteristics of who you hire and how you train them, through to the technology you build and the KPIs you target.

Traditionally, customer support puts out fires. Your agents answer questions and solve problems. To become a critical revenue driver, customer support as a business unit needs to see customers for not just who they are, but for who they could be. They need to establish a ‘growth mindset’.

A contact centre with a growth mindset keeps the conversation going longer. Their KPIs are no longer about the speed of resolution or queue crunching, they focus on helping the customer realise their full potential with your product because we know relationship building encourages retention, increases basket sizes and boosts conversion rates.

Seven ways to transform the contact centre so it adds to bottom-line growth

1. **Schuh injects sales trained agents into the digital buying journey**

Schuh, the British high-street retail corporation, introduced video chat into their customer service solution.

They would nudge certain customers on their online store to participate in a conversation, usually doing a one-way video where a sales-trained member of support would speak and direct the customer through their shopping journey.

The agent helped customers navigate the site. They could take them to a product, showcase things for them, drop things into the basket and help them up to a particular point in the journey.

“Video chat in the buying journey lead to a propensity to spend more money, an ability to convert that was a multiple of the normal website conversion and customers being absolutely delighted by the interaction."
Sean Mckee, Ex-Director of Customer Experience, Schuh

After the experiment, Schuh saw such positive results that they warmly embraced web chat as a means of customer-contact centre interaction. The Schuh team also went out of their way to measure profitability by the desk and found it to be very profitable.

2. **Three links in-store employees to online customers via video chat**

Three, the British telecommunications and internet services provider, created a project called “Three Store Now” where they repurposed in-store customer service professionals to drive revenue and additional customer delight.

Three’s in-store employees are sales trained professionals who talk customers through which phone and phone contract to buy. With the implementation of Three Store Now, idle store employees can switch on their iPad or computer and connect with customers waiting in the customer support queue.

Not only did this improve the customer experience, bringing the in-store and online retail experiences together, but it meant those customer service agents could support sales and improve conversion rates.

3**. Use customer interactions with the contact centre as a retention opportunity**

One retention method for support agents with a growth mindset is the “Yes, and…” technique.

Solving the customer’s problem should not be the end of the discussion. When you drop call resolution time as the most important KPI, your agents can spend time growing your bottom line.

At the end of a call, email or chat, identify opportunities to help the customer further. Perhaps, introducing the customer to a useful webinar or introducing them to a feature they haven’t yet used. These opportunities go a long way to helping the customer realise the full potential of your product and the more time they spend with a helpful agent, the stronger their brand affinity.

4. **Closing the loop: Uncover real-time customer complaints and turn then into a support ticket to be handled**

Closed-loop feedback is when a business responds or takes action on feedback submitted by a customer through a survey or review.

Negative feedback is harmful to a business if left unmanaged. The contact-centre can add real value here by reaching out and addressing the issue head-on. Turn negative survey results or negative customer reviews left across the web into tickets in your support ticket management system.

If properly empowered, your contact-centre team can resolve serious issues and tackle the frictions that are causing customers to churn.

5. **Develop proactive customer support and prevent customer complaints**

Proactive customer support is about anticipating customer issues and addressing them proactively.

Taking the initiative like this could increase customer retention rates by 3-5% (Enkata, 2010), decrease support ticket volume, and prevent customers from talking about your company negatively.

Setting up an anomaly alert system could help your organisation be proactive. For example, a sudden rise in support tickets about the same topic could indicate a bug in need of a fix. Passing this information to your product and engineer team could proactively solve the issue for future customers.

For example, Tesla Motors issues software patches to their cars automatically. Recently, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration alerted Tesla to a charging plug malfunction causing fires. Instead of recalling their cars, Tesla fixed the issue for more than 30,000 vehicle owners via a software update

6. **Align product teams with customer support KPIs**

At Revolut, the British challenger bank, product managers measure the performance of their feature or product based on support ticket volume. Once a product is released, they take a measure of ticket volume and must improve the contact rate with future feature releases. Feeding back customer complaints and frictions to the company product team is a feedback loop that ensures continuous, customer-centric improvement.

7**. Build expertise 'tracks' into your organisation**

Customer support agents who drive growth must be equipped with the training to do so.

Help Scout, the customer support software, advocates 'tracks'. At Help Scout, you can pursue a generalist track or a specialist track. Every new hire starts as a generalist to develop product expertise, they then follow a track into a more established role like customer success or sales development. Using this methodology you instil the value of customer support by making it the training ground for several company departments.

"Your customer support team has three superpowers:

- *Product expertise. No one knows your product(s) better than they do.*
- *Scale. The team's size makes it possible to interact with customers in a unified voice, and there are no single points of failure.*
- *A finger on the pulse. They know your greatest business challenges and can often help you solve them.*

With superpowers like these, why would you limit their impact to only reactively solving issues?"
Nick Francis, Cofounder & CEO, Help Scout

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