

How to Know When It's Time to Hire For Your Support Team

Mathew Patterson · March 15, 2025



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Timing is everything in customer service. A perfectly correct and helpful answer arriving days late might be useless.

Timing matters when it comes to customer service hiring, too. Hire too early and you'll have underused staff and an unhappy CFO. Hire too late and your service quality and team morale will both suffer as you try to keep up with your volumes.

Here are some strategies for picking the perfect moment to hire your next support team member.

Principles for planning your customer service hiring

Give yourself the best chance of maintaining support quality as you hire and grow your team by keeping these principles in mind.

1. Hire before you absolutely need to

Budget battles can be hard fought, and that may lead to delaying hires until the need is incredibly obvious to everyone.

However, when you are already stretched to the limit, adding the workload of finding, selecting, and onboarding new staff is very hard to manage. Your customer service quality is likely to suffer, and any new team member you do hire will find it hard to get much support from colleagues who are frantically trying to keep up.

2. Maintain some slack time for the team

Not Slack time, which few people need more of, but slack time as in "excess" capacity which you can use to train up staff, improve documentation, communicate with other teams, and reduce the risk of burnout.

If that excess capacity is not deliberately maintained, it will inevitably be eaten up by new customers and new questions. It may not show up in your metrics for some time, because support teams will prioritize helping customers over other work until they have no capacity left, and then everything is likely to break (see the point above).

3. Know your onboarding

How long will it take a new person to learn the products, systems, and approaches for your company? Remember that adding a new person to a team can result in a short-term lowering of your overall capacity because existing team members are pulled in to help with training.

Use your help desk reports to see how many conversations new people typically answer in their first week, month, and quarter and keep that in mind for your hiring plans.

With those principles in mind, you should have a general sense of when team growth is necessary. However to make a strong case for additional head count, you will probably need to provide more detail.

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Identifying the best time to hire for customer service

When budget time arrives, it's best to be well prepared to ask for what you'll need and to know when you will need it.

Review your metrics

Your help desk should provide you with helpful reporting that can indicate a need to hire. Here are six signs to look for:

1. **Increases in support volume** — How many conversations are being created each month? If you account for seasonal changes, is your base volume growing significantly?
2. **Growth in your customer base** — More customers will mean more customer service questions to handle, especially if new customers tend to be the ones who ask the most questions.
3. **Increases in your contact rate** — If your contact rate (the percentage of your active customers who request help in a given month) is rising, you will have more questions to answer even if you gain no new customers. That may happen if you have a new product release generating questions or a new audience that requires more help, for example.
4. **Longer times to first reply** — If customers are waiting longer for help than they used to, your team may be reaching capacity or even falling behind.
5. **Decreases in your QA scores** — If you have a [quality assurance program](#), a drop in quality of answers may indicate a team that is cutting corners to keep up with a high workload.
6. **Drops in your CSAT or NPS scores** — Customer satisfaction and Net Promoter scores are lagging indicators that can reflect drops in your customer service quality.

None of these mean a definite need for hiring, but they can be an indicator of where to look further.

Consider your company plans and strategy

Make sure you are aware of your company's goals and anticipated growth rate over the next year. If the sales team hits its goals and the marketing team goes all out, how many new customers would you need to help?

Explore your alternatives

You will improve your chances of budget success if you can show that you have already implemented less costly ways to manage a growing support queue. For example, you could:

- Move staff to offset shifts so you can cover more hours (and deliver faster answers).
- Expand your knowledge base and make it more accessible.
- Encourage people outside of the customer service team to jump in and help customers directly. It can increase coverage and create a more customer-centric company.
- Invest in product and process improvements that address the root causes of common support questions.
- Use an outsourcing firm to manage temporary or seasonal spikes in volume.

Putting all of this together and figuring out how many people you might need — and when — can still be a little fiddly. That's why we've built a [support hiring calculator](#) to save you some effort.

Using the customer support hiring calculator

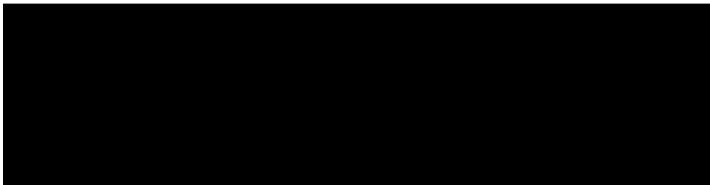
We developed [this calculator](#) to help you understand how growth in your customer base and in self-service usage will shape your team size into the future.

It works by using your existing incoming [support volume](#) as a baseline, along with your staffing costs and workload, and then modeling possible future states. Here are the pieces of information you'll need to use the calculator, along with where you might find them:

Conversation metrics



Support agent metrics



Support lead metrics (if applicable)



Growth modeling



The calculator will give you a clearer picture of the relationship between your team size, customer volume, and support load. It will help you identify potential issues and opportunities such as:

- The need to promote or hire into team leader roles, requiring a reshuffling of your frontline team.
- An unsustainable contact rate (i.e., too many customers needing help), which requires investment in product fixes and self-service tools.
- An imminent need to add new staff before the volume becomes so high your service quality will suffer.
- A target number for self-service usage that would keep your team size within budget.

Next steps for building your customer service team

If you've checked your metrics, done the calculations, and decided it's time to hire, be sure to take a look at our [customer service interview builder](#). It has job description templates, tips for interviewing, and a large repository of interview questions to help you find just the right supporting pros for your team.

Previous Chapter

[Scaling Customer Support Without Sacrificing Quality: 15 Tips](#)

Next Chapter

[7 Steps to Build a Thriving Customer Service Team](#)

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