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Viewpoint **May I Help You?**



— Sridhar Machani

Leveraging Product Technical Support Teams to Improve Documentation

Write in Exile

Whether you are working in a traditional or new age environment, technical documentation needs to traverse through the usual grind of user and task analysis, multiple drafts, and review cycles. This grind leaves little or no scope for technical communicators to receive or address customer feedback. Let's admit it, most of us work in exile, away from the customers who matter the most, for whose cause we toil away day in and day out.

Customer Speak

Customers often seek help and provide feedback about a product by various means. Organizations have product technical support teams in place that are the first point of contact and have the onus of resolving issues. It is clear who is more aware of the problems faced by customers and who learns about them first. The support personnel listen to or read about customers pointing errors, asking how to use certain features, enquiring whether something works or why not. In most cases, each customer interaction is assigned a reference number, and a repository of most such interactions is maintained.

Leverage and Collaborate

The problem repository is indeed another vital source of content for the technical communicators. It only makes sense to leverage this existing setup. A collaborative environment should be built where technical communicators have a constant dialogue with the customer-facing personnel. A seamless process should be incorporated in to the documentation life cycle, wherein all relevant customer problems are identified and documented.

The support personnel should ideally review the documentation drafts as early in the game as possible. They should be part of the review cycles as a norm and provide inputs directly to the technical communicators. The content could then be reviewed for accuracy and validity by subject matter experts.

What is the Gain?

Table 1: Improved Documentation

Direct Impact	Overall Impact
Accuracy of content	Higher customer trust and satisfaction
Focus on key topics and FAQs	Meaningful organization
Lower undocumented topics	Higher coverage of content
Lesser number of reviews/revisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quicker delivery time• Better utilization of resources
Lower problem requests	Cost reduction

Own and Drive

The world is not perfect and neither is the workplace. You could find resistance from several quarters and be tempted to give in to the pressure. Of course it's impossible to document everything, right?

However, you could always try. As content owners, the onus is upon the technical communicators to drive quality and usability of documentation. In the process, you may as well capture tangible results for your work. Perhaps, a low customer problem count is in order.

About the Author

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