

Why Outsource?

For many companies the thought of outsourcing support is met with a very simple question – WHY? Most companies think the support provided by their support group is just fine and trusting their customers to someone else is not part of their plan. On the other hand, there are costs associated with sustaining the support group such as the phone system, workstations, and other equipment. There are factors such as staff recruitment, turnover, and scheduling issues. And, there is the question that comes up sometimes – is “just fine” really good enough or is there the possibility that you can improve support and save money in the process?

There are very good reasons to outsource support, but these are seldom actually considered. The reason that most people immediately think of is that they have too many calls to handle in-house. There is no question that is a good reason, but it only scratches the surface and merely addresses timing. In fact, there are even better reasons and times to outsource, as we will discuss below.

Reason 1 – Access to Expertise and Resources

The first reason to outsource support is the first reason to outsource any function – access to resources that possess greater expertise than you can afford in-house. There is no question that you could hire an attorney to handle your legal matters as an employee, but you certainly don’t need an attorney every day. So, you only “outsource” legal work to an attorney when you need the expertise of an attorney.

Outsourcing support is the same concept – core competency. There are many options and methods for providing support – some that work and some that don’t. A support outsourcer should have the expertise to help you create a support program that is the best fit for your products and marketplaces. For instance, not all products can be effectively supported with e-mail. Trying to support a Wi-Fi service by e-mail won’t work because the customer can’t contact you by e-mail if they can’t get to the Internet. In the same way, different marketplaces – brick and mortar versus direct e-store as an example – require different support strategies. Pay-for-Support is a strategy that is only appropriate in very specific applications. Your outsourcer should be able to tell you what will work and what won’t.

A good support outsourcer should begin by working with you to develop a support plan that matches your needs. They should have the expertise to implement that plan and to know their own recruitment, training, and staff scheduling requirements. A good support outsourcer should also have a rigorous quality assurance program and meaningful reporting that allows you to see not only what is happening with your products and customers, but also to see opportunities to improve support and lower costs. In short – a support specialist that will help you achieve excellent customer support at an affordable price.

SAI has been in business since 1992 and can help you put together and implement an effective and efficient support program that saves you money, increases your customer support and sales, and enhances your company's image. SAI offers senior management with over 75 years of experience in the world of technical customer support. SAI management has designed and implemented award winning, market penetrating, innovative support programs. SAI recruits professionally trained and certified agents on the basis of their ability to help customers. All of our agents participate in our proprietary Customer Service Training program and are regularly monitored through our professional Quality Assurance Program.

Reason 2 - Money

Customer support is a labor-intensive business. Productivity is the secret to efficient support. It is almost impossible to match the productivity of an outsourcer with an in-house staff. The reason is twofold: an in-house staff only supports a single set of products and – unfortunately – customers have never learned that they are only supposed to call when you have an agent waiting. They call in bunches – more in the morning, less in the afternoon, more in the evening. They will make more calls on one day than another. No matter how hard you try, it is almost impossible to schedule staff so that you have enough people to handle peak volumes and not too many people when volumes are low. It is equally impossible to predict which hours and days are going to be high volume and which are going to be low volume. When you add up the minutes of support that your support group actually provides and divide that into your true total cost for the group you will always discover that your price per minute of support is way more than you ever thought it would be. Outsourced support – charged on a per minute basis – is always going to be less expensive because an outsourcer has the variety of supported products and the expertise and flexibility in scheduling to be far more efficient. *Please see our case study for the savings that one client realized for just this reason.*

Although somewhat esoteric, the Use of Capital Employed is a factor that virtually all funding groups look at. Essentially they look at how much of your company's capital is specifically used to generate revenue. Unfortunately, they don't see customer support as generating revenue– even though you may disagree. Basically, professional investors see support as a perfect outsource candidate and companies that use outsourced support have a more credible presentation for funding opportunities in their eyes.

Because SAI only charges by the minute for actual contact time, your support only costs you exactly what you need. Never too much, never too little!

Reason 3 – The Ability to Offer Increased Customer Service

The third reason to outsource is that outsourcing support can allow you to offer services to your customer that may be difficult, if not impracticable or even impossible, to offer with an in-house group. 24x7x365 support is extremely inefficient with an in-house group because there is just no way to avoid large blocks of non-productive time. Also,

outsourcing companies have tools that are justified only if you have the ability to amortize them over a very large volume of use.

SAI offers all clients 24x7x365 support at the same per minute rate as 8x5 support. The per minute rate is exactly the same whether a customer calls at two in the afternoon on Monday or at two in the morning on Sunday. SAI uses an e-mail collector that automatically queues incoming e-mails, tracks the wait time, and notifies management if any e-mail has been waiting for longer than the prescribed response time. E-mails are answered within the response time morning, noon, and night. SAI uses phone equipment that not only answers and queues calls and tracks and reports performance, but routes calls only to the agents that are trained and certified on a particular product.

Finally, when your customer calls they speak to an agent recruited for their customer service skills, professionally trained and certified, and monitored by a professional Quality Assurance Program that exceeds industry standards.

Timing – That “Other” Issue

There are many reasonable times to outsource your support and obtain access to resources you don't have in-house. There is really no time that you can't increase your service offerings and decrease your costs by outsourcing. However, a common misconception is that the “best” time to outsource support is when you have way too many calls than you can handle. Actually, the best time to outsource support is when sales and market conditions are volatile and unpredictable. That is when call volumes are so unpredictable that it is virtually impossible to staff efficiently. The inefficiency is what really results in cost saving by outsourcing.