TeamSupport

eBook

The B2B Customer-Centricity Crash Course

Introduction

Customer-centricity is a hot topic these days, and plenty of businesses are preaching it – chances are, you're among them. However, many of us throw around this word without fully recognizing its gravity and what it really means.

This is proven when you ask customers what their thoughts are:

56% believe businesses need a deeper understanding of their needs.

Clearly, there is a disconnect.

This can be attributed to an underlying misunderstanding of what customer-centricity means. In fact, *"what does it mean to be customer centric"* is often trending on search platforms. Is customer-centric the same as customer-first? Does it mean you're prioritizing your customers? Not quite. While these questions are incredibly valuable to your company, they don't mean you have a customer-centric business. These are actions your business takes.

If you're asking why, it's because customer-centricity is a mindset, and it needs to be a full-fledged way of thinking that's embedded in the foundation and roots of your business, fueling every decision you make.

What to expect in this crash course:

In this crash course, you'll learn the ins and outs of customer-centricity. You will gain a complete understanding of its definition, see why it's important to become customer-centric as a B2B company, discover which essential customer-centric skills and behaviors to look for in employees, find out what a customer-centric culture looks like, and recognize important features to look for when evaluating customer-centric software (because yes, software can be built from this mindset).

Part 1: Why is it important to be customer-centric?

Before we take a deep dive into what customer-centricity is and what it looks like, we need to first understand and establish why it's so crucial in the first place: your business success is COMPLETELY dependent on how happy and satisfied your customers are.

The customer relationship has changed significantly from the days when it was expected that you never hear from that company again after you buy something. Customers have grown away from these types of relationships.

B2B companies have long had customer support and customer success disciplines, but the customer relationship was often transactional. The customer has a problem that you'd help with, but your concern as a business was closing tickets and adhering to a service level agreement (SLA) for response and resolution times.

Both of these are internal metrics meant to make customer engagements efficient, but neither are the same as putting the customer's needs first.

At best, companies relied on trailing indicators like Net Promoter Scores (NPS) or Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) surveys to quantify if they were providing good support.

When a business chooses to work with your organization, they've likely gone through a long and complex buying cycle that involves many stakeholders. Their customer experience doesn't just set the tone for the first purchase – it impacts the future relationship you'll have. Buying committees have an incentive not to repeat the cumbersome research and procurement process, but if they feel like they're just a number to you, they'll go through it again.

When they choose your products and services, they're investing in you, expecting that you also consider them an investment by prioritizing the customer relationship. Your customers want to have a long-term partner rather than a one-off transaction.

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Customers Pay More for Improved Experiences

What this means is that the customer experience is EVERYTHING. In fact, 86% of customers are willing to pay more just for a better customer experience, according to Superoffice. Happier customers mean more opportunities for building brand loyalty. As their commitment grows, so does your potential for profit. HubSpot reports that existing customers are 60-70% more likely to purchase products than new leads, who have a much lower 5-20% rate.

Customer-Centric Businesses are More Profitable

Businesses that have already recognized the importance of the customer experience are 60% more profitable than others, according to Customer Contact Week. Adobe also found that leaders in customer experience are three times more likely to have exceeded their business goals.

You'll continue to see benefits as you move from an average to exceptional customer experience, according to McKinsey, as key performance indicators can boost by 30-50% when you successfully meet customer expectations.

Numbers don't lie. It's evident that customer-centricity improves your company's value because it enables your customers to spend more, therefore increasing your profitability and providing a strong foundation for loyalty. Your customers are more inclined to continue doing business with you when you offer them a consistent, quality experience.

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Part 2: What is customer-centricity? What are customer-centric skills and behaviors?

Now that we've established how beneficial customer-centricity is for your business (especially financially), it's time to explore the topic in more detail. Customer-centricity is a *business mindset* where everyone within the organization believes customers are their primary focus. They consider what customers need and act on those requirements, not what they think their products or services need.

It's a mindset that drives every action, even those that are not specifically customer-facing. When the entire organization is aligned around customer-centricity, they put themselves in a better position to achieve success and meet key performance indicators.

Customer-centricity requires empathy. Your business won't achieve the mentality without understanding your customers, what their pain points are, and which issues they face.

Forget about your product or business. By focusing on your customers' thoughts and needs first, you're more inclined to enhance your products and business in ways that benefit them. Again, it's all about the customer.

To make becoming a customer-centric business easier, everyone in the company, from front-line workers to executive leadership, need four key characteristics.

1. Drive

Your employees must actively seek out the knowledge required to understand your customer base. They can't sit around and wait for the customer to convey this information. Empower your employees to walk a mile in the customer's shoes. What are they dealing with when they contact your company? What challenges and goals are they facing on an everyday basis?

This kind of drive in employees means that they're proactive. They make it a point to have conversations with customers to understand what they need and the frustrations they face. They aren't waiting to have these conversations once a ticket or issue arises. When employees shift their perspective, they want to know this information to make a difference in customer care.

Customer-centricity requires empathy.

2. A Shift in the "Problem-Solving" Perspective

Classic customer support teams concentrate on alleviating customer issues and tickets. This approach prevents any real business growth in that everything becomes a problem that needs solving. This focus ignores the greater context of the customer and prevents you from seeing the full picture the customer is presenting. They're not always highlighting problems, they're providing insights into their needs and ways to empower them. By changing this perspective, you can shift from problem-solving to a holistic understanding of your customers.

When you do this, your business has greater potential to grow because we view these insights as opportunities rather than problems. This strategic approach makes you a trusted partner for that customer. You are better able to provide insight and guidance that

are fully relevant to the customer, as you've expanded your perspective on what they need. Employees with this characteristic will show exceptional skill in providing customers with everything they need to make informed decisions and get the best results for their unique situation.

3. Growth Mindset

You have to be willing to learn from your customers. They provide extremely valuable feedback that should be acted upon as appropriate. This feedback is critical for growing as a customer-centric organization, as you can gauge how you're doing, where there are gaps, and what future moves you should be making.

It's especially important in subscription-based businesses, where the customer lifetime value is a critical valuation metric. Lowering customer acquisition costs is also essential. The best way to accomplish that is to have customers that renew and expand with you. Employees with this characteristic are always looking for ways to get feedback and apply it to their workflows.

You'll have to be willing to learn from your customers.

4. Active Listening Skills

The most essential customer-centric skill is also the most basic: active listening. You have to actually hear what the customer is saying and not merely listen to respond; waiting for moments to drop your products or services into the conversation.

Your business has to listen to hear customers, understand them, and learn from them. Your employees need to be invested in the success of your customers and care about what they have to say. You'll discover critical information that can guide everything from your product development to your core business practices. Employees with this characteristic will spend more time listening than talking, and asking questions that encourage the customer to share what they're thinking.

Customer-centricity is a deeply-rooted mentality that every person in the business believes in and acts upon. Everyone, therefore, uses these skills to focus on and prioritize valuable customer experiences.

Part 3: What is a customer-centric culture? What does it look like?

Customer-centricity is highly distinguishable in a business environment. When you're evaluating where you're at in this journey, you'll want to keep several key characteristics in mind.

Everything Revolves Around the Customer

Since the customers and their experiences are at the center of everything with this mindset, every business decision made, regardless of the department or role, revolves around its impact on the customer.

Your business would never make a move without knowing that it will add value for the customer. Everything you do involves improving, enhancing, and maintaining your valuable customer relationships.

When your customers are happy with you and feel heard and valued, they stay around longer. You end up with a lower churn rate than competitors that fail to embrace a customer-centric approach.

Customers Aren't Numbers

Another manifestation of customer-centric business culture is prioritizing the individual behind the ticket. Your agents, support, and success staff are not preoccupied with simply mitigating tickets. The customer isn't something to be solved. They're a business made up of people who you share a relationship with.

If you give the impression that your customers are only a number, then 60% will leave the business relationship, according to HubSpot. Behind every customer account are multiple people, all of whom deserve to be treated as an individual.

It's not just ticket numbers that you need to worry about on this front. While NPS and CSAT scores are valuable for determining how a customer feels at a moment in time, if these are your only source for understanding their health then you're diminishing the customer to a number. Ratings and scores are incredibly impactful and helpful, but keep in mind that there are people behind those numbers.

Consider the greater context around the numbers you receive, especially those from your detractors.

Negative feedback can be incredibly valuable in identifying areas of improvement for the customer experience, and it gives you a chance to salvage the relationship before it gets worse. Likewise, positive feedback showcases things you're doing right and need to keep doing.

Re-Aligning Your Company Culture

Customer-centric business cultures reduce silos. While the term "siloed" typically refers to data silos, such as those that split customer data up across disconnected systems, that's not what we're talking about here. Instead, we're referring to collaboration and alignment.

Superoffice found that 39% of businesses think that poor alignment within their company culture stands in the way of becoming customer-centric. Even departments and roles that are not customer-facing need to consider the overall customer experience. Explore how it relates to each level in your organization, and provide the appropriate context to employees.

Once they understand their part in the customer experience, they can begin taking actions that align with your overall company culture goals.

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The customer is the foundation of the company. Everyone in the business must not only work together towards common goals, but they must ALL prioritize the customer and their experience no matter what their role or department is.

When individuals within the business build an aligned and collaborative culture with the customer always in mind, feedback becomes an integral part of what you do. You not only need to listen to the input, but you must also act on it.

Feedback is the Lifeblood of Customer-Centricity

Truly customer-centric businesses crave constant feedback from their customers, from surveys, interviews, submission forms, and other sources, so they ensure it's easy for customers to share their voice. After all, you can't know for certain that you're meeting customer needs unless you ask the customer themselves.

These businesses value feedback and when given the opportunity to improve, they always take it and act on it. This also means that when mistakes happen, the business owns up to them and fixes the issue in a way that benefits the customer. 63% of customers report that they're fine with mistakes as long as the company follows them up with a solution, according to Customer Contact Week.

These practices build a relationship centered around the trust between the customer and the business, because the customer voice is intrinsic to the culture.

Customer-Centricity Stems from the Top

Finally, none of these customer-centric characteristics can be accomplished without a customer-centric executive team. There must be a solid root of leaders who strongly exhibit and implement customer-centric practices and beliefs within the rest of the team, who form the trunk and branches of the organization.

Businesses with customer-centric CEOs enjoy 64% more profitability than those without, according to Superoffice.

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Since company culture comes from the top, based on what the executive team and CEO enforce, it's vital that these leaders guide the rest of the business into customer-centricity. They must be the ones to enforce empathy, listening skills, collaboration, a growth mindset, and all the other things just mentioned.

Without buy-in and adoption from leadership, it's impossible to become a customer-centric organization.

Part 4: What are some features of customer-centric software?

Despite the fact that Superoffice reported 46% of businesses are prioritizing better customer experiences, Customer Contact Week found only 14% of customers have seen an improvement. If there is such a strong desire to be more customer-centric, why are businesses missing the mark? One cause of this conflict boils down to the software you use.

As B2B companies, your clients are unique because you're dealing with businesses made up of people rather than individual customers. To manage these relationships, you're using a CRM, ticket management system, customer system program, or a combination of all of these. In a perfect world, these would all be the same platform, but it's likely you're using disparate systems.

The question is, are these systems customer-centric? Your software needs to embody this mentality just as much as your company culture does, or you'll face challenges in following through and offering a consistent customer experience. When your software is built with customer-centricity in mind, you have a much easier time focusing on your customers.

Data Silos Are the Enemy of Customer-Centricity

Your company culture should be *un*-siloed for a quality experience, and so should your customer service software. Unfortunately, the reality for 91% of companies is that customer support agents are accessing multiple screens and systems during customer interactions, according to Customer Contact Week.

Since not every agent has access to the same data, customers may get bounced from one person to another without resolution. With each interaction, the customer has to repeat their story, and both sides end up frustrated.

53% of customers say their main pain point with customer service is finding the right agent, while 43% state their frustration lies in constantly repeating themselves, according to Customer Contact Week. A lack of a seamless, consistent experience can cause a simple customer inquiry to turn into churn.

You can't become customer-centric when you're dealing with this reality. Personnel should never have to jump through hoops to get the customer data they need. The good news is that there are customer service systems on the market that provide unfragmented customer profiles for agents. They have all the context and data they need to solve inquiries faster, and with fewer overall interactions with the customer.

Harness the Power of Collaboration

Another advantage of having unfragmented customer data with the help of software is that it empowers agents and customer-facing departments to collaborate more. Even if an agent needs to bring in others to help resolve a customer issue, the experience has a lot less friction with these capabilities in place.

Software that nurtures this type of collaboration rather than inhibiting it allows agents to work smarter, not harder. They don't have to go out of their way or expend their energy simply trying to collect context or connect with their peers. Their focus can be entirely on the customer interaction and delivering exactly what they need and want at that time.

Proactive Customer Experiences

Another key software feature to look for is how proactive the platform enables you to be. If your agents are stuck focusing on the ticket itself or that issue in isolation, you've set yourself up in a reactive relationship with that customer. For the purposes of a customer-centric approach, you can't even consider this a relationship at all. Your customer is simply reduced down to a transaction as a faceless number on a support ticket.

Reactive support also misses opportunities to help other customers. Superoffice reports that only 1 in 26 unhappy customers let you know that they have a problem. The other 25 suffer in silence (or potentially complaining to their entire social network) and are more likely to churn.

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These days, you can't wait for your customer to come to you with an issue. When your support platform is proactive, you can anticipate customer needs and potential issues before they become problems. You capture those 25 customers who would not have reached out of their own accord, along with identifying other customers who may face difficulties with your products or services.

This customer-centric, proactive approach is only possible with software that delivers a wealth of data, insight, and analytics. Agents get a holistic, 360-degree view with full context on the customer, rather than just what's on the ticket, to start proactively engaging with your customers.

You get valuable insights into their sentiment, happiness, and overall account health. You can prevent problems before they harm your valuable relationship, along with surfacing extremely healthy customer relationships that are primed for growth and expansion.

Empowering Your Customers with Self-Service

Self-service is another essential part of improving your customer-centricity. Superoffice reports that 67% of customers prefer self-service over reaching out to company representatives.

If the business offers a knowledge base, 91% of customers will use that as a resource.

You gain many benefits with self-service capabilities in your software. First and foremost, you're meeting customer expectations and giving them the tools they want from your organization. Beyond that, you also cut down agent involvement on the basic inquiries, as customers can quickly look up these answers themselves. Some examples of issues that lend themselves to self-service include password updates and resets, user changes, delivery confirmations, and others.

Another customer-centric software feature that improves your self-service capabilities is live chat. Chatbots respond to customer inquiries when and where it's convenient to customers. Agent chats are saved for more complicated requests, questions, or concerns.

Your customer service software should complement, enhance, and empower your customer-centric culture, not inhibit it. These platforms may have been designed with customer-centricity in mind if they nurture collaborative, proactive care for customers and if they provide customers the agency to resolve issues on their own or reach you when it is convenient for them.

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Conclusion

Customer-centricity is vital to the success and longevity of businesses these days due to the increased desire for mutually beneficial relationships from customers. You end up with happier, more loyal customers, who are willing to pay a premium for this experience. Between the higher customer value, opportunities for cross-selling and up-selling, and more referrals, you can achieve much higher revenue.

Becoming a customer-centric business has an unmistakable appeal, but that doesn't mean that organizations immediately understand what it means or how to achieve it. Customer-centricity is, first and foremost, a mentality where the customer is more important than anything else in the business. Yes, it's even more important than your revenue model or product features.

Where do you see your organization in 10 years? In an ideal world, it would grow and thrive, adapting to changes along the way. Without customer-centricity, you'll never make it to that point. The customer and their experience form the foundation of your business, and that's ultimately what will make you successful.

Get everyone on board with adopting a customer-centric mindset, no matter what their role is, and empower them with the skills they need to truly understand your customers. It's time to prepare yourself for the customer-centric era before it's too late.

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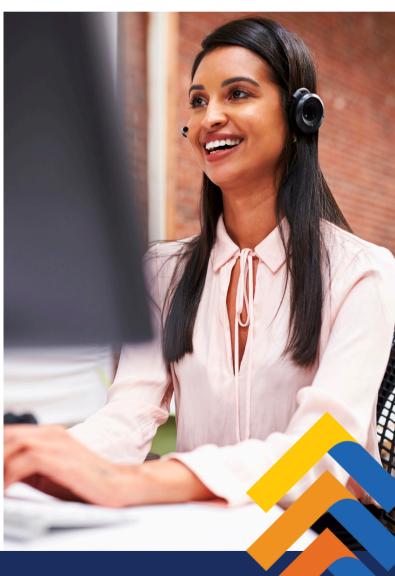
TeamSupport's Customer-Centric Solution

TeamSupport's suite of customer service software, which includes: Support (ticket management), Success (customer success), Insights (customer data analytics), Messaging & Live Chat (omnichannel live chat) provides agents with 360- degree views of customers.

Each agent gains the whole customer picture, rather than scouring multiple systems to piece together the situation. On top of that, TeamSupport's software integrates with any existing systems you have in place.

TeamSupport is innately collaborative by offering a plethora of ways to easily connect with other agents, colleagues, and departments when engaging with a customer:

- ✓ Internal chat called Water Cooler in our Support software.

- ✓ Wiki for every organization so documents can be easily referred to and kept up to date.

- ✓ Supervisor on our Messaging and Live Chat platform, a feature that allows managers to suggest resolutions and advice to chat agents, secretly, and directly in the moment they're chatting with customers.

Our suite of products enables your business to start proactively engaging with your customers. You get valuable insights into their sentiment, happiness, and overall account health. You can prevent problems before they harm your valuable relationship, along with surfacing extremely healthy customer relationships that are primed for growth and expansion.

Get started with TeamSupport to move towards a customer-centric future.