

Technical Support Call Center: Build or Buy?



10 Questions to Ask When Considering Outsourced Technical Support Vendors



The many logistical and technical factors to consider when deciding to provide in-house technical support can be overwhelming. The level of effort and capital necessary to build a successful technical support call center from the ground up is enormous. Outsourcing your technical support operation provides a way for your organization to offer top-notch service to your customers while minimizing the financial and human resource burdens this type of venture can present as well as the distractions from your core competencies. This whitepaper outlines 10 of the most important questions to ask as you prepare to outsource your technical support.

Technical support is an important part of any B2B or B2C transaction. While the application, hardware or service you offer may be top notch, your customers expect to have a resource to turn to when they encounter difficulties. Support tasks can range from providing basic customer education to fixing application bugs to rewriting code to providing information as to where to ship a product for repair.

Choosing an organization to provide your technical support should involve a great deal of research. Though cost is important, it should not be the supreme motivating factor when selecting an outsourcing provider. For example, the financial benefit of outsourcing to offshore companies is appealing from a CFO perspective, but recent headlines suggest there are other factors to be taken into consideration, namely customer satisfaction. In 2003, Dell moved its technical support operation from India back to U.S. soil after an onslaught of complaints from a major segment of its customer base.



Below is a list of questions you should ask potential outsourcing providers to confirm their ability to provide technical support for your customers and for you

1. Do you have a robust issue tracking system that can be quickly and cost effectively tailored to fit my needs?

- Technical support is dynamic; issue tracking must accommodate changes in the support environment

2. What type of phone system do you use, and is it capable of skills based routing?

- It is essential that calls be answered by the Technical Support Representative (TSR) who is best prepared to solve your customers' problems quickly
- Randomly assigning calls means that your customers may get through to a rookie while a veteran TSR sits idle.

3. What kind of call and customer satisfaction metrics can you provide?

- Reports are your tool for measuring success
- You'll need to know how many calls are being handled, their duration, their day part, and their talk time versus wrap time.
- The right reports not only measure success against service level agreements but also identify trends for human resource planning and areas for improvement.
- Adding some measurement of end-user satisfaction, like an online survey launched with each support event, can be used to measure your customers' satisfaction levels.

4. How can you ensure that my calls will be answered in a timely fashion?

- Another way to word this question to a potential outsourcing provider is 'Service levels are important to me, what can you tell me about yours?'
- Include an inquiry as to how the organization ensures the proper staffing to handle your call volume.

5. How do you train your TSRs to support my application or product?

- Each support engagement has unique training challenges when transferring the knowledge about the supported application or product to the support provider's TSRs.
- An experienced technical support provider will have a standard, repeatable process that can be customized to meet each engagement.

6. What are your escalation procedures? Can you accommodate time-based escalations?

- Be sure to ask if the organization allows for customization of escalation procedures
- Will the provider assist you in developing a multi-channel escalation process, including email, pager, and voice?

7. Is your organization equipped to handle disaster situations?

- The outsourcing provider should have a contingency plan that allows for business continuity in the event of a catastrophic failure of its primary systems or facility

8. Do you operate under a set of "best practice" business rules, and can they be customized to fit my needs?

- Proven, repeatable processes are important but flexibility is also critical

9. How will my account be managed?

- Providing technical support is a project and should be managed as such
- Discuss with your potential provider how they handle communication, problem resolution and accountability.
- Who is watching out for me in your organization?

10. How much will it cost?

- Fees are generally based on call volume, length of engagement and the complexity of the support

Thorough research, including comprehensive answers to the questions listed above can better prepare you to make the right decision when outsourcing your technical support operations.

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