

High-Technology Ranked on How They Treat Online Customers Looking for Online Support

High Technology Industry Create More Usable Support Websites with Increased Access to Dialog

IPSWICH, Mass., January 18, 2008—The Customer Respect Group, an international research and consulting firm that focuses on how corporations treat their online customers, today released findings from its First Quarter 2008 Online Customer Respect Study of the Support Sections of High-Technology and Computer Industry.

The study evaluated the websites of a representative sample of high-tech companies that supply online support to customers. Using a common set of criteria, it is the only study to bring objective and consistent measure to the analysis of corporate performance from an online customer's perspective. A directly comparable Customer Respect Index (CRI™) is provided for each company. The Customer Respect Index is a qualitative and quantitative in-depth analysis and independent measure of a customer's experience when interacting via the Internet.

The average CRI score for the industry was 6.3 on the ten-point scale which represents a slight overall since the last report with the increase mostly concentrated in improvements measured in site simplicity (general usability)

The leading company was Hewlett-Packard with an overall CRI ranking of 7.7, followed by Intuit and Xerox with 7.6. Most usable sites were judged to be Sun, Xerox and Microsoft.

Select Findings

Support Sections have become critical in providing cost effective support to customers. All companies have separate support sections structured around the concept of specific product home pages from which information, manuals and drivers can be delivered. Eighty eight percent of support sites provide user manuals in various format, all sites has product specific FAQs and links to updated drivers.

Support sites provide a wide array of navigation methods and site search facilities are especially strong compared to other industries. Sites have been technically well architected providing better support for various disadvantaged users such as those with poor eyesight. The industry recorded the highest average score for any industry for accessibility.

High technology support sites exceed other industries in the provision of options for customers to gain information. Two thirds now have user forums. Most companies are now fully invested in monitoring and updating such forums, preferring this option to allowing unofficial forums to grow in popularity. In most cases, forum contents are incorporated into general search results. One third provide some form of alert through the use of RSS or other mechanisms. Online chat has become common practice in the industry with more than half providing this facility to customers compared to 30 percent 6 months ago. Chat has started to challenge e-mail as the website dialog of preference. With less than 50 percent of email questions answered in a helpful manner within a 24 hour time period, real time chat might be increasingly demanded by customers. Of special note was the strong performance of Intuit, Microsoft and Symantec in responding to customer questions. Interestingly, Apple provides no chat or email support options and encourages users to contact Apple through stores and by telephone to solve issues with an approach closer to consumer electronics than the technical self-help nature of comparable sites.

Content relevancy has become a significant issue for many high technology companies with the explosive growth in less sophisticated users looking for more basic "how to" information. The technical customer is generally well serviced on sites but the new or less technical user in general is less supported. Ninety five percent of sites have incorporated feedback option on all advice notes so this is obviously being monitored as the industry struggles to mature from technical roots to a more consumer electronic base.



The top companies in the support study, and worthy of the Excellent Classification were:

	Company	CRI
1	Hewlett-Packard	7.7
=2	Intuit	7.6
=2	Xerox	7.6
4	Microsoft	7.5
5	Lexmark	7.1

A more detailed scorecard is available from The Customer Respect Group at (978) 834.6700 or by emailing clientservices@customerrespect.com

According to Terry Golesworthy, president of The Customer Respect Group,

“Online support is now a critical factor for any technical product with the site usability and the willingness to engage with the customer to resolve issues has become a major purchasing consideration. As technology costs go down, the ability of support sites to help all customers will be a major driver on product profitability”

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The Customer Respect Group is an internationally recognized leader in the creation and measurement of benchmarks in the arena of online customer experience and respect. Benchmarks have been shown to provide an invaluable means to consider comparative performance, learn from the leaders and take advantage of strengths. The Customer Respect Group has objectively measured websites since 2003 and has amassed a huge database of knowledge and data.

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