

Heather O'Neill 0:08

Hello, everyone, you are listening to the tech thinking aloud podcast. Each episode, we bring tech articles to life by reading them aloud and discussing their importance to the tech community and the world. We're your hosts, Heather and Jim O'Neill. Hi, everyone. This is Heather O'Neill. Today's article is titled, it's time to start treating support as part of the user experience. Written by la de talk featured on the Envision design blog, you can find the link to the blog article below. In an ideal world, our products would be so usable and understandable that users would never have to contact support. But we all know better. Users have questions or problems all day long and they will call email or dm you for help. While this is happening. We can be so focused on designing pixel perfect screens and optimizing the user experience that we forget that the experience encompasses more than just the product we're building. Support is the underutilized tool and the product design toolbox. It's a chance to make the entire experience better while gathering key insights to improve the product. In this article, I will talk about how customer support can improve the user experience, and what steps you can take to provide the best experience through support. How customer support is linked to the user experience. The user experience encompasses all their interactions with your organization. You want to ensure that at every point in their journey, their needs are met, and they come away satisfied with their experience. Furthermore, human negativity bias means that we're more likely to remember the bad stuff than the good stuff. For example, if I go to a restaurant and I really enjoyed the food, the main product, but experienced poor service, I'm likely to rate my general experience as poor. As a user researcher and consultant, I have worked with various startups and have seen how people's treatment with customer service can positively or negatively color their entire experience of using a product or service. When there is great customer support, even the most irate customers can become your best promoter. How to provide the best experience with customer support.

Heather O'Neill 2:33

I'll provide some guidelines for responding to customer complaints and inquiries whether on social media or whatever customer support software you use. For example, Zendesk Freshdesk, Salesforce, small chat Intercom, Help Scout and Drift are some of the best in class with varying price points and features. Providing the best customer support starts with having the customer at the center. You have to prioritize your users listen to them and apologize when they are dissatisfied. Good customer service can make users more loyal and more willing to recommend the business to others. And according to the same report by New Voice Media, 42% of people have stopped using a business as a result of experiencing poor customer service. The user experience encompasses all their interactions with your organization, you want to ensure that at every point in their journey, their needs are met and they come away satisfied. While you may intellectually know support can contribute to the experience, it can be hard to know where to start. So below, I outline some of the main principles to keep in mind. Be proactive. When you know you've done something wrong, don't wait for multiple users to angrily contact you. Take the first step and inform your users about what's happening, what you're doing to resolve the situation and what they have to do on their own end for example. If you are a financial services provider and are experiencing some unplanned downtime, where your users can't successfully complete transactions, send an email or notification to inform them of the issue, and when you expect to resolve it. If you're moving a customer ticket to somewhere else, let them know who you're handing

it off to and give them a timeline. But remember, please keep it realistic. Never make a promise you can't keep. Whenever there's a situation, don't just say something to get the user off the line. In the bid to keep customer happy. You may be tempted just to say anything and make all kinds of promises. If you make a promise to a customer, you have to fulfill it. If you don't, you only risk making them more upset and worse than their perception of your business. always respond quickly and politely. Always start responses with greetings and introduce yourself to the customer. Remember to do this whether the customer contacts you via chat email or social media, customer. Hello, support. Hello, customer name. Good day. My name is x, how may I help you today? Or Hello, customer name? Good time of day. My name is x. What can I do for you this time of day? Please note that you should only ask how you can help if they haven't already stated the issue. In this case, you can apologize and then ask them to clarify or provide whatever information you need to help them resolve it. customer. Hello, I've been trying to do X from the app, but it's not working support. I'm so sorry about that. Could you please provide why so I can see if you get a customer support message and whatever chat software you decided to go with, but for some reason can't respond to it quickly enough. Send the user an email if you have their information if the complaint or inquiry isn't already stated Hello, guys. My name, my name is x and I'm contacting you from organization because you contacted support. We apologize for not getting in touch immediately. What can I help you with today? If the complaint or inquiry was already stated, hello, customer name, my name is x and I'm contacting you from organization concerning your complaint inquiry about why? In order to resolve this, I will have to see if the solution or answer is something you can answer immediately. Then include it within the email and add Is there anything else I can help you with or something similar, be consistent. In order to reduce the risk of sending mixed messages or leaving support staff stuck? It's best to have scripts and guides that your staff can use. The examples in this article are formal, but you should aim to create something that works for your brand and industry and fits into your own tone and style. For more information on how to create guidelines for your own support team, you can check the links provided below how to deal with the messy stuff. Number one, apologize to the customer. If a customer makes a complaint, apologize for this bad experience. I'm sorry, you've had a bad experience with this. If you need them to provide details, you can ask them in such a manner. Could you provide the following details so I could look into it. Never tell a customer to calm down. Nothing is more annoying than being told to calm down. You want to show that you understand their pain and you want to help them resolve whatever the issue is. You can say something along the lines of I understand how frustrating This must be for you. Please give me a moment while I try to action. Be kind ask questions that will help you understand the customers context. Remember, a key principle of design is understanding your users. Another is empathy. Customer Support is a great avenue to implement these principles by asking relevant questions. And putting yourself in the customers shoes. Be careful not to ask questions in a way that could be seen as condescending. The best way to approach a support issue is from the perspective of centering your user and making them as happy as possible. This also extends to when you're done speaking with the customer. After a usability test, you wouldn't call your participant an idiot for not being able to complete a task. So don't do it with a customer who needs help. How you talk about your customers is just as important as how you talk to them. Number three, let the customer know you're working on a solution. Don't be silent when you're working on the solution. Tell them what you're doing and how long it might take disorder. Don't exaggerate the time or give unrealistic timeframes. Give me a few minutes to check. So I confirm or I'm checking please give me a few minutes. This way you're carrying them along with whatever you're doing and ensuring them that their issue is being attended to You for say thank you. Once the issue has been resolved, say thank you

to the customer for bringing it to your attention. Then continue the conversation by asking if there's anything else you can do for them. Thank you for bringing this to our notice or attention. I hope I've been able to satisfactorily resolve this for you. Is there anything else I can help you with? Five, follow up, especially with recurring issues, send an email to the customer following up on an issue that they complained about to find out if they're still experiencing it, or if they have any new complaints or inquiries. Hello, customer name. I'm contacting you from organization support. To know if you are still experiencing problems with issue. Please don't hesitate to let us know if you are or if you have any other questions. We're more than happy to help you how to deal with inquiries or feature requests. My customer asked for more information on how to do something or request features to be added, you should guide them to the right place with a course of action that they can take. When such features are not available, you should politely tell them that it's not and when appropriate, give a reason. This feedback and also help provide direction for user research into existing features and services and even help you identify new features to add to your product. You can add this feedback to an existing repository under the tag, customer support insights, or whatever works for you. Or you can create a new repository focused entirely on feedback gleaned from customer support. This can be a simple Dropbox document or Google Sheet. From this repository, you can follow the same process you use internally to determine how you handle new feature product or service ideas. This can be an internal workshop, a sprint or conducting primary or secondary research scenario a customer inquiries about a feature that's not available or no longer supported. If the feature isn't available express regret that it isn't. provide alternatives. However you do have can do z. And you can use that to do goal action by steps 123. If there's an article or video with instructions link to it. If you're working on making the feature available, let them know. Do not say you're working on making the feature available if you aren't, once a query has been attended to close by asking you if there's anything else you can assist with. For a feature that's no longer supported. Let them know why the feature is no longer available. Unfortunately, x is no longer available because of why and then launch into some of the other features that they might find useful. Scenario be customer inquiries about an available feature. If a feature is available, or still supported and a user contacts you to ask about it. Don't just say

Heather O'Neill 12:00

Yes, it's available and ended there. This is an opportunity to provide more value to the customer, tell them it is available and provide the steps they need to take to access it, and share any links that can help them in using it or setting it up. For example, in a recent conversation with customer support from my domain provider, I needed to provide some information that could only be found on my profile instead of just telling me to check my account. The customer support representative sent me a link to the specific part of my account where I could find the information. always provide the user with directions and next steps. Scenario See, customer makes a feature request. Whenever users make a feature request or suggestion, always give them feedback and let them know you appreciate the fact that they gave you this feedback. customer can you guys at x support. Hello customer name. Thanks for the suggestion. We are currently working on how to make it possible to do X Wilson an email update to you when x is possible. As a designer, ask your manager or head of support. If you can spend some time listening in on customer support calls or even handling some yourself interested in exploring the world of support further, here's some additional reading. That was, it's time to start treating support as part of the user experience. An article written by day to day talk is a design researcher and strategist working

with businesses in Sub Saharan Africa to create and improve products, services and processes. She is interested in emerging technologies such as voice interfaces, wearables, and XR, and and localization and international research. She is passionate about developing people and communities and creating an inclusive world. You can find her on Twitter or at her website.

Heather O'Neill 14:07

Hey, everyone. We're very excited today to be here with Monday to walk, who actually wrote the article that we just heard, and she's joined us to share a bit of her perspective on the conversation. La de Do you want to give us a little bit of your background?

Lade Tawak 14:21

My name is Lade. I am a design researcher and strategist based in Lagos, Nigeria. I currently am working at Google.

Lade Tawak 14:35

And been doing design strategy for about three years now. mostly working with businesses around Sub Saharan Africa, but sometimes the other episodes are in Africa wanted to stop in Sub Saharan Africa.

Heather O'Neill 14:52

Awesome. And so coming back to your article, what inspired you to write it or what was it Your mind when you were writing about customer service teams and user experience and how they're related.

Lade Tawak 15:05

So this article is actually over a year come in, because it was when I was consulting with a FinTech startup here, that I came to that realization of how customer support is linked user experience, I was going through my own notes, and found the sum of the work I had done on that project for them and in the areas of innovation, right about this project. In this experience, I was actually writing up my case study on the products and then decided so Ricky out into an article. So some of the article is actually the guide that I created for the company outside of like, as an article project that we had.

Heather O'Neill 15:54

And did the company. Take your advice? Was it well received?

Lade Tawak 15:58

Yeah. So we had a training, I do the training around looking for how was the most important to respond to inquiries complaints. So the reasons we wanted to create a Frequently Asked Questions page on the website. And so I look through customer support messages to see what questions are coming up your thoughts so as like the FAQs so towards this that we already have to see those anything extra. And so in doing this, I found some areas where I'm causing massive was called improve in terms of how they responded to customers. And I also saw areas in which we could take the feedback that was impossible guys, we get some so further research or think of new features and new ideas for the products. So I excited so After finishing with the FAQs, create this guide on how customer support could handle the user messages support messages better, providing an orang great experience for the users. And also seen how we could create some sheets or some which could include feature request, and other complaints and issues that could be resolved through maybe improving a feature or introducing a new feature.

Heather O'Neill 17:34

That's really great. And that second part is something that I'm so passionate about as well. I feel like I see a lot of user experience teams that never talked to their customer service teams and the customer service teams get so much feedback on a regular basis about what's not working, what's confusing and what they'd love to see in the future. That just largely goes ignored and companies is that also your experience.

Lade Tawak 18:00

Yeah, so um, based off of that, that one project and going into my next job, seeing that there was like this disconnect that the product teams had from there because I in my next show was a much larger organization, but also financial services. And there were lots of productions and it was like, seeing the disconnect between customer support and products was, it was like, Oh, this is a thing that people don't really pay attention to. And this was before it was my first job, which was the one before the consulting gig was it kind of agency so I didn't have that look into like having customer support. And for me, I like there was no, I didn't have that until I was in the company where there was customer support, there was product and they were seeking each other and people would have to think of the customer support as part of These experts on people they also think of because most of what is being followed. So helping drives products and research decisions.

Heather O'Neill 19:11

Yeah,

Heather O'Neill 19:11

that makes so much sense. And one of the things I really loved about your article was how intentional and especially in that guide, how intentional you were about sort of bringing customer service and empowering them to be part of the user experience team, giving them all the tools they need to actually serve the customers. So instead of sort of crossing your fingers and hoping that they'll be able to figure it out, one of the things I talk a lot about that I think is so relevant and so evident in your article is that if you're rolling out a new feature, or you're rolling out a new update, the first thing you should do before you roll it out, is actually train your customer service team on it in depth, so that they can field all the questions that come in. And I feel like we don't take the time to consider as product teams and designers and researchers the impact that that has to other They're pieces of the company, other parts of the team. And I think that your article really brings that right into the light.

Lade Tawak 20:07

Yes. So that's also another angle. So beyond even supports in when people request things is like when you use a new feature when you want to use it, you can add something else, like making sure that person was able to handle whatever requests or complaints that they get from people knowing how to handle like the technicalities of the products. So it's like when the call when customers call complain about something and you could join off each on them because most of all guys don't know how it works like that will be very weird situation.

Heather O'Neill 20:44

Yeah, but it's one that I see happen a lot. And I think that there's, you know, sort of not a lot of acknowledgement about the the big weight that customer service teams carry. It's interesting to me because there's been this rise of a discussion A lot of software in tech circles about customer success. But I'm still not seeing that trickle down into the way customer service teams are run and how they're connected to how the product gets built. Since you work with startups, do you see? Do you see that being sort of a thing that happens frequently?

Lade Tawak 21:20

Yeah, I definitely agree that they're only like, based on the people that I have worked with and the people that I have work relationships with, they only very few people, and businesses and startups that actually consider that flow between customer support and or customer success and products and you know, that is a valuable part of these experience. Yeah, coming in to this article, from my perspective, as you know, having been a designer for a while, and sort of mainly seeing that side of things. One of my big takeaways was how much designers need to Reach out to their customer support and customer success teams and really bring them into the fold in terms of reaching out from there. And as opposed to, you know, sort of having the company throw them together or something like that. Because I feel like we've spent a long time as designers fighting for access to get to talk to users directly. And I feel like there could be, at this point, kind of a chip on our shoulder to say, you know, well, we need to be talking directly to users and you know, not to our internal folks. And while I think that obviously talking directly

to users is important, the internal folks who talked to the users on an everyday basis are an invaluable resource. And, you know, that's definitely something I'm going to think about going forward.

Heather O'Neill 22:46

Yeah, Jim, that makes a lot of sense. I think. It's also interesting to think about the changes that will happen sort of at an organizational level when you start to bridge some of these gaps. Lead a Do you have any thoughts on what you You've seen, particularly after you wrote up that guide for that company, and what was the impact that that had on the way the company worked as a whole.

Lade Tawak 23:09

So I would say that there was definitely like, by the time that I left, there was definitely in the dark shoulders interactions, customer support had with the users in terms of the quality of the interaction and feedback, and how they responded to inquiries and complaints and all the other things and then also in terms of using that feedback as a source of what we need to change what we need. I also saw that happen in Japan like a lot of those things, those feature requests, those common complaints and same people. This particular message needs chair nuts, or people in this feature, so how can we This is something that would be business. So how can we make that happen? So seeing the quality of interactions improve, and say let's synchronization between the product team and customer support was very

Heather O'Neill 24:15

awesome. And for companies that haven't bridge this gap yet, is there anything that you would say to them about how to get started? So if customer service and user experience are completely disconnected, or if they're larger, like the second organization that you went to afterward, and they're just so disconnected? What are some small ways that people can get started or maybe even some bigger waves if they're ready to take the punch?

Lade Tawak 24:39

So far, it's more with start will be to have as someone from customer support, like creates maybe a doc or like we use like what I use that what I did there was we did an Excel, it will shoot that said different times. complaints feature requests inquiries so that we everybody had access to see what was filling up those tabs. And you can easily see what steps to take next one that I thank you very quick, short, fixed, legal do is you can have like lunch and learns where somebody from customer support comes on, does it presentation, some kind of presentation on what top feature requests are we had this week or what complaints that we have this week, for example, and then for your largest Applebee's actually involve the product people in maybe once a month or something, join in on customer support calls to see like those conversations happen live. I know I think base camp justice and we have written extensively of all times Phaedra that. So it will be like look at examples of other businesses that have been able to link

their customer support to the product and creates that sync between the teams to create a better experience with us are and see what they're doing, and see what you can take out of there that works for your context.

Heather O'Neill 26:26

Yeah, that's so right. And I think there's so much power in having people actually just sit on calls and listen, and even for product teams and for research teams, where you probably already doing some conversational aspects with the customer to be a part of those customer service calls is still a different part of the experience and it can be so eye opening.

Lade Tawak 26:47

Yeah, definitely. Because it's defined as one thing Some people ask them questions about the experiences department, so called in by themselves. See, this is my experience. So there's the differently is different is a different experience to be proactive in the sense of you wake up to research and different for you to sit. That is that is what the customers want to see.

Heather O'Neill 27:13

Absolutely. Jim, do you have any thoughts or anything you wanted to add?

Jim O'Neill 27:17

Yeah, I, I'm curious about the fact that a lot of what you talk about in the article and is sort of wrapped up in this concept of service design, and I noticed that on the internet service designer is part of your bio.

Jim O'Neill 27:33

I was curious to hear your perspective on sort of what service design means to you as distinct from you know, all the other bits of design that that happen, and what does that mean for you know, sort organizations who have this disconnect.

Lade Tawak 27:48

So for me, I think that service design, I think of design in general as not specific or limited to like a digital product. So that's where my perspective as well. And it goes, it comes out of my not being a visual designer and have been very great as visual design is I just think more of in people's experiences of things, whether it is the digital products or interaction with business or product in any other way outside



of the platform. Also in terms of how people experience faces, objects, all kinds of things, and how people experience services, like you able to bank and they want to open an account with an account or with each other or something, how that experience works, and where how to delight people where they have somebody come in with they had trouble expressing him angry, and how to change that for that person and make the experience better. So I think the one is IT services and I don't I just feel like for me is I focus more on like being like, I would say, I'm just an experienced designer, that I'm just interested in how experiences helps me experiences best that it can be for the users, regardless of what type of product or service that you're using. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Cool.

Heather O'Neill 29:20

And so for companies that are trying to get started or for product teams that are trying to get started or customer service teams, so how do they buy get buy in from leadership to connect the the product team and the customer service team, so if we want them to be more integrated, but leadership isn't really doesn't see the point.

Lade Tawak 29:42

So I think that's a good first step will be to show examples of other people who are doing it and who have found success in that. So I found that when leadership is not invested in it, Ida because they don't see how it will be them. So I think show examples of how it has been useful and valuable to other businesses in terms of if you can get like actual figures, numbers. See, this is how it works for this other business. That's one Secondly, you will be to see what steps you can take him to help you the case. So if saying, customer support, report something to the product team that helps them change something, let's say some greats in the business. That can be an example for the big for leadership and saying, this is an example of what we did in an informal structure. And we did this thing and he had this group results. So if you do this in a more formalized process, then we will get more and better results.

Heather O'Neill 31:00

So a little bit of the ask forgiveness, not permission. element. Exactly. Awesome. You know, we really enjoyed chatting with you today. And so before we end this conversation, is there any last piece of advice or last thought that you want to share with the audience when it comes to customer service being a huge part of the experience for your users?

Lade Tawak 31:24

So the final thing else is, because I didn't really mention this in this article is about how beyond customer service being part of the express in terms of providing equal experience with the user and converting the most, an angry customer into your champion is how customer support can lead to driving, actually driving product decisions. And thinking of how you can take that information and get some customer support about complaining About people asking for, and using that for their agency

doing it. So he's doing it doesn't our website doing it's required. So we need to do more in home visits with our users to see what their lives are like, or doing it to add this new feature? How can we add this new feature to improve to improve the experience for the user to meet this need, and also grow the business?

Heather O'Neill 32:25

That's great. Thank you so much. And I completely agree with everything you said. So if people want to find you or keep in touch, or just follow the work that you're doing, where can they find you on the internet?

Lade Tawak 32:35

So I write on medium and a tweet about design sometimes.

Lade Tawak 32:42

But I'm on with business, you can just find me and let me talk. That's not my handle, but you will find me. Everything's about I said when she goes by as I see everything where you can find me as I let it come into the mission page, so don't be worried about that.

Heather O'Neill 33:04

Very good. Well, today, thank you so much for joining us today. My pleasure. And I hope you have a great rest of your day.

Lade Tawak 33:11

Thank you for having me, had a great time.

Heather O'Neill 33:15

A big thanks to this week's author for sharing their article. And thank you also to our producer Melanie Scroggins. To get details about anything we referenced in this episode, or to recommend an article for a future episode, visit [tech thinking aloud.com](https://techthinkingaloud.com) we'll see you in the next episode.

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