



How to scale your Support without scaling your Support team

A  freshdesk Greenpaper

The Struggle for Zero Inbox

Imagine opening your support portal every day and having no overdue tickets from last week. A zero inbox is a utopia that every successful help desk team drives towards. But as businesses grow, managing a few hundred customer queries every day can be quite a struggle. Plus customers are now moving from traditional email and phone, into social media to vent their frustrations, forcing business to ensure that their customer support is prompt, precise and social.

“Some of these trends [outsourcing, increasing penetration of smarter devices, adoption of industry best practices, and improvements in applications and devices] are working to diminish the size and function of the help desk, while others are putting more pressure on help desk staff”

- Computer Economics, 2011 Helpdesk Benchmark.

Take the case of a hypothetical 10 member support team managing 400 tickets every day. If the company suddenly sees their daily inflow jump up to 600 tickets one morning, that is sure to raise alarm bells all across the floor. After all, a 50% work overload is more than enough to give any support team nightmares. And with all the backlogs piling up, pretty soon there are more tickets coming in your team can even handle. And that's when the screams and cries to hire more customer support agents starts resonating top-down, bottom-up and side-to-side.

But is merely adding more agents to your customer support machine going to solve the overloaded problem at hand, or is there something more deeply routed that you need to take care of first?

Puncturing the overloaded support balloon

Scaling the customer support experience as businesses grow is not as difficult as it seems. The key to getting back to a zero inbox is identifying the reason for the sudden overload. If the engineering team pushed out a major software update last week, the support team can expect an influx of customers reporting bugs, functionality breaks and confusions with the interface changes. Or if your payment gateway, order management system or an important server is down, your support is going to get flooded till everything is hunky-dory again.

Most cases of helpdesk overload map to four common customer support situations, based on whether they are raised by existing or new customers, and whether the tickets refer to unique or the same set of problems.

- A lot of existing customers reporting the same problems
- A good chunk of existing customers reporting new problems
- New customers and customer segments reporting the same set of problems
- New customers and customer segments reporting new problems.

	Unique problems	Same problems
Existing Customers	Payment completed but did not receive order confirmation	Not been able to access old files after upgrading to v6.3 last
New Customers	Unable to configure the product	How do I make a purchase in your website?

Table 1: Ticket Scenarios

There was a time when I was working the operations help desk at Taco Bell, and an “unplanned” software distribution went out to 4,000 restaurants. The result? The back office systems of those 4,000 restaurants were frozen, and then they all called in at the same moment. We got “slammed” and couldn’t manage to funnel less than 75 calls into the queue.

-Peter McGarahan

To be able to maintain a zero inbox, businesses need to be able to identify support bottlenecks in real-time. Before hiring another agent, your support teams must be able to show exactly what kind of problems are choking the helpdesk, and which issues the team gets cracking like a bullet train on steroids. In short, when there is an elephant ripping your the support team’s messenger bag at its seams, and in order to scale your customer support experience, you need to be able to nail it fast.

Nail the Elephant in the Messenger bag

Before you even consider interviewing another candidate for your support team, it is important that you know exactly what is causing the ticket overload. And for that, you need to be able to nail the problem that is choking your support. Industry best practices have been screaming the importance of categorizing incoming support tickets hierarchically. For example, most support requests that ecommerce store receive fall under Payments, Operations and Order Processing. Within Operations, stores typically have second level categorizations like Shipping and Packaging, with specific courier vendors and postal services tied to shipping issues.

Submit a ticket

Your Email ▾

Problem Category

Shipping ▾

Source

Delivery Issue ▾

Issue

UPS ▾

Please explain your issue in detail ▾

B **I** **U** **≡** **≡** **A** **☺** **☹** **↺** **↻**

I ordered a package (order ID TNL1814000) and it was supposed to reach me via UPS priority shipping yesterday. The tracking code you gave me (18383E10Z) showed that the package should have reached me 21 hours back but it still hasn't. Please look into this asap.

Alex

Attach a file

[Choose file](#) | No file chosen

Attachment(s) size can be up to 15 MB

Save Save and New Save and Close Cancel

Knowing that 80% of all customer complaints over the past few weeks are due to problems with the new shipping vendor it partnered with, a store can immediately identify that the solution to get back to a zero inbox is in either training its new vendors or finding new partners - not hiring more support staff.

Instead of blindly adding support resources, allowing customers and support agents to bucket complaints and queries into the specific category, sub-category and item affected, businesses get fine grained detail on the core problem areas that they can then take back to the respective teams.

Once businesses nail the elephant, increasing the productivity of the helpdesk, circumventing the problem with workarounds, or eliminating it altogether becomes easier.



4 things to figure out, before you think of hiring the next support agent

Is the buggie somewhere else?

If the engineering team just pushed a new software update that is causing an overload on the help desk, hiring new full time support agents may not be the best choice. After a couple of weeks, when the support volume falls, a larger team will end up working at sub-optimal levels. Customer-centric business use these opportunities to bring resources from engineering and QA into the support team temporarily for just a few days, as occasional agents.

Templatize responses and boost productivity

There are always issues, like product returns and refund requests, that are not common enough to be part of the knowledge base, but still cause a significant strain on the support team. Support teams end up spending hours everyday rehashing the same replies, so it makes sense to create ready-to-use templates and share canned responses to common questions. Agents can modify and reuse these responses and save more than a few hours every day.

Before hiring agents, hire evangelists

Community forums provide a powerful medium for customers to talk between themselves, ask questions, provide answers, report issues and workarounds, and even suggest ideas. By allowing the support team to manage, moderate and participate in the community, businesses can not only reduce their support load by engaging customer evangelists, but also build a powerful user community around their brand.

Help customers help themselves...

Another source of a spike in ticket volume following a major change to the product, service or website is because of confusions that arise from the new changes. While existing users might just cause a temporary spike in support load, the support volume after the spike usually rests at a higher level than before, because most new customers coming in report these issues as well.

The good news is a majority of businesses and consumers would rather try to help themselves before raising a support ticket. A well designed self-service portal and updated knowledge base can streamline support queries and reduce helpdesk load, while keeping customers happy.

Bonus

Add intelligence into self-service

In order to make your knowledge base and self-service experience truly useful for your customers, you and your support team need to be able to understand what customers are looking for in your support portals. You probably already use tools like Google Analytics to track activity on your website or store. Bringing these capabilities into your self service portal can shed deep insights into what support your customers really want.

For example, by knowing what solution articles customer search for, which they engage with and where they bounce off, your support agents can learn what solutions they need to add, and which articles in the knowledge base they should revisit.

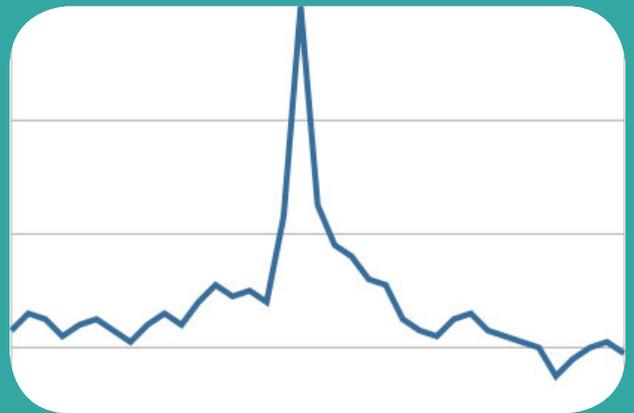
Leading businesses in technology, retail and even manufacturing leverage their customers to generate ideas, inspiration and direction. Almost every business has at least a handful of enthusiastic customer evangelists who would love to participate and share their knowledge with others in the community. However, business and support teams struggle to empower these customers with the right platform.

Understand the trend: Spike, Leap or Growth?

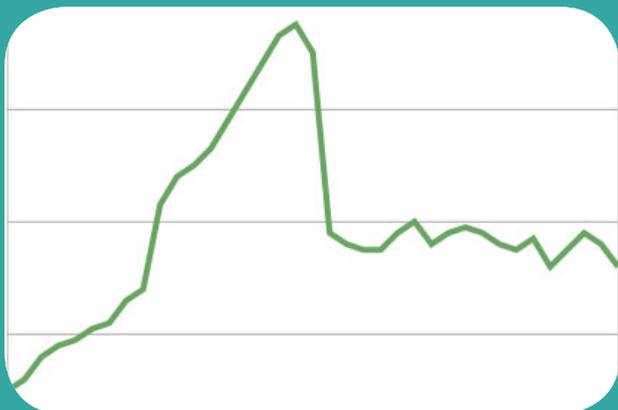
It is easy to get overwhelmed when support volumes suddenly shoot up. But identifying the trend can make the difference between a healthy customer support team that continues winning the love of customers, and a sub-optimal team with just a few tickets and one too many support agents.

The next time you see a jump in your support volume, try to analyze the trend over a few weeks and identify if it is a spike, a leap or a growth.

Spike is a temporarily high support volume, following UI or product changes. Most customer complaints here can be narrowed down to user friction. A majority of tickets here are raised by existing customers who are used to the old interface and design.



In these situations, it makes sense for the support team to “wait it out”. Once customers understand and accept the changes, the complaints die down to the previous level.



Leap is a sudden jump after which support volume steadies at a higher level. The most common reason for a leap is a break in the core functionality like payment processing, or major bugs in a software release.

Once the support team categorizes the issues and identifies the probable root cause, a permanent solution for this problem lies with other teams outside the helpdesk. However, it is important for customer support to communicate the issue to the right team, and provide customers with quick workarounds even if the root problem takes a few weeks or months to solve.

Growth is a relatively organic jump in support volume following higher customer acquisition, and where a majority of support requests are raised by new customers.



Again, it is important to categorize issues and identify the major problem areas. If a majority of tickets require instructions like how tos, it makes sense for the support team to focus on enhancing the self service experience and adding the right knowledge base solutions. However, if more customers are raising deeper requests that require a more detailed explanation and support, perhaps it is a good time to consider hiring more support agents after all.

Simply put, with an analytics driven approach to customer support, business can effectively scale the support experience without scaling the support team. Scale your team's productivity with Freshdesk. Not its size.



Freshdesk is a cloud-based social customer support software used by over 5000 businesses every day to win the love of their customers. With a full-service help desk, complete with robust ticketing, powerful automations, multi-channel support capabilities, knowledge base, and integrated community forums, Freshdesk allows business to take their support to customers wherever they are.

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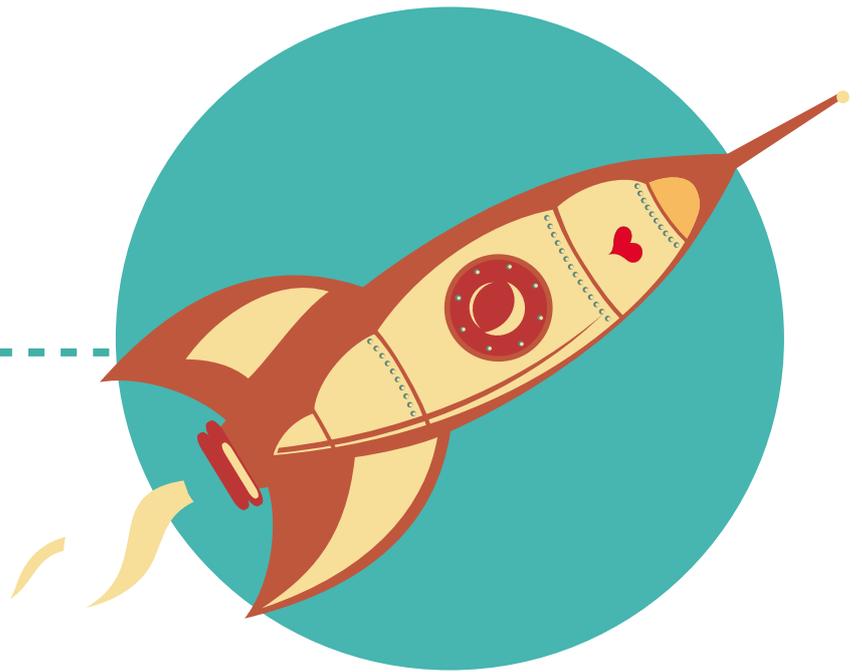
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