

## Customer Care Best Practices

1. ***The importance of providing first-class customer care should not be underestimated.*** One happy customer will tell one friend, an unhappy one will tell many friends. Making sure your customer care is built to exceed your customers' expectations will translate into more repeat buyers as well as more new customers. How to improve your customer care operations, however, can be the source of long debates. Better management practices internally, newer/better technology and outsourcing can all contribute.
2. ***Whether in-house or outsourced, an effective call center system makes all the difference.*** So often, call centers are built with suboptimal tool sets that don't empower the customer service representatives (CSRs) to effectively help customers. Without these tools, CSRs are relegated to "telephone answerers" with no capability to help customers. Outsourced call centers require even better tools to be effective.
3. ***In-house call centers, domestic outsourcing or off-shore outsourcing all have costs, benefits and risks.*** All require significant management attention. Develop and review with your executive management team quantitative models based on tracking metrics before undertaking any major effort in this area.
4. ***In evaluating in-house vs. outsourcing, remember that recruiting and initial training for internal CSRs can range from \$3,000 to \$10,000 (or more for technical or specialized areas).*** The total cost of having an internal call center is easy to underestimate. However, if well-planned, monitored and well-executed, it can be less expensive than outsourced. If these are not done well, the cost will dramatically increase and be more than outsourced.
5. ***Your company knows your products and customers best.*** Outsourced call centers will never know your products and customers as well as you do. They will be able to perform most activities, but the personal and consultative touches won't be as strong.
6. ***Outsourced call centers can scale faster.*** Outsourced call centers can easily add CSRs as well as cover all time zones, after hours, and weekends. Internal call centers require multiple shifts to support the same hours and take longer to scale to meet these extended hours.
7. ***Use a multi-channel approach to all areas of customer contact: phone, chat and email.*** While different CSRs may specialize in different tools, they should all have access to the same data. Keep them focused on one medium at a time, however. It's difficult to chat and talk.
8. ***Take the time to monitor random customer care calls yourself, whether in-house or outsourced.*** There's no better or more immediate feedback as to how you're doing. Calls and chats can be saved so that you don't have to do it real-time.
9. ***Treat CSRs well and recognize them publicly.*** They are on the firing line when there are problems and often deal with unhappy customers in difficult situations. Handling all that conflict can take its toll.
10. ***Calls into your customer support center can be opportunities for additional revenue.*** Develop a plan to properly incentivize CSRs to create sales. Include a sales or promotional message at the bottom of their email communications to customers.