Measuring Customer Satisfaction with Support Services

Jenny Rains
Senior Research Analyst, HDI

For companies that sell products or services that require technical support, the support customers receive might be the only personal experience they can use to gauge their satisfaction with an organization. Since, for many of these organizations, customer satisfaction directly affects revenue, measuring customers' satisfaction with the service experience and the services provided is extremely important as it enables these organizations to manage and improve the customer experience.

This HDI Research Corner report reveals the findings from 264 support organizations that provide technical support for the services or products used by customers. The data was collected via an online survey from August to October 2012.
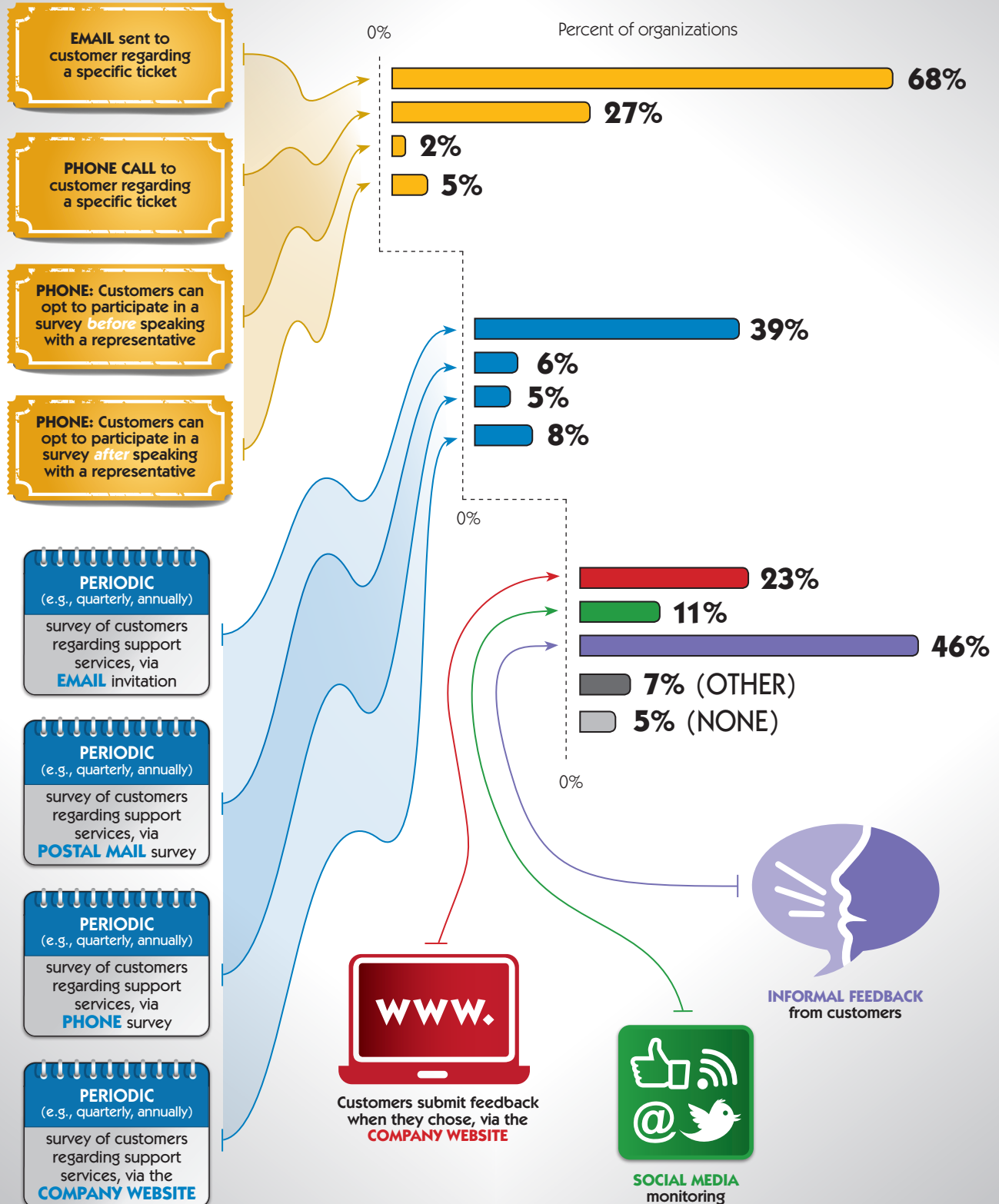
Survey Results

Methods of Assessment

Ninety-five percent of customer technical support organizations are assessing customer satisfaction with the support services provided. The most common method for analyzing satisfaction levels, used by 68 percent of technical support organizations, involves sending a customer an email regarding a specific ticket. The second most popular method of formal assessment involves periodically (e.g., quarterly, annually) surveying customers regarding support services, also by email (39%). About one-quarter of companies allow customers to submit feedback at any time through the company website, a less traditional channel.

Eleven percent of customer technical support organizations use social media monitoring, a relatively new means of gauging customer satisfaction. One benefit of this surveillance method is that satisfaction can be monitored without soliciting responses. However, organizations should keep in mind that customers usually post comments about companies' customer service when they are either extremely satisfied or extremely dissatisfied. Monitoring social media channels is a valuable way to spot red flags, but it should not be the sole method for gauging customer satisfaction levels.

Assessing Customer Satisfaction with the Support Services Provided

Respondents were allowed to choose more than one option.

EMAIL sent to customer regarding a specific ticket

PHONE CALL to customer regarding a specific ticket

PHONE: Customers can opt to participate in a survey *before* speaking with a representative

PHONE: Customers can opt to participate in a survey *after* speaking with a representative

Percent of organizations

0%

- 68%
- 27%
- 2%
- 5%

0%

- 39%
- 6%
- 5%
- 8%

0%

- 23%
- 11%
- 46%
- 7% (OTHER)
- 5% (NONE)

0%

PERIODIC (e.g., quarterly, annually) survey of customers regarding support services, via **EMAIL** invitation

PERIODIC (e.g., quarterly, annually) survey of customers regarding support services, via **POSTAL MAIL** survey

PERIODIC (e.g., quarterly, annually) survey of customers regarding support services, via **PHONE** survey

PERIODIC (e.g., quarterly, annually) survey of customers regarding support services, via the **COMPANY WEBSITE**

www.
Customers submit feedback when they chose, via the **COMPANY WEBSITE**

SOCIAL MEDIA monitoring

INFORMAL FEEDBACK from customers

Comparing Assessment Methods

Overall, organizations are not overly confident that their method, or combination of methods, is successful at measuring customer satisfaction with support services. When asked to rate the success of their assessment methods on a scale from one to ten, where ten is "very successful" at assessing their customers' satisfaction with the support services provided, the average score was a 6.32.

The highest scoring method, periodic (e.g., quarterly, annually) surveying of customers regarding support services via email invitation, was rated 6.67. Companies with a combined approach of incident-based surveying (i.e., requesting feedback regarding a specific ticket) and periodic surveying (i.e., requesting general feedback about support services provided) rated their success in assessing customer satisfaction higher, with a score of 6.80.
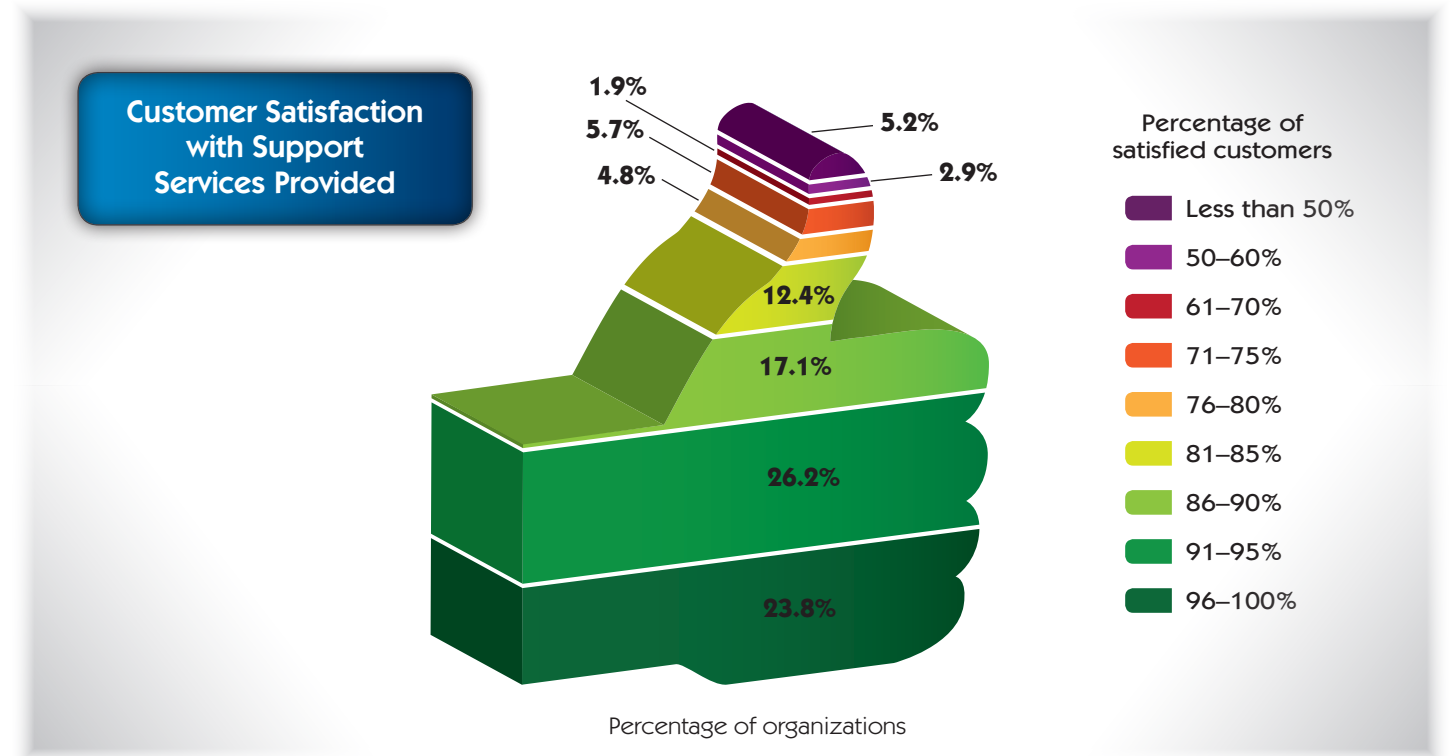
Success Ratings for Customer Satisfaction Assessments (1 = "very unsuccessful" –> 10 = "very successful")	Average Rating
Email sent to customer regarding a specific ticket	6.58
Phone call to customer regarding a specific ticket	6.27
Phone: Customers can opt to participate in a survey **before** speaking with a representative	Limited Data
Phone: Customer can opt to participate in a survey **after** speaking with a representative	Limited Data
Customers submit feedback when they chose, via the company website	6.41
Periodic (e.g., quarterly, annually) survey of customers regarding support services, via email invitation	6.67
Periodic (e.g., quarterly, annually) survey of customers regarding support services, via postal mail survey	6.61
Periodic (e.g., quarterly, annually) survey of customers regarding support services, via phone survey	Limited Data
Periodic (e.g., quarterly, annually) survey of customers regarding support services, via the company website	Limited Data
Social media monitoring	6.61
Informal feedback from customers	6.22

Completion Rates by Survey Method	Median
Email sent to customer regarding a specific ticket	21–25%
Phone call to customer regarding a specific ticket	41–50%
Phone: Customers can opt to participate in a survey **before** speaking with a representative	Limited Data
Phone: Customer can opt to participate in a survey **after** speaking with a representative	Limited Data
Periodic (e.g., quarterly, annually) survey of customers regarding support services, via email invitation	26–30%
Periodic (e.g., quarterly, annually) survey of customers regarding support services, via postal mail survey	26–30%
Periodic (e.g., quarterly, annually) survey of customers regarding support services, via phone survey	Limited Data

Organizations were also asked to estimate the percentage of customers that are offered the survey and end up completing the survey (completion rate). The most common survey method, sending an email to a customer regarding a specific ticket, has the lowest completion rate, with a median of 21–25 percent. Phone surveys about specific tickets have a higher median completion rate, at 41–50 percent. Note that completion rates can vary depending on the number of customers sampled, the frequency of surveying, and the opt-out options available to customers.
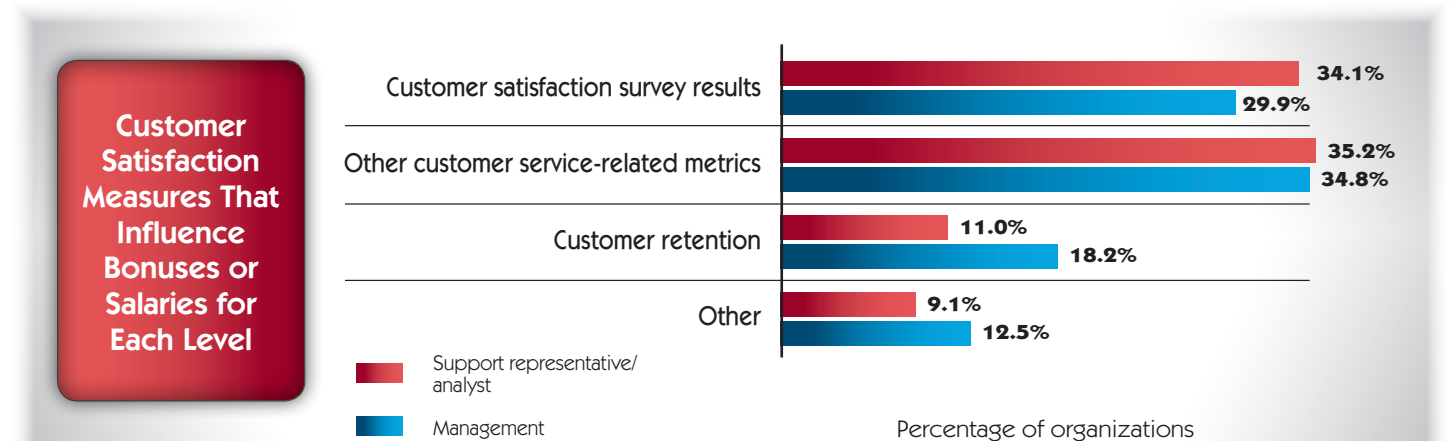
The Metrics: Customer Satisfaction

Most companies (50%) report that more than 90 percent of their customers are satisfied with the technical support services they provide. An additional 17 percent report that 86–90 percent of their customers are satisfied. Customers from 23 percent of organizations are able to review the company's satisfaction scores. Sixty-eight percent of organizations share their satisfaction scores with the technical support staff. Managers and directors are the most common group that reviews customer satisfaction scores (86%), followed by executives (74%).

Customer Satisfaction with Support Services Provided

1.9%	5.2%
5.7%	
4.8%	2.9%
	12.4%
	17.1%
	26.2%
	23.8%

Percentage of satisfied customers
- Less than 50%
- 50–60%
- 61–70%
- 71–75%
- 76–80%
- 81–85%
- 86–90%
- 91–95%
- 96–100%
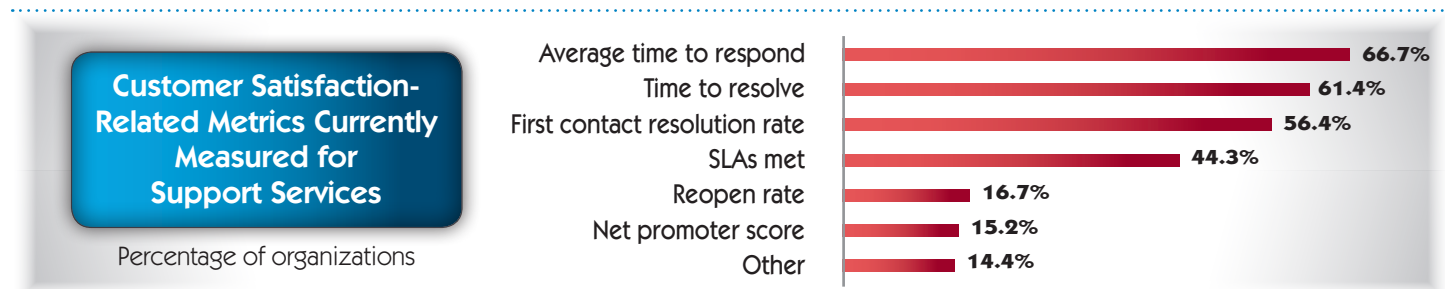
Percentage of organizations

Customer Satisfaction's Effect on Compensation

Because customer service is tied to revenue in customer-facing technical support, it is not surprising to learn that compensation (including either salaries or bonuses) for support representatives/analysts in more than one-third (34%) of organizations is influenced by their customer satisfaction survey results. Thirty-five percent of organizations use other customer satisfaction-related performance metrics to set salaries and calculate bonuses for this group. Forty-six percent of companies' support representative/analyst compensation practices are influenced at least somewhat by measures of customer satisfaction. Results are similar for management, with 47 percent of companies' management compensation practices influenced by measures of customer satisfaction.

Customer Satisfaction Measures That Influence Bonuses or Salaries for Each Level

Measure	Support representative/analyst	Management
Customer satisfaction survey results	34.1%	29.9%
Other customer service-related metrics	35.2%	34.8%
Customer retention	11.0%	18.2%
Other	9.1%	12.5%

Percentage of organizations

Other Customer Satisfaction Metrics

Beyond customer satisfaction ratings, other measures of satisfaction used by customer technical support organizations include average time to respond (67%) and time to resolve (61%). Reopen rate (17%) and net promoter score (15%) are currently the least common. The most common "Other" response was abandonment rate.

Customer Satisfaction-Related Metrics Currently Measured for Support Services

Percentage of organizations

Metric	Percentage
Average time to respond	66.7%
Time to resolve	61.4%
First contact resolution rate	56.4%
SLAs met	44.3%
Reopen rate	16.7%
Net promoter score	15.2%
Other	14.4%

Companies that provide external technical support for products or services have a unique role compared to support centers that provide internal IT support. For these companies, the technical support team is often the face of the company, or at the very least the hands, from the customer's perspective. This scenario creates an interesting challenge with regard to measuring customer satisfaction with the actual support provided instead of with the product or service being consumed. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the companies surveyed admit that it is difficult to distinguish between their customers' satisfaction with the support provided and the product or service being supported. This complexity could partially account for the unimpressive ratings for the success of various assessment methods ("Comparing Assessment Methods").

The organizations that reported that it is not difficult to distinguish between the two (36%) were asked to briefly explain how their organizations make that distinction. The most common response was that the survey questions they use on their satisfaction surveys are designed to specifically address this possible confusion. For example, they are either specific in the way they word their questions (i.e., this survey is about the support provided and not a product or service) or they include a separate question(s) about the customer's satisfaction with a product or service. In addition, several organizations reported that allowing customers to provide text responses helps make this distinction.

Conclusion

As an industry, companies that sell products or services requiring technical support realize the importance of assessing customer satisfaction with the support service. Only a small percentage (5%) report that they are not currently doing this. Most are allowing their customers to provide formal feedback, and some are monitoring social media or assessing informal feedback from customers. In addition, organizations are measuring performance metrics that directly affect the customer experience.

However, it is important to note that assessing satisfaction is only one part of the solution to improving support. Organizations must act on that analysis. While basing salaries and bonuses on customer satisfaction may encourage some employees to provide better service, training support staffs and modifying practices based on the assessment of customer satisfaction is the key. Measurement alone will not improve customer satisfaction. When a company's revenue depends on satisfied customers, taking action and making research-based modifications is critical to its survival.

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