lokalise

Support-led growth: How to turn customer service into a sustainable growth engine

Support-led growth is a business approach aimed at shifting customer support from cost center to critical revenue driver. Here's how you can do it, broken into 4 key phases.



The only way to succeed in modern business is: better customer experience.

This collection of articles began with this discussion. Should you invest in improving every customer touchpoint or mark it down as an operations cost that must be cut or outsourced? Is there a sweet spot somewhere, and what would that look like? To help settle it, we pulled together a task force from companies that do it right, like:

- Intercom
- Plum
- Doxy.me
- And a whole lot more

They're going to show you how they do it...

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The old vs. new approach to support

Practically every company understands the importance of using sophisticated, data-driven software to maximize efficiency and transparency in their workflows. Yet relatively few companies have the same standards when it comes to managing customer operations, even though today's customers have increasingly high expectations for excellent, customized support.

The result? Companies pay lip service to support while viewing it as a cost center. Research from Accenture shows that only one in five organizations fully views support as a profit center. They claim to provide great customer support, but not all customers (a whopping 80% according to Qualtrics) have a great experience, so clearly there's room for improvement.

Customer support has had a long, successful run in its traditional role. Imagine support as a function so essential to your company that it engages customers at every step of their journey, in multiple languages. It's integrated, indispensable, and seamlessly embedded into your operations.

This is support-led growth – a business approach aimed at shifting customer support from cost center to critical revenue driver. Because clearly, sales-led, marketing-led, product-led, community-led, media-led, retention-led, and content-led growth are not enough (yes, we're kidding). But it's true. Research from Accenture shows that companies who view support as a profit center generate 3.5x more revenue growth than those perceiving it as a cost center.

A new definition for customer support

Stereotypical customer support	The new customer support
Viewed as a cost center.	Viewed as a growth center: the face of a company, and a critical component of sales and word-of-mouth marketing.
Disempowered and inefficient agents focus on mundane, repetitive tasks with the help of legacy technology (like spreadsheets or the go-to "ask the manager" workaround).	Focused on empowering agents and customers with self-service tools, freeing up agents to deal with more complex and challenging customer requests.
Requires customers to call during specified business hours and often wait on hold for help.	Round-the-clock support backed up with the rise of digital channels and self-service options e.g., website knowledge bases with FAQs and support documentation, virtual agents, email, chat, social media, etc.
Call center agents relegated to cubicles or outsourced to other locations/countries to meet cost-efficiency requirements, straining access to internal company knowledge.	Works side by side with other teams using new technology that empowers remote work and has a seat at the table in company decision-making.
Operational metrics tied to cost-cutting: average handle time (AHT), average talk time (ATT), service level (SL), repeated contact rate, call resolution times, etc.	Holistic metrics tied to company-wide goals: Net Promoter Score (NPS), customer satisfaction (CSAT), customer effort score (CES), first contact resolution (FCR), etc.

Here at Lokalise, it's a topic close to our hearts. Reflecting on their previous venture, our co-founders Nick and Petr admitted that they didn't place enough emphasis on providing great support. With Lokalise, they wanted to change that, starting with a focus on the fundamentals: delivering on our company values and consistently exceeding customer expectations.

Support strategy flows from company strategy

Customer experience is only important if you make it important. And to do that, you have to start at the top. Your leader needs to take a personal interest in customer experience and treat it as a company-wide priority.

Leaders should speak about customer experience frequently and enthusiastically, in terms of its importance for the company's business goals, not just because it's something nice to do. Senior managers should also be tasked with acting on the leader's message and ensuring their teams are held accountable for improving customer experience.

It's not enough to just talk about customer experience, or even just make it a priority — it has to be a part of your company's core values. Those values should be incorporated into every aspect of operations, from product development and marketing to sales, service, and support. If you're serious about having a great team, you can't ignore customer experience.



Delivering on company values



Nick Ustinov,
CEO & Co-founder, Lokalise

One of Atlassian's core values is "Don't #@!% the customer." Too direct? Maybe. But this means the support team (and the entire company) never strays from that value, and because it's public, their customers expect to be looked after.

If your company values honesty or speed, those values should inform your definition of great support, and your team should be set up to deliver on those values.

At Lokalise, one of our company values is "Be direct and kind. Put yourself in others' shoes." The ability to communicate directly and with empathy underpins our entire support process. We understand what customers want to achieve and offer the best solution possible.

But adopting this customer-centric approach is about more than doing the right thing. It's our most effective marketing tool in a world that is undifferentiated. Just take a look at our G2 reviews and you'll see that support is our secret weapon.

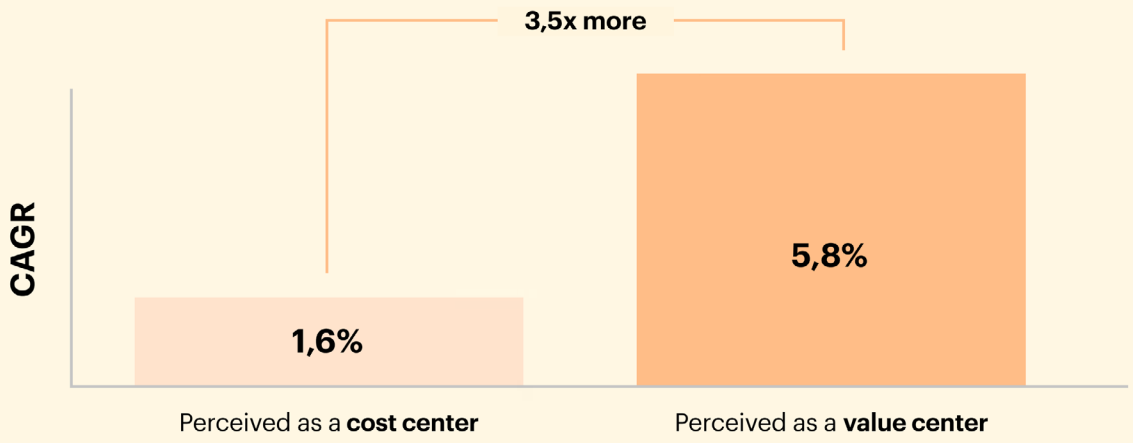
The business case for support-led growth



Declan Ivory,
VP of Customer Support, Intercom

We have always thought of customer support as a 'value driver' for our customers; as in, our support team directly helps the customer achieve the benefits they anticipated from using Intercom. In this case, support is absolutely a revenue driver.

When customer service is perceived as a value centre, revenue growth is higher



Accenture 2021 End-to-Endless Customer Service Research

This philosophy has been part of the Intercom approach from quite an early stage, so there hasn't been a major shift other than we fully acknowledge that customer expectations are increasing all the time. This requires an objective reassessment of what 'value' means from the customer perspective and ensuring that we evolve our support capabilities accordingly.

Help customers get more value



Bobby Stapleton
Director, Customer Support, Intercom

Our support is key in maximizing value delivered to customers by providing personalized and contextually relevant strategic advice. This requires a focus on unblocking anything preventing a customer from using the full potential of the platform and also looking at the customer experience from a lifecycle perspective. That is, from the time they initiate a trial, through onboarding, and then ongoing customer success and customer support activities.

We actually use Intercom at Intercom, and can engage with our customers with the full context of the communications that we have already had with them, allowing for a very personalized support relationship that enables our team to accelerate how customers are using Intercom.

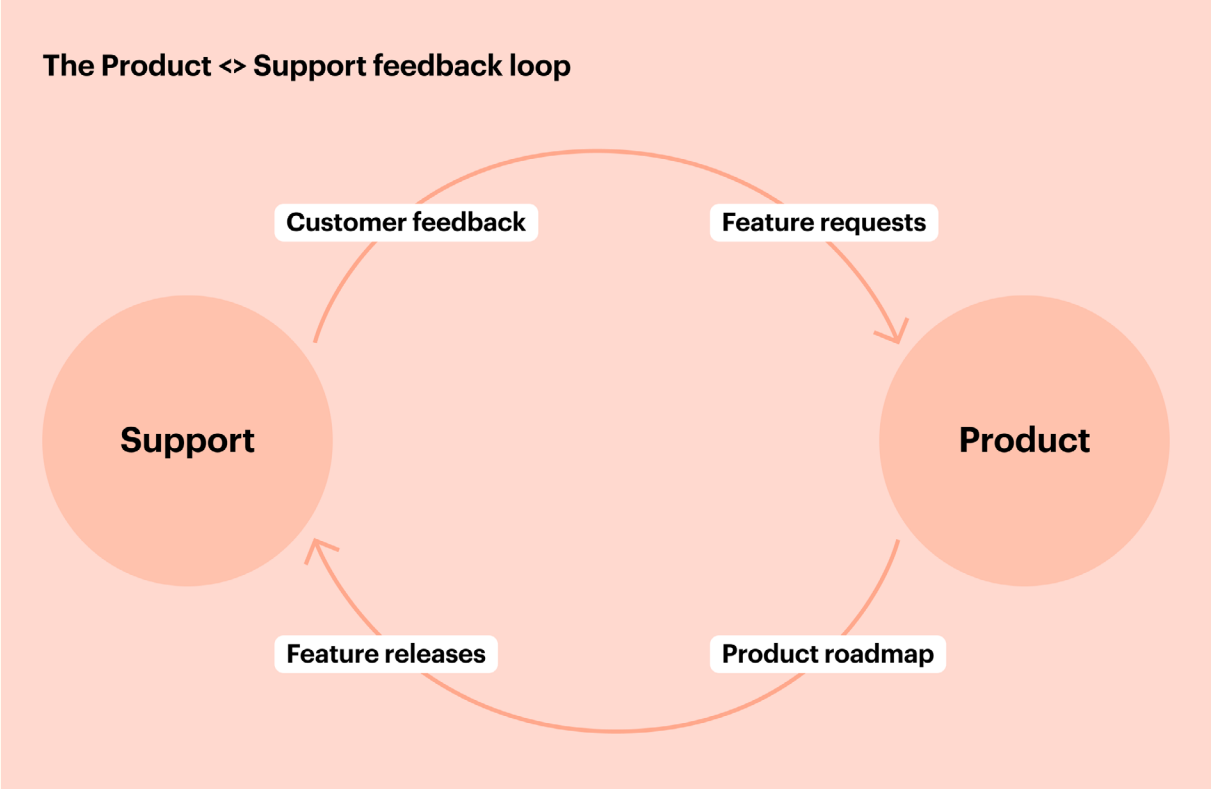
Boost expansion and retention

We have discrete teams that look at customer onboarding, customer success, and customer support, so it is a different team that looks at expansion and renewals. However, driving revenue expansion and preventing churn is a cross-functional effort. We collaborate across all of our customer-facing teams to ensure that we share as much context on the customer as possible, which enables customer support to play a role in driving revenue growth.

Our customer support team helps customers resolve issues, which accelerates the realization of value for the customer. This can both contribute to revenue expansion and to churn prevention because the more value that a customer is deriving from the Intercom platform, the more likely they are to expand their usage of the platform. This also helps mitigate any churn risk.

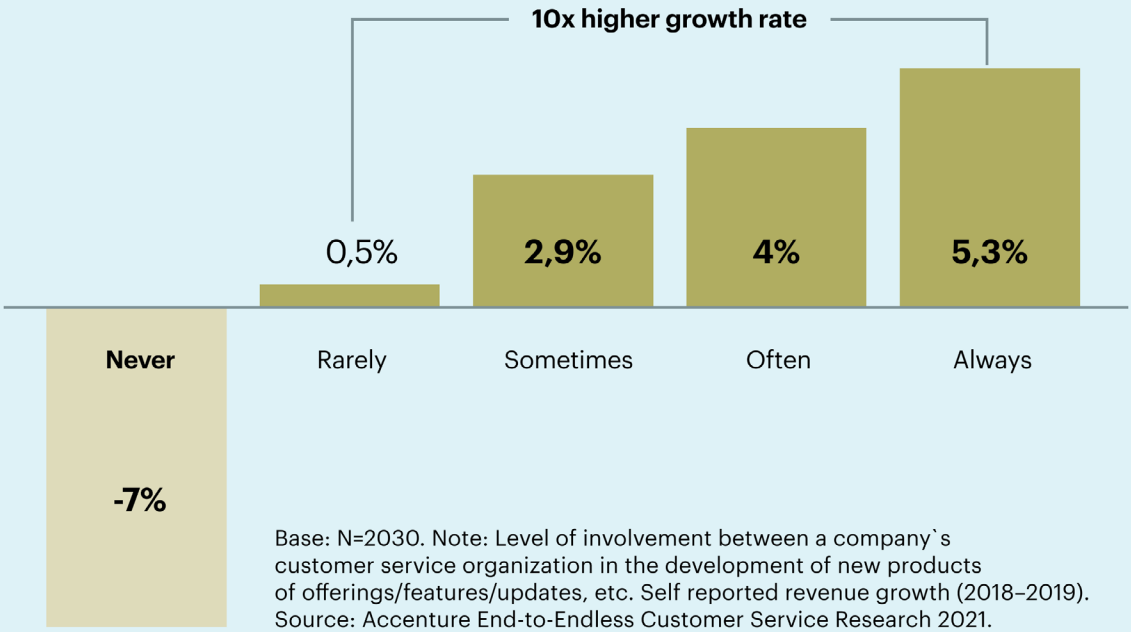
Make better product decisions

We see ourselves as advocates for the customer with both our engineering and product teams. Intercom's platform automatically captures customer feedback gathered through the support process, like feature requests, and enters them into a centralized feedback system.This then aligns with other data sources to assist product managers with product roadmap decisions.



Given that we use the Intercom platform to support our customers, our own experience of working with Intercom is also a valuable source of feedback for the product teams. We also run regular 'Customer Support Insights' workshops with product managers to discuss the insights we hear when supporting customers. This typically adds a lot more context for the feature requests that are logged on behalf of customers.

The more often a company's customer service is involved in the development of new products/services, the greater the revenue growth potential - up to 10x higher



Base: N=2030. Note: Level of involvement between a company`s customer service organization in the development of new products of offerings/features/updates, etc. Self reported revenue growth (2018–2019). Source: Accenture End-to-Endless Customer Service Research 2021.

Great customer support = differentiation

When people in SaaS think of customer experience, they think of design. When your customers think of customer experience, they think of the people on your team helping them out. According to Suneet Bhatt, Former Growth Manager, Crazy Egg, "If you want more customers doing better, customer experience is where you need to invest. Your tech is not going to differentiate you in the market, your customer experience is."

When there was a market to acquire, growth came from acquisition. Now that the market is saturated and acquired, growth comes from retention and upsell. Your customer support team leads both of those endeavors. And all they need to do is be helpful.

If you can create a culture of treating customer support as an investment, the next step is to ask the following questions:

1. What are customer operations teams doing incorrectly today that is sabotaging team productivity and customer value?
2. How do I improve my customer experience globally?
3. Can technology help me deliver improved customer outcomes while reducing costs? What impact do processes and technology have on agent productivity?
4. How can I leverage insights from my customer-facing team?
5. What are the biggest untapped opportunities to improve the productivity of customer support operations?
6. What are the metrics that a high-performing CX team needs to care about and why?

Getting started with support-led growth

Here's how you turn support-led growth from a nice idea into a sustainable, long-term management practice.

What makes a world-class support team?

The best customer support can be defined in six tenets:

Tenet	To execute
Helpfulness Do you actually answer their question or solve their problem?	• Have good judgment • Be empowered ato act • Be equipped with knowledge (internal enablement) • Analyze direct improvements of the first contact resolution rate (FCR)
Expertise Do you know what you're talking about?	• Well-documented product information and • internal training on customer, product, and landscape • Easy-to-access information through intelligent knowledge management and CRM tools
Accessibility Can you help people in the way they want to be helped?	• Multi-channel help: calls, messaging, email, live chat • Self-service resources: knowledge base, FAQs, video tutorials, chatbots/AI-led virtual assistants • Multi-language support
Availability Do you help people when they want to be helped?	• 24/7 service • Cross-time zone staffing • Staffing appropriate to customer inquiry volumes

Efficiency Do you help people as quickly as they want to be helped?	• Cross-time zone staffing • AI technology to automate repetitive tasks for agents • Excellent knowledge base of internal documentation and saved replies
Positivity Can you make every interaction a positive experience?	• Voice and tone standards • Replies based on a growth-driven mindset

Phase 1

Your team's vision is an image of how it will fit in and contribute to your company several years from now. It needs to align with your company vision and contribute to overall company success.

For example, if your company's vision is to become a global company, your vision should be to create a go-to-market (GTM) strategy for international markets.

Global go-to-market strategy

Global go-to-market motion is implemented for new products or services targeting geographical markets with language preferences. The markets where the product will be introduced are chosen along with the languages needed to support those markets. Budget is allocated for localization, marketing materials, support, and should be ready to go when the product is shipped. **Like localization, support often doesn't have a seat at the table when startups think about global GTM strategy. Here's how support can help create and execute on that strategy.**

How support fits into global strategy



George Papadopoulos,
Head of Customer Success, Plum

At Plum, GTM strategy is led by the cross-company leadership group and every department has more or less an equal say.

Each department contributes in the following ways:

- Starting with Product, we make sure that any new functionalities and features that will be launched add value and are useful for our clients, and make the app more attractive and competitive in the market.
- Engineering plays also a significant role in confirming that any new products and offerings are complete and ready to be launched
- Marketing is responsible for understanding our clients' and the market's needs, and also promoting our product in the most attractive and effective way.
- Customer Support is the only client-facing team that participates in the GTM strategy by ensuring that we are ready to deliver high-level support and coverage to our clients, and that we are able to support and guide users throughout their journey with Plum.

The role customer support plays in developing international strategy



Yoan Jedrowiak
Customer Success Lead, Plum

As the main customer-facing team, it's essential that support is present and active in strategy conversations around international growth. We make sure that CS is heard and taken into consideration for any potential expansions because we need

to be ready to offer high-level support and coverage to our users with different time zones and languages, for a variety of products and services.

Also, given that the functionality of our platform might differ from market to market for legal reasons, we need to ensure that each market has sufficient coverage and support given its needs. Therefore, before expanding or launching in a new market, we make sure that CS is well engaged and prepared for what the needs might be.

Technology strategy

When teams are starting out or small, it is common for ad hoc tools and implementations to be used in the place of proper procedures and standardized processes. These may work in the short term, but as the team grows, changes members, or experiences unexpected growth – cracks can quickly show in the processes.

As a senior member or leader of your customer support team, you can start using technology early to prepare your team for rapid growth. As Lance Conzett, the Customer Experience Lead at Found, and former CX Tools and Knowledge Management Lead at Postmates, pointed out:

"Right now, we're coming at technology investment from the point of view of setting ourselves up for a growing future. We want to stay ahead of the curve—not just ride it. And making smart investments in foundational tools (platforms like Zendesk) sets us up to make better decisions down the line in supporting tools (such as add-on functionality like quality, knowledge, or performance management)."

Demonstrating value

The first thing to focus on when defining your support technology strategy is your company's business objectives. You need to be able to demonstrate how your technology strategy contributes to the objectives. You'll need to map to the objectives to demonstrate ROI and get the buy-in you need.

Here's a matrix that will help you map technology to business objectives:

Technology/ business objectives	Enable cost savings/ efficiency	Great customer experience	Impact on support KPIs	Enable global growth	Total objectives met
Customer engagement platform					4
Knowledge base/help center systems					4
Real-time interaction translation tool					4
Translation management system					3
Quality management system					3
Chatbots/AI virtual agents					2
Resource management tool					2

Remember: everything will always take longer than you expect. Implementing a new customer support platform can take months. And the budget for everything can take longer than expected to plan.

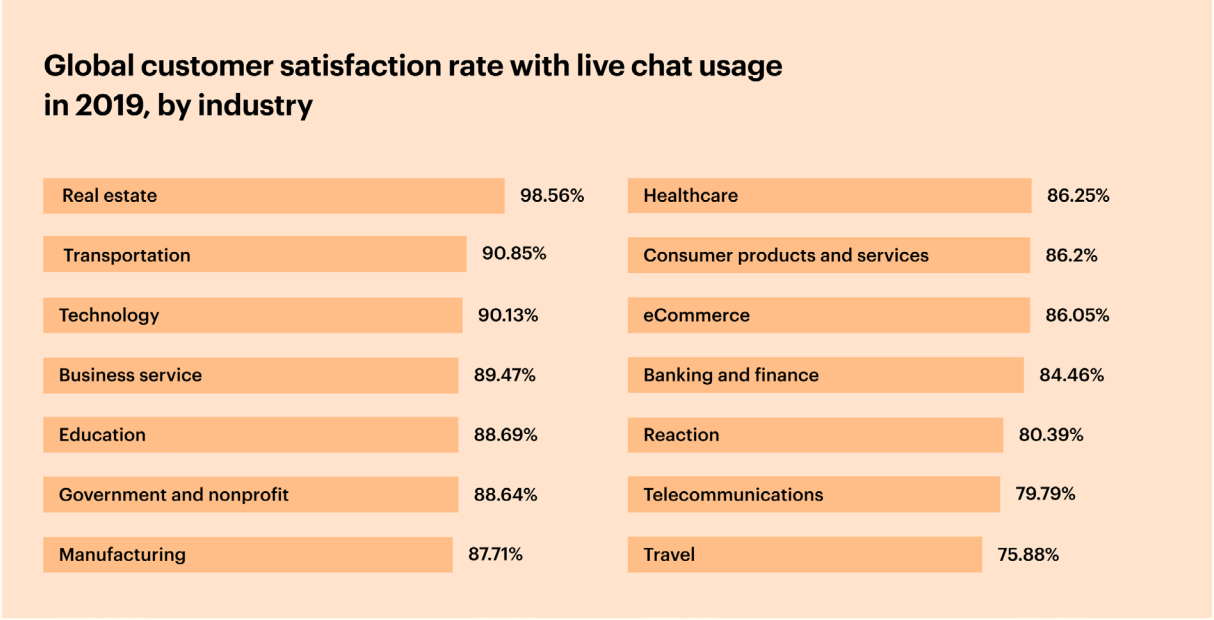
As a support leader, you can empower both your team and your organization by having a plan when introducing new technology and preparing for the worst.

Phase 2: Channels and languages

When you're committed to providing great customer support, it's tempting to say, "We'll be available on every channel all the time!", but small teams almost certainly can't provide consistently great support across all channels, time zones, and languages.

That's why live chat is our primary support channel at Lokalise. We also provide support via email, but the number of our customers who choose this option is far lower. Our customers love live chat, and the data is clear: given a choice, the typical customer will choose a real-time support option (phone or chat), over email or social channels.

Just take a look at this chart showing global customer satisfaction rates with live chat usage across every industry:



It's better to provide quality customer support on a few channels than to spread your team too thin and give inconsistent support. So how do you choose which channels your support team will monitor? Find out what your customers are using and make sure you're available on those channels.

Channels

Live chat = support-led channel



Bobby Stapleton
Director, Customer Support, Intercom

We use the Intercom platform to engage with and support our customers, which is more than just live chat. It is a chat channel, but coupled with the power of a complete platform full of rich, first-party customer data and insights, intelligent bot technology, apps, and more. We're able to provide a much more personalized and contextualized support experience than if we were just using live chat alone. Our customers—and people in general—embrace and value this. In fact Forrester found that messenger-based support rose from the fifth most used support channel to the second during the pandemic, even overtaking phone support.

Intercom's platform enables us to collect and act on rich, first-party customer insights and data, which is helpful as our support team has the necessary context when helping a customer. We have also deeply integrated intelligent bot technology that drives a very personalized experience even without human involvement and ensures that by the time an issue reaches a human support specialist or engineer, we have already collected a lot of relevant context for the customer issue.

The combination of a chat channel and an AI-powered automation provides a scalable and powerful platform for delivering customer support. In addition, the ability to deploy apps within Intercom enables easy integration of Intercom into the wider technical stack, ensuring existing business systems and platforms can be used as part of the chat experience.

For example, Lokalise has an app available for Intercom that facilitates language translation of support conversations. As mentioned, we do look at the lifecycle of a

customer and therefore we believe that a good support experience through a trial will ultimately help a customer make a decision to commit to Intercom.

Languages: how to go global without slowing down

Language strategy is not so much about language; it is about reaching your audience and creating experiences accessible to everyone. Defining the languages you support is how you achieve that reach.

Effective global growth hinges on multilingual support



Yoan Jedrowiak
Customer Success Lead, Plum

Currently our app is available in the UK, France, Ireland, and Spain. Therefore, on our websites you will find information in the aforementioned countries' main languages. We want to make sure that all of our clients can experience tailored and high-level support when interacting with us or when trying to find information by themselves through our main page or our help center.

Plum has great plans for expansion in Europe in Q2 and Q3 of 2022, starting with countries like Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Cyprus. Our CS org and our marketing team are intensively working on making sure that our coverage and information are fully available in the languages spoken in those countries before launch day. This will ensure that our new clients in those regions can have a high-level experience from day one.

My advice to other companies would be to focus on what they can control and what their current audience is. If, for example, a platform is currently available only in France and Spain, focusing on delivering a high-level experience and support coverage in French and Spanish should be the number one priority. Once the company decides to expand, then they can focus on that expansion.

Multilingual support can be costly and a really big project with multiple moving parts. However, you need to be ready to embrace this challenge since you want to make sure that all of your clients, regardless of region and language, have the same high level of coverage and support. At Plum, we focus on two main pillars: our people and the technologies available to us.

Firstly, we are sure to hire native language speakers for any market that we operate in, in order to offer support which is human, real, and effective. As a second pillar, we use technologies available to us, like Lokalise, which is the platform that helps us translate content in multiple languages in real time. Therefore, this enables us to offer coverage to any markets we operate in and it makes the experience for our clients smoother.

The top three approaches to real-time translations

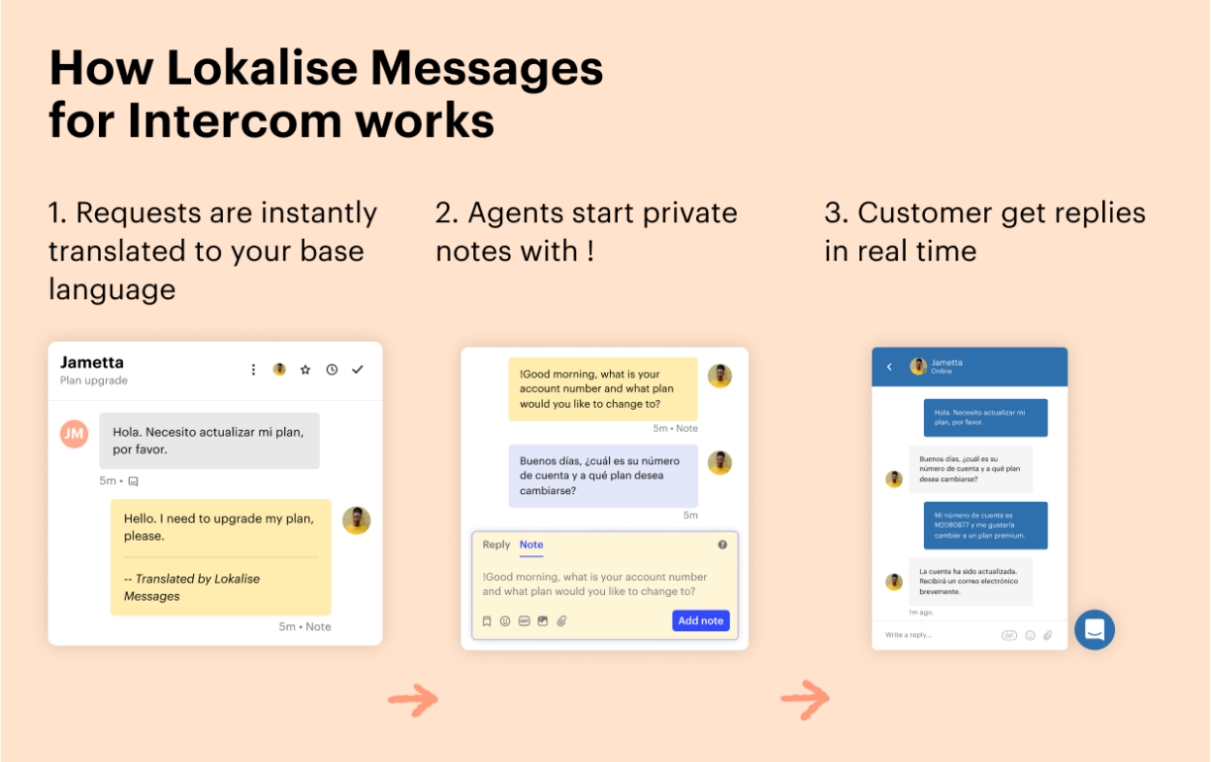
Native speakers or polyglots	Translation tools	Translation services
Emma is fluent in German and English. Her Spanish isn't too shabby either. That's not why you should hire her – she has to be exceptional at delivering customer support as well. The problem? Hiring someone who checks the boxes for both language and technical skills is hard. And retaining them is likely even harder. Add the $14,113 it costs to hire and train a support agent and your CFO will freak out.	One of the go-to strategies to handle requests in other languages is to manually use machine translation tools – copying and pasting customer questions, copying and pasting agent replies – ultimately disrupting the agent workflow and increasing average interaction handle times. Many companies have started taking advantage of Lokalise Messages for Intercom to automatically translate conversations and support customers in their native languages regardless of which agents are available.	You might also explore some of the translation services that provide human-corrected machine translations. Note that this is the least time and cost-efficient option compared to using automated translation tools.

At Lokalise, we don't hire support agents for language skills, manually copy and paste queries into machine translation tools, or rely on expensive human translators, so we can't speak to those options.

How does our small support team answer queries in 108 languages? Lokalise Messages for Intercom. We like to practice what we preach, so we've been using it for months in the run-up to its official launch. It's been key to supporting our international users, allowing our agents to deal with queries in any language from anywhere in the world.

Here's how it works.

How Lokalise Messages for Intercom works



How else does it support your customer service operations?

Glossary	Built-in analytics	Language based routing
Helps you ensure accurate translation of your product names, company name, and industry standard naming conventions, as needed	Help you understand how you are performing in different languages (including CSAT for each language so you can ensure quality and maintain the right schedules)	If you have a Spanish customer that contacts your customer support, and you have a Spanish-speaking agent, you can automatically route that conversation to the agent

Lokalise Messages is powerful, but don't just take our word for it: here's a case study to inspire you to take action.

How doxy.me went from one to 100 languages in a few months with Lokalise



Jacob Palmer
International Growth Manager at Doxy.me

The context: For doxy.me, steady growth was replaced with swift progress when the pandemic hit. As demand for telemedicine solutions skyrocketed, doxy.me saw a tenfold increase in providers using their platform, going from around 65,000 providers to more than 1,000,000 from over 150 countries.

The results: For Jacob, one of the highlights is how Lokalise has helped the doxy.me team take customer support to the next level. Being able to easily translate help articles has made it possible to equip providers with the necessary information to quickly troubleshoot and solve any more serious issues they run into.

Better yet, Lokalise Messages lets doxy.me respond to and assist with virtually every real-time support request, no matter the language. Lokalise Messages provides live two-way chat translation for Intercom users.

> “Being able to chat with and provide support to our users in their native languages, in real time, at all times is game-changing. Doubly so, given the urgent nature of most requests,”

“Being able to chat with and provide support to our users in their native languages, in real time, at all times is game-changing. Doubly so, given the urgent nature of most requests,” Jacob says.

Add multilingual support gradually

It’s great to translate your knowledge base into multiple languages, while you also work to localize your website and tools in those same languages.

Pull demographic data to find where the majority of your international customers already are, and focus on delivering effective multilingual support first.

Finally, make sure support has a seat at the table when it comes to developing an international growth strategy so that you can scale the level of your support accordingly.

Phase 3: Scaling support accordingly

Aligning people, processes, and technology with evolving business needs



George Papadopoulos,
Head of Customer Success, Plum

The scale of our support always has a "client first" mindset, and it depends mainly on two factors:

a) The current volume of users that we have in the markets we operate in and the estimated growth we expect to have in the already operating markets
b) Any potential expansions

Both factors are extremely important.

The first one is important because you want to make sure that you have enough people and processes to cover the needs of the clients who are using your platform. This means being in a position to offer a high-quality experience to them in order to keep them satisfied, retain them as users, and help them use your platform in as many ways as possible.

The second one takes into consideration any potential growth, either because we might be launching in new markets or launching new features. Estimating the potential growth and volume is important because in this way you ensure that there is enough coverage to support both the people who trust and use you already, but also everyone else who might be interested in becoming your client.

Phase 4: Measuring support success (Metrics & KPIs)



George Papadopoulos,
Head of Customer Success, Plum

At Plum, our main KPIs for customer support are:

- CSAT (customer satisfaction): This is a really important metric that helps us understand the satisfaction and the experience the user has when interacting with our team, and also in the grand scheme of things, the overall experience they have with our platform.

- FRT (first response time): We focus on FRT because we believe it is something that is interconnected with client satisfaction and retention. Being easily accessible and having fast responses is critical. When someone wants to get in touch with our team, it means that they need support and guidance; therefore, the faster you reply and show that you are available to engage with them, the more satisfied the client will be.

- IQS (internal quality score): We have internal mechanisms to track our agents' quality when it comes to the answers they send and the level of support they offer. This helps us ensure that everyone follows correct processes, has sufficient product knowledge, and can manage the conversation in a professional and appropriate manner.

- Agent efficiency: Our reps need to meet specific SLAs in order to ensure that they are productive and effective in their roles. One of the SLAs is the number of conversations they handle in a day. This helps us make sure everyone is productive, and focus on serving our clients.

Every company measures day-to-day support success differently. Here are the daily metrics that we'd recommend:

- Average reply time (ART)
- First contact resolution (FCR)
- Average handle time (AHT)
- Qualitative conversation review
- Customer effort score (CES)
- Customer satisfaction (CSAT)

When your support team is smashing their daily metrics and solving problems for customers every day, you have a cash cow. That said, you don't want to tie them to revenue targets. If you need to tie them to broader business metrics, consider engagement, adoption, self-serve, retention, and expansion.

Measuring performance beyond the numbers



Dmitry Olenov
Customer Support Manager, Lokalise

"When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure."

"When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure."

As soon as we try to manipulate behaviors to alter a measure, it's no longer useful. Most metrics don't measure anything except whether someone is good at making them go up.

If you measure quality, but only ever reward or praise reply quantities, your quality

program will stay on the sidelines. If, on the flip side, you have clear quality metrics and highlight them consistently, then your quality reviews will have an impact.

While we don't tie our support team to revenue metrics, their work is crucial when it comes to retention, expansions, and customer loyalty.

In both B2C and B2B, it's evident that customer support is not just customer support, but also sales, marketing, branding, and customer success. As these disciplines blur, customer support is directly impacting business results.

There's a downside to rapidly increasing customer expectations: providing fast, excellent support to everybody at all times is hard. Making that balancing act work is definitely making customer support in 2022 a much steeper challenge than 10 or 15 years ago.

Note: We don't use metrics as part of our team's performance review process but rather as a set of indicators of the overall health of our team.

About Lokalise

Lokalise is a continuous localization platform that streamlines the translation and localization process and collaboration between developers, designers, translators, project managers, and customer support teams.

Our plug-and-play integrations help you deliver end-to-end localized experiences at every step of the customer journey. From sales and marketing (emails, websites, etc), to product (apps, webapps, websites, and customer service (chat, tickets, and knowledge base). With Lokalise and Lokalise Messages, customer service departments can provide the best customer experience anywhere in any language.

Lokalise is a fully remote company founded in 2017 with 2500 customers from 80 countries, ranging from startups to Fortune 500 companies.

Ready to see Lokalise in action?

Book a demo with our team or give it a test-drive yourself with our free trials for Lokalise and Lokalise Messages plug-in.


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