



TIERED CUSTOMER SUPPORT IS DEAD... AND THAT'S GOOD FOR BUSINESS

What is Tiered Support?

OUR STORY

As veterans of the software and customer service industries, we shared the same pains as today's customer service teams do.

Over the course of our tech jobs—as CEO, software developers, and customer support professionals—we watched in frustration as communication consistently broke down within teams and across departments.

We knew there had to be a better way. And that's why, in 2009, we created TeamSupport. Drawing upon industry best practices honed in numerous workplaces, our product today is widely considered one of the best in the field.

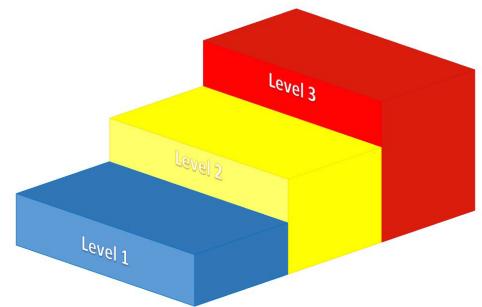
Collaborative customer support is quickly replacing tiered support—with substantial benefits to a company's bottom line

Think back to the last time you called a customer support department for assistance with an issue. Perhaps you needed to resolve a discrepancy with a banking statement. Or maybe a feature within the software your company purchased wasn't working properly.

Unless your issue was a simple one, chances are good that you were passed from one agent to the next, having to repeat your name and explain the issue over and over again until someone—anyone—could finally address the problem to your satisfaction.

It can be a frustrating experience from the customer perspective, yet it's a very common way of delivering support. In fact, for as long as customer support departments have been around, the idea of having this type of "Tiered" or "Level" model of support has been the typical way of addressing customer issues.

In this Tiered model of support, newly hired support agents are placed in the "Tier 1" group to handle the most basic of customer questions. Any customer issues that are beyond their basic knowledge or ability are



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automatically elevated to a “Tier 2” agent to address, and so on.

Once support agents have been on the job a while and amassed enough knowledge of the product to easily answer all Tier 1 questions, they are promoted into a Tier 2 role where, once again, they don’t know the answers to most questions and have to start from scratch and learn much more about the product.

Some companies may have as many as five levels of support—and when that is exhausted the question usually has to be referred to a software developer or feature management team.

The Problems with a Tiered Model of Support:

Tiered Support is Bad for Customer Support Agents.

The life of a Level 1 support engineer is repetitive. They have to answer the same questions over and over again. The good news is that they may become really adept at solving the same problems, but boredom from repetition quickly sets in.

Support engineers, by trade, want to be able to solve issues, and they are frequently frustrated when they don’t have the solution to a problem. In some cases, this ends up with a support representative spending time researching an issue rather than escalating it to the next tier of support, which defeats the entire purpose and results in a dissatisfied customer.

No one likes being in a situation where they feel dumb, and that’s what every promotion brings a support engineer. As soon as they master the topics in their particular level of support, they get promoted into another tier of support. And while some enjoy the challenge, the majority of engineers become frustrated that they now must deal with an entirely new set of issues and problems, requiring them to learn an entirely new set of skills.



The default model for most Tiered support organizations is that if the agent can’t solve the problem, it gets “kicked up” to the next level. Unfortunately, this leaves the support agent in a scenario of never getting a chance to learn about the issues. Once it is passed on to the next level of support, the original agent loses visibility of the issue and a huge opportunity is lost: The opportunity

The default model of customer support requires a customer to be passed “escalated” through several levels based on the severity of the issue

**AT LEAST 50% OF
CUSTOMERS WILL
LEAVE DUE TO A
BAD CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXPERIENCE**

*Source: Accenture

DID YOU KNOW?

97% of TeamSupport users
have recommended us to
their peers!

to let the support agent learn the solution to the problem so they can address it the next time it comes up.

In organizations that work in the Tiered model, the Tier 1 support agents slog in the trenches until they start to be able to solve the problems and begin to feel that they are on top of the product and their customers. Then they get promoted to Tier 2. Now they are back treading water and having to pick up a new level of knowledge about the product and the next set of issues. None of the knowledge they are gaining during this process is ever filtered down to the Tier 1 technicians, so the opportunity for education is lost forever.



Tiered Support is Bad for Customers.

Customers are smart, and they know the product. They use it all the time and have figured out the tips and tricks to make it work in their environment.

Very few things upset customers more than calling support and having to deal with an agent who knows less about the product than they do, and that's exactly what happens many times in a heavily Tiered support operation.

The customer is forced to call and explain the issue to a junior agent, then when that agent realizes that they can't answer the question—something the customer already figured out 15 minutes ago—the customer is put on hold and stuck in the level 2 queue, waiting for the next representative to attempt to assist.

If the customer has a complex problem that requires a technician who is several levels up, you can only imagine the frustration of having talked to a number of people and being transferred or put on hold numerous times.

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The tiered model of support is one that we have all experienced, but something that we—as consumers—try to avoid as much as we can.

So, what's the solution? Collaborative customer support.

Teamwork

Working together to get something done
Cooperative work done by
process of working collaboratively
join action by a team of people
Build collaborative relationships

The Solution to Getting Rid of the Tiered Model is Simple: Collaboration

A fast-growing number of companies are abandoning the old Tiered model of support for a more collaborative and team-based approach to service—and by doing so, they gain many significant advantages that influence a company's bottom line, including:

- Saving staff time
- Reducing duplication of effort and redundancies
- Addressing customer issues faster
- Cultivating a more knowledgeable support team
- Enhancing customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty
- Reassigning entry-level support agents to more challenging and interesting assignments



Here's why:

Through a collaborative support model, issues can be assigned priorities and put into queues as they come in, either through a manual triage process or an automated approach. This method can take into account the severity of the issue, the difficulty to resolve, and also the importance of a particular customer.

For a collaborative approach to work properly, the ticketing tool you are using should support internal collaboration

Instead of using a structured tiered approach, the collaborative approach assigns each ticket to an individual or group to resolve—ideally, the person or team best equipped to solve it. If the agent or team can't resolve the issue, other people in the department or company are utilized to help address it. For this to work efficiently, the ticketing tool that they are using should support internal collaboration and make it easy to bring other stakeholders into the discussion, so that the best minds can be used to address the customer's problem.

Don't Escalate, Collaborate!

TEAM SUPPORT: A COLLABORATIVE SOLUTION

With TeamSupport, your customer support team can move away from a Tiered method of support for once and for all by integrating these powerful features specifically designed to encourage collaboration within your organization:

- The **WaterCooler** is a powerful internal social networking tool that allows in-house conversations about tickets, customers, products or groups.
- Internal **Groups** ensure that the right people are working on the issues.
- Internal **Chat** lets you communicate with colleagues to briefly address customer issues.
- Collaborative editing of the **Wiki** lets anyone on the team update documents so they're always up to date.
- The **Community** section lets customers ask questions and interact with each other.

Many companies are also implementing internal social networks, which are great ways to foster collaboration in support teams. The ability to reach out to specific groups (or the entire company) to ask a question about the product is a huge step forward for many companies. This has the potential to include the development and product management teams—and even senior management and other key decision makers—so they can stay apprised of what's going on “in the trenches.”



Preferably the conversations in this internal social network will be stored so that they can be found in searches. Imagine the power of being able to search for the resolution to an issue, and finding not only other tickets and knowledge base articles, but also entire conversations between people about the exact issue you are trying to solve!

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In addition, a more collaborative support model—rather than a tiered approach to delivering customer support—provides many significant benefits to your company, including:

- **Developing a more educated team of support representatives.** Instead of simply pushing any question they can't answer to another level of support, the first agent stays with the ticket throughout the entire process. Even though they don't know the answer to the question at the beginning of the process, they will understand the issue by the time it's resolved. The customer has an answer, and the support rep has been educated so that the next time that question comes in, they are equipped to handle it.
- **Taking better care of customers.** By assigning a single rep to guide the issue through the process, the customer is guaranteed to have consistent support and not have to repeat their question multiple times. The customer also feels like they have a more personal connection since they are dealing with one individual throughout the process instead of being punted around like a football.
- **Dramatically reducing support agent burnout.** Level 1 technicians can get easily burned out since their entire day consists of answering mind-numbingly boring questions or kicking the more interesting issues to another level. By involving all



support agents in questions of all types, the agents get to learn more and avoid burnout from repetitive elementary questions.

- **Cultivating a stronger sense of community.** When a Level 1 technician passes a problem on to someone in Level 2, there's a sense of "not my problem anymore." This is clearly not good

CUSTOMERS ARE INFLUENCING THE BOTTOM LINE WITH COLLABORATIVE SUPPORT:

Customer support teams using TeamSupport to deliver collaborative customer service have achieved the following benefits:

- **Saving time** equivalent to one full-time support employee and reassigning that individual into a more sophisticated supervisory role. (ECSI)
- **Saving money** by allowing a remote support team to stay small in size while addressing increasingly complex customer needs and serving a growing customer base. (Assured Software)
- Saving an estimated **20% in staff time** and a 100% improvement over a previously used support software system. (Suntell)
- Dramatically **improving continuity, collaboration, and communication** among multiple internal teams—from Help Desk to Sales, Quality, and Finance. (GridPoint)

ABOUT TEAM SUPPORT

TeamSupport provides powerful yet easy-to-use, Web-based enterprise software that helps businesses provide seamless, effective omnichannel customer support by enhancing collaboration and breaking down internal barriers. Using their skills as software and customer support professionals, and drawing upon industry best practices honed in numerous workplaces, TeamSupport has built a product that is widely considered one of the best in the field.

for overall company attitude, nor does it develop a rapport with customers. Moving to a collaborative model where everyone has a hand in supporting customers brings the entire company together and makes them aware of their most important assets: Their customers.

Moving away from the traditional Tiered approach to customer support is clearly a good thing for most companies, and it's why we are seeing an increasing number of businesses adopting this modern methodology for supporting their customers. Working together enables quicker access to the expert, thus reducing agent burnout, customer hold times, and ticket resolution times. A collaborative approach also reduces the cost per incident, especially in organizations with complex, multi-touch requests.

Example: Collaborative Customer Support at A.C.T Lighting



“We needed a Web-based system that would connect the whole team together in one interface - and that’s TeamSupport.”

Will Murphy, A.C.T Lighting

A.C.T Lighting, an importer and provider of high-quality entertainment lighting products, prides itself on standing 100% behind its hardware and software products. To keep up with customer inquiries among a growing customer base and a support team spread among Los Angeles, New York, Toronto and locations in between, A.C.T Lighting’s support team turned to TeamSupport for a collaborative approach to customer service.

In particular, the team relies on TeamSupport’s unique WaterCooler, an internal social media tool that allows team members to participate in group discussions in a private, internal forum that is behind the scenes. With team members in far-flung offices across coasts, the WaterCooler brings them together in a protected online space to share information within the group to solve customer issues and collaborate about R&D.

Not only does the WaterCooler provide a secure space for team members to solve problems together, but these conversations can also be linked to tickets, issues, groups or people as appropriate.

“What’s great about TeamSupport’s WaterCooler feature is that everyone on the team can benefit from shared knowledge, problems are solved, and customers are served with greater efficiency,” explains Will Murphy, Director of Software Support & Development.

“We needed a Web-based system that would connect the whole team together in one interface—and that’s TeamSupport.”