A BRIEF GUIDE TO

a better email

How to write support emails that your customers will love.

By Chase Clemons, SupportOps.co

Design by Help Scout

About the Author

CHASE CLEMONS

Chase is the guy behind Support Ops, a community devoted to bringing humanity back to the world of customer support. He works on the stellar support team at 37signals.

Check out more about Support Ops at supportops.co.

Contents

You're Swamped

You've got 300 new email support tickets for your app with all sorts of other ideas and things to be done outside of answering them. You're answering emails for hours a day but the inbox never drains down. It seems like even Obi-Wan Kenobi isn't a hope for you any longer.

**Good news is that you're not alone.
And you're in the right place.**

I'm going to show you how I handle support tickets. I'm not promising the holy grail or anything close. I can't magically make those emails answer themselves.

What I can offer is a way to stay on top of your emails without them being on top of you. A way to answer more support tickets faster and easier.

And if you can answer them faster and easier, then you can get your support email inbox down to zero in no time.

What follows is a series of emails that I've collected from different companies around the web. They include major apps, Internet providers, cable companies, banks, and more. I picked the worst ones for our little showcase. After pointing out what's wrong with the bad emails, I show you exactly how I would write a better email.

Give me a little time now and I'll save you a lot of time in the future and help you get your support load under control. Once you learn how to write a better email, you'll be faster at answering support emails and more importantly, your customers will love getting them.

WARNING: The bad emails you're about to see are real. Names have been changed.

We've got your email.

Each time someone emails you asking for help, you need to let them know you've got their email. It takes away the anxiety of "Did they get my email? Should I send it again?"

We've got your email.

Hi!

We just received your inquiry. We'll get back to you about your order as soon as possible. For your records, your support ticket number is #1234567. Include it in any future correspondence you might send.

- The App Team

NOTES

• Ever hear of the word "thanks"?

• The words inquiry and correspondence are too formal, unless you're writing to the Queen of England. Then you can use them.

• Instead of having the customer worry about ticket numbers, let them know they can just reply to that email to update their ticket.

• Personalize it! Even if you're on a big support team, send out the email as being from your head support rep. Anything other than the generic "team".

We've got your email.

Hi there!

Thanks for your order with us! This is an automatic email just to let you know I've got your email. I'll get you an answer back shortly.

Thanks!

Chase Clemons
Customer Support

Feature requests that you're not working on.

Every team gets feature requests. When you're not actively working on it, tell the customer so. Be as honest as you can with them so they can decide if they need to move to another app.

TICKET

Hello Support!

I was looking for this feature and couldn't find it. Do you have it? If not, could you add it to your feature request list?

- John Doe

Feature requests that you're not working on.

Hi there!

Thanks for submitting your feature request. We get lots of requests each day so we're not able to respond to each one. But do know that we read each and every one of them.

Don't hesitate to let us know if you have any questions or comments.

- The App Team

NOTES

• Thank them for using your app and their idea, not just for "submitting" it, which is a weird word to use here.

• Their probably not reading "each and every" feature email. Toss that phrase out because it's probably a lie.

• The last paragraph comes across as formal again. Liven up the ending!

Feature requests that you're not working on.

GOOD

Hi John!

Thanks for using our app!

We haven't added {{FEATURE}} into it yet. But I think that's an awesome idea! Having it would definitely {{INSERT REASON WHY IT WOULD BE COOL}}.

We're not working on that at the moment but I'll pitch it to the team and see what they think.

If you have any other questions, just let me know and I'll be happy to help. And have a fantastic Tuesday!

Chase Clemons
Customer Support

Feature requests that you are working on.

Since you know your team is working on this, let the customer know. Even if you don't have a timeline for it, the customer will love that you're working on that new feature.

TICKET

Hello Support!

I was looking for this feature and couldn't find it. Do you have it? If not, could you add it to your feature request list?

- John Doe

Feature requests that you are working on.

BAD

Hi there!

Thanks for submitting your feature request. We get lots of requests each day so we're not able to respond to each one. But do know that we read each and every one of them.

Don't hesitate to let us know if you have any questions or comments.

- The App Team

NOTES

Same as with the last feature request email.

Feature requests that you are working on.

GOOD

Hi John!

Thanks for using our app!

We haven't added {{FEATURE}} into it yet. But I think that's an awesome idea! In fact, we loved the idea so much we're began working on it a short time ago. I don't have an ETA from the team behind it yet but from their last update, I'd say we're close to launching it.

If you have any other questions, just let me know and I'll be happy to help. And have a fantastic Tuesday!

Chase Clemons
Customer Support

Troubles with the browser itself.

A lot of times, a wonky behavior will be from the browser itself.
A rogue extension, something hung in the cache, who knows.
Here's how to have them clear it out.

TICKET

Hi Support!

My browser isn't showing your website formatting right. It looks like all the colors, backgrounds, and fonts have been stripped out. Any idea what's going on?

- Jane Doe

Troubles with the browser itself.

BAD

Hello!

Typically when that happens, it's some corrupted data hung up in your browser. Can you try a hard refresh and clean out your cache? That should fix it.

Let me know if this doesn't help.

- The App Team

NOTES

• You know their name. Use it!

• Corrupted data, hard refresh, clean a cache? Stay away from complicated wording.

• Make sure to include clear instructions on how they do this in their own browser. Linking over to a support page you have listing the different ways works best here.

Troubles with the browser itself.

Hi Jane!

Definitely strange! I think there's some wonky data hung up in your browser. Can you try clearing your cache, cookies, and restarting it? It's sounds intimidating but I've got some guides here to walk you through it.

If it's still a no-go after that, can you try a different browser? That'll help me rule in/out the browser as the culprit here.

If this doesn't work or you have more questions, just let me know and I'll be happy to help!

Chase Clemons
Customer Support

Extensions in the way.

With as many browser extensions as there are out there, sometimes one of them will get in the way of your app.

TICKET

My browser isn't showing your app formatting right. It looks like all the colors, backgrounds, and fonts have been stripped out. Any idea what's going on? The only thing I did this morning was update an extension I use.

- Christopher

Extensions in the way.

Hello!

It sounds like it's something to do with that browser extension you use. You'll want to talk with the team behind it to see why.

Let me know if this doesn't help.

- The App Team

NOTES

• Don't just pass off responsibility to the team with the extension. At least help where you can.

Extensions in the way.

Hi Christopher!

I'm sorry about those formatting troubles! Since it just happened after that extension, it's probably something with it. Can you try disabling it and let me know if it works again after that? If that browser is the culprit, I'll email their development team and see how we can get that worked out.

Thanks!

Chase Clemons
Customer Support

Supporting only certain browsers.

As browsers keep getting better and better, your team
will start dropping support for older ones. Just explain why and
encourage the customer to upgrade to the latest one.
It's in their best interest and yours.

Hi!

I was prompted to upgrade my browser from Internet Explorer 8 to 9. I'd rather not
do this. Is there any way around those compatible browsers?

- Bob Smith

Supporting only certain browsers.

Hi Mr. Smith,

For the best experience, you'll need to be running the IE9 rather than your current browser. I'm sorry for any inconvenience that may cause.

Please reply with any questions you might have.

NOTES

• Explain why you only support specific browsers. But make sure to explain it in a way they can understand.

• Stay away from the "inconvenience" phrase. Right now, they can't get to your app because they have an older browser. That's not just inconvenient, it's a flat out problem. It's like being locked out of their car.

• Have a link to a support page where they can check out their browser choices. Hopefully, someone running IE might see a better browser and use it instead.

Supporting only certain browsers.

Hi Bob!

Thanks for checking out my app!

Our app was built to support modern browsers, so we dropped support for certain ones -- it just can't provide the same web experience that other browsers can. To support those older browsers would mean that we can't optimize our interfaces or provide an enhanced customer experience in our apps -- it would mean slower progress, less progress, and, in some places, no progress. We wanted to make sure the experience is the best it can be for the vast majority of our customers, so supporting them would have held us back.

You can check out those compatible browsers at the link here.

If you have any other questions, just let me know and I'll be happy to help. And have an awesome Wednesday!

Chase Clemons
Customer Support

Cancelling an account.

Customers will inevitably forget to cancel their account before their next billing cycle starts. You'll want to cancel it and get that refund headed to them all at once.

TICKET

I forgot to cancel my cable/internet package in time before this month's charge. Can you cancel it for me?

- Jack D.

Cancelling an account.

Hello,

You'll be able to cancel your account by logging in and going to your Information page. There's a cancel link at the top of that page.

Please reply to this email with any future questions.

- Customer Service Team

NOTES

- They're canceling their account and you want them to go back in and complete some more steps? Just do it for them since it'll have them leaving on better terms.

- Make sure to include that you're refunding their charge.

Cancelling an account.

GOOD

Hi Jack!

Sorry about that charge! I've cancelled your account and got that refund headed your way. You should see that refund on your statement within a few days.

If you have any other questions, please reply to this email and I'll be happy to help. And have a fantastic weekend!

Chase Clemons
Customer Support

Getting a traceroute.

Asking for a traceroute for a customer to see if they're reaching your server can be scary. It's a technical thing that many customers will be intimidated by. Strive to make it as painless as possible.

TICKET

Hi!

I've not been able to access my account this morning. It's like the site is down from my end. Are you running into any network issues?

- Bill Johnson

Getting a traceroute.

BAD

Hello,

I'm sorry for the inconvenience from this. Can you perform a trace route to your account to see if you can reach the servers via your Internet network connection? This will help our programmers see what might be the problem.

- Bad App Team

NOTES

• There's that "inconvenience" phrase again. Just never use it.

• Traceroutes can be scary for a customer. Walk them through how to do one.

• Thank them for helping you out with this. It goes a long way to actively get them involved in figuring out what's going on.

Getting a traceroute.

GOOD

Hi Bill!

I'm sorry about those access troubles! The app's looking good on my end with your account. Can you perform a traceroute to help me figure this one out? I know this might sound like a scary tech tool but I'll walk you through it.

Here's the steps to do that traceroute:

For Windows:
1) Go to Start (start button on the lower left of the desktop)
2) Choose 'Run'
3) Type: "cmd" (no quotes)
4) This should bring up a DOS prompt. Once there, type: "tracertmyapp.supportops.co" (without quotes and including your subdomain)

For Mac:
1) Open Network Utility from your Utilities folder, select the Traceroute tab, enter "myapp.supportops.co" (without quotes and including your subdomain) and click the trace button.

It may take a few minutes to complete the trace. The result will be a series of text output that shows hops from your computer to our server. Copy this output and send it to me in a reply to this email message. I'll have our programmers take a look and see what's going on.

Thanks for your help with this!

Chase Clemons
Customer Support

Emails blocked by a firewall.

If a customer is behind a pretty strict firewall, email notifications from your app might be blocked. Here's how to have them check.

TICKET

I'm no longer receiving email notifications from our forum. Any idea what's going on?

- Lisa

Emails blocked by a firewall.

Hello Lisa,

Follow these tips to troubleshoot your issue:

1. Make sure you have not adjusted your Notification settings.
2. Check your spam or junk email filter to make sure that emails coming from us aren't being placed in this folder. If they are, be sure to add our email domain to your email account's safe senders list.
3. If you're still not receiving emails from us, please contact your ISP (Internet Service Provider) to ensure that they are not blocking email traffic coming from us.

If the issue continues, please let me know.

- The Forum Team

NOTES

• First, don't write like a robot. But I think you knew that one sounded like a heartless robot wrote it.

• Go ahead and give them the IP addresses with instructions to pass them on to their IT team. That'll go a long way and the IT team can make sure not to block anything from that address.

• If none of those work, check out your email logs and see if you're sending those emails out right. Any logs you can provide to the IT team will help out.

Emails blocked by a firewall.

GOOD

Hi Lisa!

I'm so sorry for the email troubles!

Would you mind checking to be sure that both supportops.co is whitelisted with your email server? Sometimes, our forum email notifications get caught in spam filters at the server level. The domain and IP from which emails are sent is: {{INSERT DOMAIN/IP ADDRESS HERE}}

If you send me a link to a message for which notifications you did not receive, but should have, I'd be happy to look through our email logs and see exactly where that email travelled. That'll help your IT team figure out where it's going.

Thanks!

Chase Clemons
Customer Support

Online only.

Customers will ask about using your app when they're on a plane or out in the middle of nowhere without Internet access.

Is your cable TV app accessible only with an Internet connection? What happens when I can't get to a network?

- James Bee

BAD

Hello,

Our app is online only at the moment. Sorry for any inconveniences from this!

Please reply to this email with any future questions.

- App Team

NOTES

• Arg, it's that "inconvenience" phrase again!

• Have a little empathy. Don't just blow them off with an email.

Online only.

GOOD

Hi James!

At the moment, you'll only be able to watch shows with an Internet connection. I know, it can suck at times. I'm without Internet access on the weekends so I can feel your pain on missing shows. I'm pushing pretty hard for a download episode option so hopefully we'll get something soon!

If you have any other questions, please reply to this email and I'll be happy to help. And have a wonderful weekend!

Chase Clemons
Customer Support

Criticisms from customers.

You'll always have a few emails from customers about what you're doing wrong. Some have specifics, some are vague. Here's the best way to approach them.

Your phone service sucks.

- Erin

Criticisms from customers.

BAD

Hello,

I'm sorry for the inconveniences with our phone service. What specifically wasn't working for you? I'll pass it on to the rest of the team.

- Customer Service Team

NOTES

- Say you're sorry. You're there to help people, not make angrier with a bad opening line to an email.

- Find out what they like and don't like. That'll help you find out how they're using your service. And it'll remind the customer about the good things they do enjoy about you.

Criticisms from customers.

GOOD

Hi Erin!

I'm so sorry you're not finding our service useful! What do you like and not like with it? I'll be more than happy to see how we can help out.

Chase Clemons
Customer Support

Getting by without a sales team.

Your team is small and there's not really a reason or the money to hire a dedicated sales team. Larger customers expect you to have one but here's how you can help them without one.

I'm looking at your service for my entire company. Do you have any sales reps that can walk me through this?

- Holly

Getting by without a sales team.

Hi,

Thanks for looking at our service for your team! We don't have any sales reps like that but our website should answer any questions you have. If you find something not answered there, let me know.

- Customer Support

NOTES

• The support team is the sales team. You should be ready to answer any question a customer has.

• Be flexible on how the customer wants to talk with you.

• Be excited and thankful they're checking out your team. That excitement can go a long ways with a customer.

Getting by without a sales team.

GOOD

Hi Holly!

That's awesome! I hope we can be a great tool for your company. We don't have a dedicated sales rep like that since we're such a small team. But I'd be more than happy to answer any questions you have. We can do that via email or if you have some free time, I can jump on a call with you. Just let me know what works best for you.

And thanks again for checking out our tool for your team!

Chase Clemons
Customer Support

Saying thanks.

If you do your job right, every ticket will be resolved at the end.
Don't leave your customers hanging without some reply
to finish things up.

TICKET

Hi there!

That last step did the trick. Thanks for figuring it out!

- Steve Grifton

Saying thanks.

Hello Steve,

Glad we could get that problem fixed. Please write back with any future questions you might have.

- The app team.

NOTES

• That's the corporate robot writing emails again.

• Have fun. Leave them with something memorable. Bring a smile to their face.

Saying thanks.

Hi Steve!

Awesome! Glad that got it fixed.

Just remember, we're always an email away if you need help. (Well, help with our app. I have no clue about good vacation spots in Alaska.)

Chase Clemons
Customer Support

Use an app to speed up your typing

With all of these emails, you don't want to memorize them or copy/paste them out of some list. Remember, I said I'd help with making you faster at answering emails, not just add more steps to it.

It's tempting to go with the infamous canned email reply. Don't. It's impersonal. It takes away the trust the customer has with you. It breaks an already fragile relationship. They're in the midst of a crisis and you didn't even read their email but automatically sent back a reply anyway.

Snippet Rule: Never use an automatic canned responses.

They don't work, never worked, and sure as hell won't ever work.

But like all good math rules, there's a corollary to that. You CAN use pre-set snippets to help speed up your responses.

For instance, there might be a project that your team is actively working on. But you might see 15-20 emails every day asking about that option, tool, feature, etc. Sure, I could retype each and every email to a customer. But that's wasting the customer's time and my time. They just want an answer.

Enter Text Expander.

You can use whatever app you like but Text Expander is my app of choice. I plug in this emails with distinct keyboard shortcuts. When I get an answer, I'm able to type a few characters and have the bulk of the email ready. From there, I go in and customize the name, add a few other things like "Go Tigers" if they're an Auburn fan or such. When it's ready, I send it and move on to the next ticket.

Using Text Expander with email snippets, I'm able to work a lot faster than before. An email ticket about that project from before only takes around ten seconds from start to finish. That's way better than the five minutes it'd take you to find the info you need and type it all back out. Way better than even thirty seconds of looking for it on a list and then choosing to copy/paste.

With canned automatic emails, no one but the computer ever reads them. That's wrong… so utterly wrong.

But with snippets, a person actually reads the email, understands what's going on, and then replies back quicker than having to compose that email from scratch.

Think about how much faster you can be when you start using a text shortcut app.

A few last minute tips & tricks

Before we finish up, I want to leave you with a few tips and tricks that you can use for every email you write.

Use their name!

Customers love when you say "Hi Bob!" rather than just a generic "Hello" or "Hi there".

Make sure to say thanks for using your app.

There's usually a lot of choices out there and your customer has chosen you. At least say thanks and mean it.

Talk like they do.

Don't use formal writing or words that you wouldn't use in real life. Write like you would write to a friend.

Short simple sentences reign.

Break up long paragraphs into readable ones. They're reading an email, not a novel.

For feature requests, repeat their idea and relate to it if you can.

This shows them that you actually read their email and didn't just skip over it.

If you can, tell them about new features.

It shows that your team is always working on your app.

Close your email on a highlight.

"Happy Friday!" or other date specific line let's them know you're writing the email on that day. If you see they have an auburn.edu email address, throw in a "Go Tigers!" or other tidbit.

That's it.

You've got my best emails. The ones that I use for most of the customers I interact with.

With these emails, you'll be faster and your customers will love the emails they get from you.

So now what?

Don't just copy/paste my emails into your collection of responses. If you do, you won't sound like you. You'll end up sounding like me.

Instead, look at how I ended up writing those emails. In college, I had a class on politics and writing. My professor gave us four essays to study for the first class - two pretty horribly written ones and two outstanding ones. Then, we talked about what set them apart, the mistakes from the bad ones, the right phrases and tone from the better ones.

That's the idea I had in mind when writing this. I wanted you to be able to see bad examples and learn from them. I wanted you to see better emails and learn from them. Not to straight up copy but rather to see what goes into a great email to a customer.

Take the notes from each email and write your own. That way, when a customer gets it from you, it'll really sound like you.

Thanks for writing better emails.

Acknowledgements

I'm great at support because I learn from the best. I could list out everyone but that list would be longer than you'd care to read, kinda like credits at the end of a movie. But a big thanks to all the ones I've learned from and I made sure to let you know in real life who you are.

Many thanks to you too. You're on the front lines of your company talking with customers all day every day. You're the voice of the company to your customers. And I'm glad you're learning how to send better emails to them.

If you ever want to talk, hit me up through any of the options below. I'd love to hear what you thought of this guide.

Thanks,
Chase

Website: http://supportops.co
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