Supercharge your support agents with Slack
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Introduction

Customer service is no longer just a cost center—it’s a core part of your business offering. **Eighty percent of consumers** now consider a company’s customer experience (CX) to be as important as the products or services it sells.

What defines a high-quality experience? Zendesk’s “Customer Experience Trends Report 2020” found that customers continue to cite fast responses and resolutions as their top service priorities. They also increasingly crave a humanized experience. According to PwC, 82% of U.S. and 74% of non-U.S. consumers say **they want to interact with humans more** as technology improves, not less.

Your ability to provide fast yet human service can make or break customer relationships. Every negative interaction is a potential deal-breaker. Nearly **50% of customers** say they would switch to a competitor after only one bad experience, and that number jumps to 80% in the case of more than one bad experience.

This makes your support agents key to your competitive success, especially in today’s microeconomic climate, where the cost of losing customers is very high.

But many support agents can’t do their best work with ticketing tools alone. Functional silos create significant hurdles to resolution by distancing agents from the data and the people they need to provide competitive service.

To transform your customer experience, you must transform how your support teams collaborate with the broader company.
Unlock company knowledge to boost customer satisfaction

Customer experience is essential to the health of the whole company, but it’s often pushed off to support teams to figure out. The problem? Support agents often lack access to experts and knowledge that could help them offer a faster, more personalized support experience to customers.

This is because of functional silos—barriers between systems and teams that lock important insights away from the people who need them. Functional silos affect both the inward flow of information (customer data, feedback) and the outward flow (institutional knowledge, subject-matter experts).

The service experience suffers when support teams don’t have fast access to internal resources and subject-matter experts. Complex issues often require input from product experts or access to data that’s locked away in someone’s inbox. Hunting down the right people and knowledge costs precious time. It also raises the chance of miscommunication and, ultimately, customer dissatisfaction.

Customers expect their feedback to matter to the company; they expect recurring issues to be addressed by developers or consistent billing issues to be addressed by finance. But when key customer insights become locked within certain systems (such as ticketing tools, data dashboards and email chains) or simply delayed by inefficient communication workflows, it’s hard for a company to solve customer issues proactively.

No wonder 89% of service professionals believe that “partnering with other departments is critical to providing great customer experiences,” according to Salesforce’s “State of Service” report. Even a majority of consumers recognize the benefits, with 71% of customers surveyed by Zendesk saying they “expect companies to collaborate internally so they don’t have to repeat themselves.”

When organizations do succeed in breaking down silos, it’s the customers who stand to gain the most. According to Dimension Data’s “Customer Experience Benchmark Report 2020,” a fully collaborative approach to CX processes greatly increases speed-to-answer time, solving a key frustration for customers.

Slack unites your whole company around the customer experience

Slack is the missing piece that completes the pathways between your knowledge bases, experts, and frontline support teams.

This happens in channels, single places where cross-functional stakeholders can unite around a topic or an issue and collaborate directly with important customer insights,
Unlock company knowledge to boost customer satisfaction ensuring that the right data and people are available when they’re needed most.

The edge cloud platform Fastly uses a Slack channel to bring together executives and subject-matter experts for resolving support situations. Even if it’s a Saturday, key participants may fire off a response via Slack’s mobile app to keep resolutions moving along.

“Because of Slack, we’re able to see activity almost instantly, triage events if needed, determine the severity, then pull other people in,” explains Kim Ogletree, the VP of customer success at Fastly. “Then we diagnose exactly what we need to do in near real time.”

The channel also provides a transcript of the resolution process for future reference. With the full context, teams can explain issues during customer meetings and postmortem discussions and share the knowledge with colleagues to prevent similar situations in the future.

With Slack channels, people with various skills and knowledge sets can work together as seamlessly as if they were all on the same team. This has been the experience at the Australian software company Iress, which improved its client and user experience by enhancing collaboration between product experts, developers and the frontline support team.

Iress uses channels to coordinate behind-the-scenes support. Previously the company relied on email and phone calls for urgent issues, tracking people down one by one. Messages were missed, emails bounced around, and time was lost.

Now critical issues are handled in Slack. The product specialist team swarms priority issues in the channel #client_priority, which has more than 100 members capable of expediting and resolving the most serious situations.

Leveraging Slack as part of a broader support strategy helped the product specialist team cut the average response time for complex customer issues from eight days to two and led to a 64% decrease in the customer support ticket backlog.
Unlock company knowledge to boost customer satisfaction

When Slack enables your entire company to support your support agents, both you and your customers reap the rewards. After adopting Slack as a support tool, many companies have experienced dramatic gains in customer service KPIs, including:

- A customer satisfaction (CSAT) score increase from 58% to over 90% for Accent Group Limited
- A 70% increase in Nordstrom’s CSAT
- A 12% increase in Net Promoter Score (NPS) at Intuit QuickBooks

“Slack empowers agents to do the right thing for the customer and gives them more agency—to find out why we made a certain product decision, to decide how they want to frame an answer to a customer, to escalate an issue, to advocate for the customer,” explains Kristen Swanson, the customer experience chief of staff at Slack.

Empowered agents generate higher CSAT scores, which in turn leads to higher retention and more revenue. In other words, when your company acts like a single team that’s dedicated to customer experience, everybody wins.

But it’s not enough for every team member to work together for the customer. Collaboration is far less effective if it takes your agents twice the time to context-switch between various tools and conversations.

To realize the full benefits of cross-functional collaboration, you also need to make sure your support stack is fully synced.
Integrate your systems to deliver faster, more accurate resolutions

Empowering your agents is not simply a matter of providing them with more applications. Many agents are already burdened with unwieldy toolkits.

According to research by the software platform Intercom, 44% of support teams use between six and 10 tools to do their job. While tools like ticketing systems and knowledge bases are necessary, support agents can waste time context-switching between so many applications. Siloed tools slow the work of 41% of support teams on a regular basis, and 46% of support leaders say that their current tech stack is holding them back from realizing their goals.

Agents are limited in their ability to shorten resolution times until they streamline the workflows between these key tools. So you don’t need more software or even more powerful software. What you need is a tool that makes your tech stack more than the sum of its parts.

Slack connects your support tools to improve average resolution time

Slack works as a single hub alongside your entire support tech stack, including your ticketing tool. With Slack, support teams can access important data and software functions without constant switching and searching between applications.

“It’s a myth that agents only live in their ticketing tool,” says Sabrina Dermody, a solution engineer at Slack. “Often agents have 10 windows open. Slack becomes the consolidator of every other window, other than the ticketing tool.”

Slack doesn’t replace your current ticketing tool; it enhances it. Instead of switching between 10 windows, your agents only have to switch between two: Slack and your ticketing platform. Slack offers a streamlined point of access to all those other tools.

Support solutions like Salesforce Service Cloud, Zendesk, Oracle Service Cloud and more are available in the Slack App Directory, ready for secure use right out of the box.

With these software integrations, agents can quickly address issues as they arise. Imagine a scenario in which your agent needs to connect with a developer and an account manager to solve a specific ticket. Ordinarily, this would require a lot of back-and-forth over multiple different communication channels
Integrate your systems to deliver faster, more accurate resolutions

as your agent shares relevant data points and asks for colleagues’ advice. Then your agent would have to update customer records and knowledge bases with any insights gained from the conversation.

That’s a lot of movement between apps and conversations to solve a single ticket, and if that conversation isn’t logged correctly, another agent may have to repeat the whole process again on a similar issue.

By plugging Slack into your ticketing system, agents can automatically push requests into a Slack channel where cross-functional partners, subject-matter experts and managers can receive the information they need. With Slack integrations, they can then push their reply directly from Slack into the ticketing tool, or assess and assign as needed—no context switching required.

Slack makes your support stack more collaborative, which translates directly to faster customer service. On average, support teams that use Slack enjoy:

- A 31% reduction in ticket resolution time
- An 8% increase in the number of tickets routed correctly
- A 7% increase in the number of tickets resolved correctly

To get the most use out of software integrations, many companies leverage Slack’s Workflow Builder, which allows teams to build no-code workflows (or bots) that automate tasks between Slack and other pieces of software.

For the customer service team at Oscar Health, a direct-to-consumer health insurance company, Workflow Builder provides a way to standardize help requests in their expert channels. The workflow prompts agents to fill out a form with important information, such as the state or policy involved.

“Before, there was a lot of back-and-forth in the channel,” says Sebastian Burzacchi, the VP of service operations at Oscar Health. “The form gave us a standardized submission process so supervisors receive all the information necessary to solve the issue.”
The cloud data platform **Snowflake** also uses Slack workflows, but for a slightly different purpose: providing agents with easier access to the organization’s internal knowledge base. The startup created a custom Slack bot, which can be asked to pull information from the company’s various databases, providing answers about ticketing processes, help wikis and more.

“The custom Slack bot has become our little one-stop shop for any questions people might have,” says Marisa Guarino, an IT systems engineer at Snowflake. “Something as onerous as opening an IT ticket can be as simple as just talking to the bot and saying, ‘I need help.’ ”

With powerful integrations and automated workflows, Slack helps your agents bridge the gap between your ticketing tool and the rest of the company’s tools and resources.
Develop more effective agents via coachable moments

Customer satisfaction is closely tied to agent satisfaction. Agents who are engaged, experienced, and equipped to do their jobs are more likely to provide the kind of fast, human experience customers want.

This type of agent doesn’t just appear: Support managers must help their team members cultivate these skills.

Development can’t be shunted off to one side, either. Agents inevitably make mistakes. But how much those mistakes affect the customer experience depends entirely on support managers’ ability to catch issues quickly and train agents to avoid these mistakes in the future.

“Leveraging data and insights to improve coaching and continuously improve agent performance is critical,” Dermody says. “Agent performance directly impacts customer churn.”

Ticketing platforms are also a poor setting for real-time coaching because they’re not designed for fast, in-depth conversations. That means many managers must use email for collaboration on these issues, while the context and data live in the ticketing tool.

And although managers often have access to metrics on a user level through their ticketing tool (such as average response time or escalations), they rarely have the associated detail and context to understand what actually needs to change for an agent to improve those numbers.

Mistakes can slip through the cracks, sometimes repeatedly, leading to repeat issues and frustrating experiences for customers, all of which impact CSAT and retention.
Support managers need a tool that allows them to quickly correct course and turn potential issues into real-time learning opportunities.

**Slack helps managers coach agents with real-time insights**

With Slack, managers can have a dialogue around a support ticket and provide crucial coaching to their agents in real time.

Real-time, transparent channels make it possible for managers to quickly jump into issues alongside the team. They also give managers a high-level view into their team’s struggles with those issues.

This is the case at Oscar Health, where coordinating the member care response in Slack builds an evolving repository of knowledge. “If we start seeing the same questions in Slack, this gives us a sense of each team’s development needs,” Burzacchi says.

“With channels, you can understand the common issues people are running into and build tools to mitigate them.”

_Sam Gross_  
_Senior technical product manager, Oscar Health_

Intuit QuickBooks upsskills support agents by building custom Slack apps, such as the custom conversational bot the company dubbed Quincy.

Through AI and a growing knowledge base, Quincy can answer more than 60% of support agents’ questions. “Basically, Quincy becomes an agent’s assistant,” says Omer Khan, the former customer success digital lead at QuickBooks. “So any question an agent has, they can ask Quincy at any given time, right in Slack.”

The bot has contributed to a **20% increase in agent confidence** and a **36% increase in agent efficiency** at Intuit QuickBooks. It has also highlighted more micro-coaching opportunities for the company’s support agents. When Quincy can’t answer a question, it triggers a direct message to a product champion for help. That product champion can then turn the situation into a learning experience for the support agent.

Intuit QuickBooks has seen:

- **20%** increase in agent confidence
- **36%** increase in agent efficiency since implementing its custom Slack bot Quincy

“**You can imagine that we are talking about hundreds and hundreds of these questions coming in every single day,**” Khan says.

Slack’s integrations and custom workflows with ticketing tools and learning management software also help managers streamline the learning process.
Develop more effective agents via coachable moments

“Micro-coaching is actually driving the skill set to a level which we’ve never seen before.”

After Quincy notifies them of the question, the product champion jumps into a Slack conversation or call to do a quick micro-coaching session. During this session, the support agent learns how they should have resolved the customer's issue and what to do the next time the same issue arises.

By continually raising its support agents’ abilities, Intuit QuickBooks also continually raises the quality of the customer experience. Since adopting its Slack-based customer support strategy, the company has increased its Net Promoter Score by 12%.

By harnessing Slack’s capabilities, support teams can give their agents the coaching and confidence they need to boost support KPIs.
Slack is the key to human-centric customer support

Customers don’t just want a ticket number—they want a human support experience. And while you likely have the software, experts and data you need to provide this experience, those won’t matter if these resources aren’t easily accessible to the people who need them.

Slack is the multiplier for your tech stack. It unlocks the value of your company’s experts, customer data and support tools by directly connecting agents with these resources. With greater access to this knowledge, your support agents are set up to provide the high-quality service that will keep your customers happy for years to come.

To learn more about how Slack can help your support agents provide faster resolutions and a more human customer service experience, contact our sales team.
About Slack

Slack makes work simpler, more pleasant and more productive. It’s a channel-based messaging platform for enterprise that brings the right people, information and tools together to get work done.

From FTSE 100 companies to corner shops, millions of people around the world use Slack to connect their teams, unify their systems and drive their business forward.

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