



# Mastering Multilingual Customer Support

A Checklist for Success





Online services can target customers in hundreds of countries at once, and with a fully localized customer experience, consumers are becoming ever more comfortable engaging with international products and services. But providing quality customer support across multiple languages to accommodate that global appeal comes with a greater set of challenges.

Conducting a data-driven content audit to determine your translation needs entails a more quantifiable approach – upon completion, you'll know exactly how many product descriptions, service pages, and FAQs are required. Customer support, on the other hand, is all about exceptions to the norm: It's expecting the unexpected on a timescale dictated by the customer and what they are experiencing at that moment.

Staffing native customer support agents to support every market your business targets is not an economically viable solution. But making these decisions will first require a strategic overview of your needs and resources. You'll want to gain trust within your consumer base and build loyalty by getting their queries resolved within their native language, but you'll also want to avoid the logistical and financial issues that doing so could pose.



## Before starting your customer service journey, you might wonder:

- ▶ How should you prioritize what languages to support?
- ▶ Should you hire native agents for any language?
- ▶ And how should you adapt to the local culture in a way that truly resonates with your local audiences?

**We've compiled a quick checklist to help you navigate the complexities associated with employing a global customer support strategy within your organization – guaranteed to maintain or uplevel your CSAT scores / Net Promoter Score.**



# 1. Leverage Data to Understand Consumer Demographic

- Gather information on your consumers.** Do people who live in France spend more time on your website than those in Spain? Or vice versa? Using IP data, email addresses, and Google Analytics will provide optimal insight into your multilingual support needs.
- Include second languages.** In some territories, a second language is so pervasive that the problem of implementing multilingual support is mitigated before it arises. In the Netherlands and Israel, for example, English is widely spoken, therefore these markets are potentially less of a priority for multilingual investment.
- Get the product right first.** If you receive a disproportionately high number of support requests in a language compared to service users in that language, it might point to a potential problem with the localization of the product or possibly a cultural misalignment. If that's the case, try to examine the aspects of the product that could be causing this – and only then focus on the translation.
- Look at language trends.** It's a multilingual world: Only 25.1% of online content is now in English, compared to 80% in 1996. Today, Chinese (25.1%), Spanish (8%), and Portuguese (4.1%) are all joining the conversation. And companies that act on this shift in language are reaping the rewards.



## Consider the following

- What are the main languages spoken by your current customers?
- At what point do they tail off? (Expect 3-5 main languages and then a dramatic fall-off)
- What are the secondary languages in your territories?
- Is there a difference between the languages used when contacting support vs. those used by regular customers?
- Does the company have any plans for expansion into new markets and languages within the next year?





## 2. Give Customers as Much Information Online as Possible

### Prioritize Self-serve Tools

According to *Zendesk's CX Trends 2022 Report*, 69% of customers want to resolve as many issues as possible on their own using customer self-service options. Additionally, 64% of today's consumers tried a new way to get in touch with customer service in 2020, with messaging and bots increasing 110% in popularity year-over-year.

- ❑ **Provide comprehensive FAQs.** Neglecting this section of your website can have a bigger impact than you might expect, so ensure that you translate your FAQs and knowledge bases into as many languages as necessary, and that both original and translated versions are revisited regularly (quarterly or every six months).
- ❑ **Invest in self-serve tools.** Basic self-service options such as chatbots or interactive voice response (IVR) systems can handle simple requests such as password resets and payment processing. Beyond that, predictive analytics can help teams predict customer behavior and make the digital customer experience more seamless.



## Consider the following

- Is all your customer service information localized?
- Do customer contact reports feed into the production of future FAQs?
- Can you automate anything?

### 3. Understand the Service Expectations of a Local Culture

Cultural aspects of customer support can vary widely. Some countries have different expectations of the sort of service they should receive. For example, [Unbabel's 2021 Multilingual CX Report](#) found that French consumers prefer phone communications – which require more support staff.

Perhaps more importantly, some countries have rigid rules on hierarchy and manners, such that spending more time crafting a culturally appropriate reply will yield a better level of satisfaction than racing to get a faster response out.



#### SUPPORT LOCAL

For example, customer support agents servicing the Japanese market may need extra training to account for the important honorifics (titles and forms of respectful address) in Japanese culture.





## Consider the following

- What are the local expectations of service in each territory?
- What is the cultural role of communication in each territory?
- What do people in each territory value most? And what would turn them off?

## 4. Time Zones are Cultural Assets, Too

Today, speed matters. We have culturally ingrained expectations about how long a reply should take. For example, we now expect “verify your email address” emails to be delivered within seconds of signing up for a new service. We want a reply to a tweet within a few hours – especially if it’s a complaint. We expect a customer support email response within 2-24 hours (and we give extra credit if it’s faster than that). In short, we’re time-sensitive.

The [2021 Global Multilingual CX Survey](#) found that speed of response is among customers’ highest priorities, and that means time zones take on new importance.

If you require 2 hours to deal with a query, but your service hours are 8 am – 8 pm, the wait for someone on the other side of the world trying to get in touch with you during your ‘night hours’ could be up to 14 hours. Many online businesses find themselves opening (or buying in) 24/7 support centers for precisely this reason.



## Consider the following

- What does your world look like? Are there 'hotspot' time zones to consider?
- What are your best and worst possible outcomes for response times with current staffing? Is this adequate?



## 5. Access Your Linguistic Long Tail

You'll almost certainly have heard the concept of the 'long tail.' It describes the many situations where a small number of items account for the majority of circumstances, and a substantial amount of items account for the remainder.

For example, in most libraries, a small number of books are hugely popular and lent out all the time; but the majority of books are much less popular, and some are barely ever lent out at all.

Similarly, **Google's most searched** 'how-tos' include 'how to screenshot on Mac,' and 'how to lose weight fast'. But after these very popular questions, the rate at which questions are asked drops off rapidly, with millions of questions only asked once.

Your demand for support languages is almost certainly a long-tail graph (our client, **Skyscanner**, saw **exactly this type of demand for languages**). A few languages will be worth local or in-house support from native speakers. The rest – the long tail – is where you must make a call as to how much support will impact profitability.

## Consider the following

- What shape is your long tail? Where does in-house support end and on-demand support begin?
- At what point is support no longer economical to provide?
- What is the trend in product usage in long-tail territories? Where is usage surging, which would warrant extra attention?

## Before you reach your destination!

In the end, it's all about creating a long-lasting relationship with your customers. Your support team may not be an international community of thousands of native speakers, but you'll still be able to turn a complicated operation such as multilingual customer support into a smooth and efficient trip with these tips.

