



Lesson #19

Using Help Desks For Customer Support

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Foreword

In lesson 25, Kelly talked about what methods you can use to communicate with your clients and suggests help desks as an option. Having some experience using one and setting up several help desks for my clients, she's asked me to help out with a lesson about help desks in your Blog Evangelist business. And so this week, we are taking a short break from our normal 'technical' lessons to talk about this.

Must You Use A Help Desk?

No. You can communicate in any way most comfortable for you and your client. I've found that brick and mortar businesses tend to favor phone and personal meetings with a sprinkling of email here and there. I presume things will turn out pretty much the same for you as well.

But you have to admit. It is not always possible to be on the phone or meet in person. Also, no matter how well you manage them, they tend to take a lot of time. I believe setting up a help desk system for them to ask impromptu questions in addition to the physical and phone methods is a good thing. Particularly after the site is handed over.

When you're building the site, phone or in person works very nicely because the feedback is immediate and you need to discuss a lot of things, going back and forth. A help desk is not really designed for discussions although I've done it before. But often, clients will have extra 'one more thing' questions after everything is over and done with. These are the real time robbers.

Depending how you set it up, both Kelly and I strongly advise you to tell them that 'one-more-thing' questions after the project is handed over costs extra. But sometimes weaning them off your email is tough. When you tell them instead that they can refer to your help desk for additional support, you are subtly confirming that the project is closed.

Why A Help Desk?

Email is OK for one-more-thing type of questions but they get lost or people receive them and lose them and ask you to 'resend' – basically repeating yourself. A help desk here will definitely help to keep everyone in the loop plus all communication is documented. That is good for you because you can back it up if anything goes South. We don't wish that upon anyone but it does happen.

The other thing about email is, it is too easy. It does sound contradictory. We should make things as easy as possible for clients but, when it is too easy, some (not all) clients tend to take it for granted you'll be there to answer their emails all the time. Some expect you to answer almost immediately and others are in the habit of sending multiple emails. It is not pleasant to wake up to a mailbox full of questions from one single client. It is because they have too easy access to email.

The other nice thing about having a help desk – depending on which system you use, you can set up 'paid support' or 'priority support'. Some help desk systems can help you manage additional support by elevating certain clients to priority ahead of everyone else.

Finally, a help desk can be easily outsourced because it is web based and you don't have to be the one answering all the questions. Since a help desk stores a history of the communication, this makes it much easier for a new assistant to pick up from where your previous staff left off. The history also helps them get comfortable about what they should do or how they should respond to common concerns. Instead of asking you every step of the way, they can always do a search of past similar issues.

Beyond One-on-One Communication

Here's one thing I personally like about using a help desk. Many of them come built in with what is commonly called a Knowledge Base. Think of this like an FAQ. Make full use of it!

There are bound to be questions you will be asked over and over and over again. Instead of sitting there answering these repeat questions, explain to your clients

to take full advantage of your Knowledge Base. Tell them it is your value added service included in your package (since it costs you nothing for them to search and find solutions on their own). This cuts down your work dramatically and allows clients to get immediate assistance.

Remember those one-more-thing questions? Put them here. If your client insists on emailing you for help. It is so much easier to politely direct them to the Knowledge Base. After one or two polite redirects, they'll soon 'get it' and either use it or pay you for extra live help.

Keep it updated. Every time you are asked a generic question that could benefit someone else, put it in the knowledge base. You'll be surprised how many emails this alone cuts out.

Which Systems Should You Use?

There are many free help desk systems that will suffice. There are also many paid systems that are frankly, pretty costly. Which you use depends on your budget and what level of support you wish to have.

If you want a hands free system where you don't have to manage it at all, here's a list of help desks that you pay to use monthly.

[Kayako eSupport Hosted](#) (starts at \$39.95/month)

[Cerberus On-Demand](#) (starts at \$35/month)

[ZenDesk](#) (starts at \$19/month)

If you don't mind having to manage your own system, upgrading, patching and securing it. These are systems you can use.

[Kayako eSupport Owned](#) (around \$300)

[Cerberus On-Site](#) (around \$400 after Small Business discount)

[TrellisDesk](#) (free download and use. Optional support starting at only \$20 for 90 days)

In Closing, Are You Ready For A Help Desk

Despite the many advantages of a help desk. It is not something I would jump right in to starting off. This will only add more things for you to worry about and to manage.

Consider how many clients you are supporting. If you only have 1-2 clients at any one time, then you may not need it. But when you start regularly supporting 5,10 or more clients at a go, then you need something better to manage your communication so everyone is on the same page. This is so very true especially when you start hiring sub-contractors who actually do the work for the client with you as the 'supervisor'.

If you're not a point you feel a help desk is necessary, I encourage you to consider setting up the Knowledge Base of FAQ.

Next Lesson...

We're going back to our theme to add widget support so your clients can manage the sidebar and possibly other areas on their own.

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