

# How to Deal with Difficult Customers over Live Chat



# Contents

Introduction	01
Understanding Difficult Customers	02
Consumer Psychology	02
Company Integrity	02
Limited Patience	02
Clarity and Ease-of-use	02
Difficult Customers Are Just Underserved Customers	03
Building a Dissatisfaction Prevention Strategy	03
Hire the Right People	04
Train Operators Effectively	04
Have Organized Departments and Specialists	04
Keep Your Operators Informed	05
Make Effective Chat Greetings	05
Enhancing Real-Time Live Chat Support	06
Emphasize Customer Support Soft Skills	06
Be an Effective Listener	06
Show Empathy	06
Be Expressive	07
Stay Calm and Don't Take It Personally	07
Understand What the Customer Really Wants	07
Admit Your Mistakes	08

Reach Resolutions Efficiently	08
Use Dynamic Chat Scripts	08
Systemize Multi-Tasking for Operators	08
Create Channels for Operator Collaboration	09
Empower Your Operators	09
<b>Implementing a Post-Resolution System</b>	09
Deliver Follow-Ups	09
Collect Customer Feedback	09
Create and Maintain Metric Systems	10
<b>Conclusion</b>	10
<b>About Comm100</b>	11

# Introduction

*In most cases where a service or good fails, customer service has the ability to turn things around for the company.*

Customer service operators deal with a large array of challenging situations every day, making them the unsung heroes of any customer support team. But even heroes need help sometimes. When customers contact operators in rage, the clock is ticking, and there's tension from the moment a chat starts to the moment of resolution. The ability to defuse this tension and effectively handle difficult customers can make the difference between a strong team of motivated operators, and a powerless team in which operators admit to defeat long before finding a resolution.

To make matters worse, customers are increasingly turning to the Internet to air their grievances, which can negatively impact business if your customer support channels are underperforming. This is a problem that affects your bottom line—according to the [Customer Rage Study](#), in 2013 over 76 billion dollars were at risk as a result of issues with products and services.

But there is hope. According to the aforementioned Customer Rage Study, 80% of customers who have an issue with a product or service will complain to the responsible entity — that means that in most cases where a service or good fails, customer service has the ability to turn things around for the company. Unfortunately, at least half of support teams are failing to seize this opportunity. The number of those surveyed who felt complaining was worthwhile dropped from 61% in 2011 to 50% in 2013.

This guide will help your support team make every chat worthwhile for customers. It will serve you on your journey to high retention rates and customer satisfaction. Remember, a difficult customer is nothing more than a customer who hasn't been served to the fullest potential.

# Understanding Difficult Customers

*When you peel back the layers, you understand more clearly that the customer was delivered a subpar experience, and they perceive your company as the reason for their unhappiness.*

To understand how to best serve difficult customers, it's crucial to define what makes a customer difficult in the first place, and examine how they became unsatisfied. After all, customers who are unhappy with a service, product, or support may often times be justified in their difficult behavior. When you peel back the layers, you understand more clearly that the customer was delivered a subpar experience, and they perceive your company as the reason for their unhappiness.

## Consumer Psychology

According to the White House Office of Consumer Affairs, happy customers tell 4-6 people about their experience, which is a powerful and organic form of marketing. Additionally, positive experiences lead to customer retention, and according to *Leading on the Edge of Chaos* by Emmett and Mark Murphy, a 2% increase in retention is equivalent to 10% reduction in cost.

On the other hand, due to negative bias, which is the psychological phenomenon in which negative experiences more severely impact us than neutral or positive ones, we are more likely to talk about bad experience than good ones. So each customer service mishap not only compromises customer retention rates, but also narrows the pool of eligible candidates for future customers. So the question becomes how to reduce these negative experiences that create customer dissatisfaction, and how to optimize customer satisfaction instead. The key is to tap into consumer psychology in order to fully understand what customers want. Major consumer expectations are tied to integrity, efficiency, and ease of use.

*What customers expect from companies is a commitment to company policies, a quality product and service, and a sympathetic customer support operator in times of difficulty.*

### Company Integrity

Difficult customers are often a direct result of a company's shortcomings. They expect that the entities they do business with possess a certain level of integrity. What this means is a commitment to company policies, a quality product and service, and a sympathetic customer support operator in times of difficulty.

According to the 2013 [Customer Rage Study](#), 76% customers who were disappointed by a company want to receive an apology, but only 32% received one. This study reveals that customers have certain expectations aligned with the character of the brand they engage with, and something as simple as an apology can be effective in mitigating disappointment.

### Limited Patience

When customers turn to support they are expecting a certain amount of responsiveness, and have an internal time limit that varies depending on the individual. It's important for an operator to consider the reason a customer has to chat with customer support to begin with. Generally it's because some kind of company-related shortcoming has already frustrated them and tried their patience. According to the aforementioned Customer Rage Study, time lost is still the most reported damage at 62%.

### Clarity and Ease-of-use

Customers expect a certain level of simplicity in terms of the service, product, and

customer service they receive.

The building blocks of simple service include:

- Clear instructions for use of product or service
- Quality and detailed shipment options
- Easily accessible privacy policy and terms of service
- Ability to self-serve (i.e. website with clearly detailed instructions, policies, and contact page)
- Accessible customer support channels

When information is inconspicuous, customers tend to lose patience — companies should look to build an information infrastructure that promotes easy acquisition and implementation of goods or services, as well as direct access to customer service.

*All customers, difficult or otherwise, have similar expectations. Excellent customer service makes all the difference.*

## Difficult Customers Are Just Underserved Customers

When you review the expectations of customers above, you will realize that all customers, difficult or otherwise, have similar expectations. So what is the difference between a normal, satisfied customer, and a so-called "difficult" one?

### Excellent customer service.

It may seem at first glance difficult or nearly impossible to rectify all these issues through your customer service team. The answer to live support strategy that addresses difficult customers can be broken down into three service areas: enhanced dissatisfaction prevention strategy, optimized real-time chat support, and an effective resolution system.

*So what is included in a prevention strategy? Any method that can lessen dissatisfaction before support even begins.*

## Building a Dissatisfaction Prevention Strategy

Aside from building the best product or service possible, there are a number of things customer support teams can do to curb the existing amount of difficult customers. The first step is to focus on prevention.

If a support team focuses on prevention first, the implementation of a real-time live support strategy becomes much more manageable. So what is included in a prevention strategy? **Any method that can lessen dissatisfaction before support even begins.** The following tips serve as the basis for a strong customer service foundation:

*Some individuals are innately helpful and empathetic — these individuals are the kind that create the foundation for a fantastic customer support team.*

## Hire the Right People

Some individuals are innately helpful and empathetic — these individuals are the kind that create the foundation for a fantastic customer support team. The following tips can help you recruit the right team to build an effective customer service culture:

- Carefully review candidates' employment history. Have they worked in customer service before? What is the reputation of the companies they have worked for?
- Build an online quiz that tests how candidates would respond in a number of different scenarios with difficult customers. Only interview those who score highly, as they are the ones who have an intuitive sense of how to successfully handle difficult situations, making them the easiest to train.
- If you are conducting this interview over the Internet, ask candidates to type out several paragraphs in response to a question in order to get a sense for their command of language.
- Conduct your interviews over live chat if possible. This allows you to conduct role-playing scenarios, and it tests candidates' ability to craft short and professional messages.

*Great training requires both an emphasis on soft skills and product knowledge.*

## Train Operators Effectively

Hiring a team is only half of the battle — the best operator will be lost without adequate training. **Great training** requires both an emphasis on soft skills and product knowledge. Use the following to get a sense of how to properly/adequately train your customer support team:

- Train operators thoroughly in company policies and products. Allow operators to experience both live chat and your product or service like a customer would.
- Train operators to set clear and measurable goals — whether that be a set response time, or the number of resolutions to aim for per shift.
- Train operators specifically to **avoid using negative words and phrases**.
- Provide operators with tests every quarter to see how far they have come in response time and customer satisfaction — this can be conducted through survey tests and studying key metrics.

*Having organized departments and specialists is critical to delivering solutions quickly.*

## Have Organized Departments and Specialists

It's important to get customers to the right people as quickly as possible. Each time a customer must be transferred or put on hold as an operator looks up their personal and/or account information, the customer's patience threshold is lowered. So having organized departments and specialists is critical to delivering solutions quickly.

In live chat, this means selecting a provider that has an **auto chat distribution (ACD)** feature that can instantly connect customers to an operator best suited to handle their inquiry type based on pre-defined rules. For example, if your customers have designated account managers, you can set up the ACD to automatically route the

customers to their respective account managers when they are requesting live chat support.

*By making visitor data such as account information and past interactions easily accessible for your operators, you give them the ability to not only serve customers efficiently, but also to engage in more personalized conversations with your customers.*

## Keep Your Operators Informed

Knowledge is power. By making visitor data such as account information and past interactions easily accessible for your operators, you give them the ability to not only serve customers efficiently, but also to engage in more personalized conversations with your customers. This in turn reduces the possibility of customer unhappiness caused by miscommunication and repeat identity confirmation, and promotes customer satisfaction instead.

Live chat has obvious advantages comparing to other support channels in terms of visitor data collection and accessibility. A robust live chat support solution should allow you to:

- Read relevant customer information from your website or account system and display it right on your operator chat console.
- Integrate your live chat system with your CRM or help desk solutions to share contact details and history.
- Set up a pre-chat survey to understand customers' needs beforehand and make the chat more meaningful and efficient
- Track customers' navigation behaviors on your website as well as their past chats and messages.
- Segment certain customers (VIP, for example) from the rest and notify operators when they arrive.

## Make Effective Chat Greetings

Though relying exclusively on scripts is impossible, they are crucial in facilitating [effective and efficient chats](#), specifically in the early stages of a customer support conversation. Use a friendly chat greeting script that can be personalized like the following:

- *Hi **(insert customer name)**, my name is **(insert operator name)**. Thank you for contacting **(insert company name)** via live chat. How may I help you today?*
- *Good morning/afternoon/evening **(insert customer name)**, this is **(insert operator name)** to assist you with your concerns today. How is your day going so far?*
- *Hi **(insert customer name)**, I understand you have billing concerns today. My name is **(insert operator name)**, and I'd be happy to help!*

*Operators must be prepared to engage in a live chat that adequately mollifies customer rage and dissatisfaction.*

## Enhancing Real-Time Live Chat Support

After focusing so much effort on prevention, it is reasonable for a customer support supervisor or manager to feel that the large majority of possible issues have been prevented. But the reality is that focusing on prevention in support does not account for issues like delayed shipping, damaged products, or subpar service. Focusing all efforts on prevention is not sustainable — operators must be prepared to engage in a live chat that adequately mollifies customer rage and dissatisfaction.

### Emphasize Customer Support Soft Skills

Soft skills are slightly more difficult to teach, as they are the inherent skills that allow people to work effectively with others. But every live chat operator needs a good reminder that great support focuses on kindness and effective listening.

#### Be an Effective Listener

Difficult customers want to be heard at the end of the day. A customer support operator who listens well can actually realize the best method for resolution. Those who aren't listening carefully risk embarrassment or consumer rage by asking for the customer to repeat themselves (which is inefficient). They also risk implementing the wrong solution.

The following are tips for effective active listening:

- **Take a deep breath.** When the operator's mind is wandering, they should be instructed to practice breathing that will focus their minds and bring them to the present.
- **Use small affirmations.** These are the small phrases that show the customer you are engaged in what they are saying, like "I see" and "I understand."
- **Summarize what the customer is saying.** Miscommunication issues can arise online with different typing and communication styles. When appropriate, provide the customer with a recap of their statement--this not only helps force you to be engaged, but also acts to clarify any miscommunications.

#### Show Empathy

It's imperative to emphasize the importance of empathy in customer service operators. The simplest and most direct way to train operators in expressing empathy is to remind them to use phrases that show understanding, like:

- *We understand how you feel, we're very sorry. We're going to take care of this for you right now.*
- *I understand how you feel—would you like me to transfer you to my colleague who is specialized in this issue?*

And to apologize in a genuine and effusive way:

- *We're very sorry, but fulfilling that request isn't possible at this time. Let me check and see what I can do for you.*

*Difficult customers want to be heard at the end of the day. A customer support operator who listens well can actually realize the best method for resolution.*

- *We're deeply sorry about \*Issue\*. Let me speak with my supervisor to see how we can correct this for you.*

*Tips for an effective tone:*

- *No caps lock*
- *Auto spelling and grammar check*
- *Appropriate use of exclamation marks*
- *Positive phrasing*

*The attitude customers are expressing is due to the situation.*

*Often looking through the customer history, prior chats, and notes made by other chat operators can help provide insight into what the customer wants to resolve the situations.*

### **Be Expressive**

When chatting online with your customers, the following should be followed to master an effective tone:

- Do not use caps lock, as this can be perceived as aggressive.
- Use the appropriate auto spelling and grammar features — customers hold an operator's command of language to a higher standard.
- Exclamation marks show excitement and positivity. While they should not be overused (no one is truly excited all the time, so it may come off as disingenuous), they should be used periodically to avoid sounding bored or disengaged.
- Use **positive phrasing** and avoid words with negative connotations when possible.

### **Stay Calm and Don't Take It Personally**

It is important for you to remember that the attitude customers are expressing is due to the situation. They are not directing it at you who is the other end of the chat.

Also, they may not think before they send the text message so they may say something hurtful without intending it to be taken that way. When you react to the anger or other negative emotions expressed by the customers, it isn't productive and can lead to more problems.

You need to be very careful when crafting responses when chatting with a difficult customer. Tone can be misconstrued in a written conversation so any text that could be interpreted as anger, resent, sarcasm or condescension cannot be sent to angry customers.

### **Understand What the Customer Really Wants**

During a conversation with a difficult customer, you need to cut through the anger and bluster to determine what the customer is really looking for. It can be something as simple as an apology, a free upgrade to resolve the problem, or a discount on their bill. Sometimes the customer is looking for nothing more than just having the issue fixed quickly and efficiently.

Don't just offer free items or a discount until you know what resolution the customer is looking for. Offering things at random will only frustrate the customer because you are not serving the customer's needs. Often looking through the customer history, prior chats, and notes made by other chat operators can help provide insight into what the customer wants to resolve the situations.

In addition, experience of handling similar situations with other customers can be useful in determining the best resolution. If you don't have experience handling this type of complaint, you can ask other operators or supervisors for assistance. If you think you are not able to resolve the complaint, just pass the chat to a more experienced operator in the team.

*It is important for your company to have a policy in place on how to handle product recalls, software issues and other types of company-wide problems that may arise.*

*Using scripts is a sure way to deliver quality with speed.*

*To manage multi-tasking effectiveness, operators should be assigned a maximum number of chats based off of experience.*

## **Admit Your Mistakes**

Admitting mistakes proves the company is human and will help customers to be more willing to forgive. It is when companies try to hide their mistakes and refuse to accept responsibility that do customers become difficult and even leave a company.

It is important for your company to have a policy in place on how to handle product recalls, software issues and other types of company-wide problems that may arise. This way you can handle such issues quickly, supply customers with the information they need and let customers know what can be done to rectify the situation.

The customer is always right policy doesn't always work, though. Sometimes a customer isn't always right or they try to take advantage of the situation by asking for valuable products or a high amount of money to compensate them for the frustration they experienced. You should know how far you can go to satisfy a customer.

## **Reach Resolutions Efficiently**

When working with customers in real time, the best way to ensure satisfaction (other than through quality service) is to promote efficiency. The following are methods to obtain record fast resolution times:

### **Use Dynamic Chat Scripts**

Using scripts is a sure way to deliver quality with speed. The important thing here is that operators are aware of how to effectively combine scripts with unique and personal touches. For example, phrases that can be canned include greetings, empathy, follow-up questions for additional support, and goodbyes. Personal touches include references to the specific issue at hand, as well as addressing the customer by name.

See if your live chat solution provider has a canned message feature. This can really aid operators to deliver scripts efficiently, without having to waste time copying and pasting scripted responses manually.

If your team does not already have a script, you can use Comm100's [Live Chat Scripts to Make Stellar Operators](#) to help you get started.

### **Systemize Multi-Tasking for Operators**

Multi-tasking is crucial for live chat operators, as they can answer more active customers as they wait for replies from others.

To manage multi-tasking effectiveness, operators should be assigned a maximum number of chats based off of experience. Newer and less experienced operators should have lower limits. Check with your live chat provider to see if they have a feature that can help you manage these unique limits.

Additionally, make sure your live chat solution offers tools that promote efficiency such as canned response, file transfer, spell check, keyboard shortcuts, etc. and train the operators to use them to the full potential. Another feature worth noticing is typing indicator, which allows operators to see what a customer is typing in real time. Operators can use this to their advantage and be prepared with a response before the customer even hits send.

*Train operators to know when to reach out for help, and when to attempt to handle situations independently.*

## **Create Channels for Operator Collaboration**

When a team has an influx of new operators or a number of specialized departments, it is crucial that team members can collaborate on difficult support issues.

If your live chat has options that allow operator collaboration (inter-operator chat, chat transfer, chat monitor, etc.), it's crucial to enable them. Train operators to know when to reach out for help, and when to attempt to handle situations independently. It's always helpful for new operators to be able to send drafts to superiors should they feel any hesitation about a particularly difficult situation.

## **Empower Your Operators**

Give operators (depending on their experience and their performance) ascending levels of decision-making. For example, an operator may be able to best serve a customer through screen share. While this is clearly a technology that can be abused to intrude on customer privacy, seasoned operators should be given a high level of trust to do what is necessary to efficiently and effectively serve customers — if they must consistently wait to ask for permission from superiors, the company risks testing the limits of customers' patience.

*The follow-up, or post-resolution system, is critical because it is the extra effort that indicates to the customer that the company values not only their business, but also their understanding and support.*

# Implementing a Post-Resolution System

After serving solutions to difficult customers, there is still one crucial step that needs to be acted upon: the follow-up.

The follow-up, or post-resolution system, is critical because it is the extra effort that indicates to the customer that the company values not only their business, but also their understanding and support. A post-resolution system provides either the epilogues to a happy ending, or the opportunity to further assist a customer if the resolution wasn't as effective as first imagined.

*As a team, you should make sure that all the unresolved issues are followed up on appropriately until they are resolved to customers' satisfaction.*

## **Deliver Follow-Ups**

After every interaction with an unhappy customer, operators should be required to systematically report the aggravation and solution used to address the issue. Whether this information is forwarded to a supervisor or kept for the operators' own records is dependent on the size of the team and the amount of traffic the operator is likely to receive.

At the end of a shift or at the start of the following, operators should be required to send out emails to the difficult customers as a follow-up — with an apology that references the specific issue, and a question to ask if the problem has ultimately been resolved or not. As a team, you should make sure that all the unresolved issues are followed up on appropriately until they are resolved to customers' satisfaction.

## **Collect Customer Feedback**

Soliciting customer feedback is another way to gauge the quality of a solution and chat.

Consider including a survey at the end of a live chat session, or following up with a feedback request via email. This had better be used after an effective resolution is implemented, and the language attached to the survey should make it clear that feedback is used to improve future customer service scenarios.

*Metrics are crucial to help your support team make decisions that affect the future of your customer support strategy.*

## Create and Maintain Metric Systems

Outside of directly reaching out to difficult customers, there is another internal aspect to the post-resolution system: collecting and maintaining metrics that enable continual improvements to customer service strategy.

### **Metric Check List:**

- Collecting transcripts from difficult conversations, or when solution was not successfully implemented
- Average response time
- Average resolution time
- Number of chats operators handle per hour
- Number of chat requests per hour
- Number of low-value requests vs. high-value requests

Metrics are crucial to help your support team make decisions that affect the future of your customer support strategy. Create a periodic metric review meeting with supervisors and managers where metrics can be discussed, and actionable decisions can be made. All operators should be made aware of any changes made to the strategy, and should be informed of what metrics informed these decisions — a good team communicates goals and plans for success to every operator.

## Conclusion

At Comm100, we pride ourselves on maintaining a service that helps you find success with your customers — even the difficult ones.

Through an effective live chat support strategy that promotes efficiency, efficacy, and compassion, you'll find that your retention rates will be up while the number of difficult customers you deal with will be at an all-time low. We hope you use this information to bolster your live chat channel, as well as to strengthen your reputation and customer retention rates. After all, the success of your company starts with a single happy customer.

## About Comm100

Comm100 Network Corporation is an award-winning global provider of live chat, email marketing, and help desk software. Comm100 Live Chat is an enterprise-grade live support solution that enables brands to engage website visitors in real time interactions. The prominent benefits of utilizing our live chat software include higher website conversion rates, increased customer satisfaction, improved service efficiency, and lower operating costs.

Trusted by thousands of global brands worldwide, some of Comm100's top clients include **G2A**, **Sears**, **Stanford University**, and **Whirlpool**. With "100% communication, 100% success" as our company motto, Comm100 is committed to ensuring that transitioning human-to-human interactions to real-life success stories is always possible in a digital world.

## Contact Us

TEL | 1-778-785-0464  
FAX | 1-888-837-2011  
E-Mail | [support@comm100.com](mailto:support@comm100.com)  
Web | [www.comm100.com](http://www.comm100.com)

Suite 238 – 1027 Davie Street Vancouver, British Columbia V6E 4L2 Canada

To find more resources about the live chat industry and more tips on improving customer service, you can:

- Visit [Comm100 official blog](#)

• Follow us on    

Copyright © 2016 Comm100. All Rights Reserved.

Comm100, Comm100 Live Chat, MaximumOn™ and other Comm100 brand or product names are trademarks of Comm100 Network Corporation in Canada and other countries. All other trademarks or registered trademarks are property of their respective owners.

The information provided herein and opinions stated herein are not guaranteed or warranted to produce any particular results, and may not be suitable for every individual.