CSM from the Trenches

Mentors Edition

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTING CUSTOMER SUCCESS

presented by

clientsuccess

Introduction

Customer success managers (CSMs) live and breathe the customer journey each and every day. Being on the frontline between the company and the customer allows them a vantage point that no one else across the company is privy to. CSMs have the ability to directly influence the success of clients, to help them achieve goals, and to help them grow efficiently and effectively.

The customer success space is chock full of incredibly valuable resources, tools, and thought leadership, but few of these resources represent the CSM's unique point of view. In November 2015, one of our very own CSMs, Sam Feil, decided to do something about this lack of frontline knowledge sharing by starting a blog series that eventually became known as CSM from the Trenches. The series features both current CSMs as well as Mentors who worked their way up to management positions.

In the first eBook installment of our CSM from the Trenches – Mentors Edition series, we've compiled the individual responses from one of the questions we asked these featured mentors who built their company's customer success strategy from the ground up.

Q I'm the first CSM for my company and have been asked to implement a "customer success" program. Where should I begin? What tactics have worked for you?

"There's really no substitute for getting your hands dirty, especially as a leader."

Tyler Richards, Head of Mid-Market Customer Success, Lucidchart

Name: Tyler Richards
Title: Head of Mid-Market Customer Success
Company: Lucidchart

"Previously in my career, I joined a company at a time where the Customer Success organization consisted of only two other individuals The only CSM at the time had less than three months experience in engaging with our customers. Needless to say, we didn't know much about them, nor what made them successful. We had our work cut out for us to build a Customer Success organization and process without really knowing much about our customer base.

The approach we took was to first understand our customers better; how were they using the product, and what value were they attempting to achieve through our solution? In my opinion, there's really no substitute for getting your hands dirty, especially as a leader. We instituted a training program where my team and I simply began to speak with customers. Our goal was to better understand their challenges and the pain they were feeling, which we hoped would lead us to how we could solve for that pain. We hired a few more individuals and conducted hundreds, maybe thousands, of training sessions over the course of the next four or five months. The information we gathered, as well as the lessons we learned, were invaluable. The insights we gained helped us throughout the rest of the next year and a half of building out our customer success organization and process.

If you are just beginning to implement a customer success program, there's no substitute for digging in and just talking with your clients. Set up as many meetings as you can to interview them and get to know them a bit better. Ask questions like "What pain(s) have you felt in your business that caused you to seek out a solution?" or "What was it about our solution that made you believe we could solve this problem?". This will teach you a lot about what you'll need to solve for."

“Look at the customer journey and map out what each touchpoint looks like from the customers perspective”

Nina Wilkinson, Director of Customer Success, AspireIQ

Name: **Nina Wilkinson**
Title: **Director of Customer Success**
Company: **AspireIQ**

“I would definitely encourage a CSM in this position to look at the customer journey and map out what each touchpoint looks like from the customer’s perspective. Consider the five questions outlined below.

At this point, hopefully you’ve got at least a handful of clients you can interview to look into their product usage and understand why they’ve been successful.

You can then look at other areas, such as the renewal process. Developing, documenting, and strengthening your existing journey can help you understand where and what you could be doing better. In an ideal world, what would your customer journey actually look like? What would be the experiences there? And what could you do to make things better for your clients all around, whether that’s on the website, platform, product, sales or onboarding process…there’s a lot for you to continually enhance over time.

In my career, I’ve yet to come across a company that’s got it perfectly figured out yet. So again, I would start with the customer journey and reconfigure or rebuild according to whatever it might be to get you to a more ideal state. Knowing the customer journey and who’s responsible for owning which pieces of the puzzle are critical for any “customer success” to actually happen.”

5 questions to ask about the Customer Journey:

1. When I land on your website, what am I seeing from marketing?
2. When I get to sales, what are the conversations I’ll be having like?
3. When I get to you, what does the onboarding process look like? Are there technical elements to it? Does it involve a lot of heavy lifting? Or is your solution pretty simple to get started?
4. What does the adoption process look like? What does the experience look like to be in your tool and actually be doing stuff?
5. What does it look like to be a successful client?

"At BetterCloud, we've dedicated an entire stage in our customer journey to understanding customer goals and business objectives"

Kristi Faltorusso, VP, Customer Success, BetterCloud

Name: Kristi Faltorusso
Title: VP of Customer Success
Company: BetterCloud

"The number one thing we've done at BetterCloud to really transform our engagement with our customers is we've dedicated an entire stage in our customer journey to understanding customer goals and business objectives. We refer to this stage as "Develop" which is focused on establishing goals and setting expectations. By spending more time to really understand their business objectives and how they are defining success with the partnership, we have something clear we are working towards.

By making this a focus and priority for the partnership, it almost doesn't matter how you engage with them, weekly, monthly, in-person or via hangouts, we have something clear we are working towards together. Make their success your priority. This focus has transformed our engagement.

By doing this you can now create a process that is scalable and repeatable, or you can do something that is more custom – it really doesn't matter where you go from there. But if you truly understand how your customers are defining success, you can be successful. You can get them there. At the end of the day, customers engage with us and measure us based on the value that they're driving their organization. If we don't understand what that looks like and how that translates to value for them, all the conversations and support won't matter.

As a version one, I'd say your very first conversation with customers needs to be all about understanding their business objectives and goals, and then find a place to track that. It doesn't matter whether it's a CRM system, another tool, or a spreadsheet…just seek to understand what their goals are! Put them somewhere where you can track against it, where every conversation you have in the future is around that goal and how your product is going to help get them there."

"Everyone should be on the same page when it comes to delivering to clients"

Ashley Correll, Chief Operating Officer, Beyond Insurance

Name: **Ashley Correll**
Title: **Chief Operating Officer**
Company: **Beyond Insurance**

"The first place to start is truly understanding and articulating your whole scope of services. Map those out as a team so everyone is on the same page when it comes to delivering for your clients. This may sound too elementary if your business is well established, but I have found that as new services and capabilities are brought into your organization, your core mission may start to get diluted if you're not all in sync.

I would do a lot of research and data analyzing on what has worked, and also what hasn't. Have you lost clients recently? Why? What could you have done differently? Having a standard kind of "post-mortem" after you lose a client better enables you as an organization to make change. On the flip side, take a look at your relationship with your longest or "best" client. How have you delivered for them? What has made them stick with your business throughout the years? You may find it's the quality of your products or services but more likely, it's the customer service experience they have had. They feel valued and appreciated, which in turn, leads to a long-standing relationship.

The last piece I would focus on is defining success – for both your organization and the clients. You obviously want to make sure you are delivering for your clients, but you also want to establish those metrics for yourself. Think about what the average lifecycle of a client looks like for you – is that based on tenure or revenue? If you are aware of expectations from your own organization from the beginning, you'll have more success reaching those goals."

Follow These 3 Tips:

- *Understand and articulate your whole scope of services*
- *Research what has worked, what hasn't and make the necessary adjustments that lead to a long-standing relationship*
- *Define what success looks like for both your organization and your clients*

“The first thing I’d do is define what success looks like both internally and externally”

Natalie Williams, Director, Customer Success, SmashFly Technologies

Name: Natalie Williams
Title: Director of Customer Success
Company: SmashFly Technologies

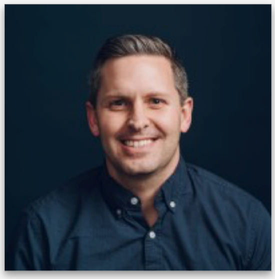
“Customer Success has evolved so much and continues to shift at a very rapid pace. If I were asked to implement a CS program today, the first thing I’d do is define what success looks like (both internally for our company and externally for our customers).

Internally – define customer retention rates, understand who your reference-able clients are, map out customer lifecycles and journeys within your organization.

Externally – understand what success looks like from the perspective of the customer. Ask about their goals. What are the challenges they’re trying to overcome? Why did they partner with us? What are their metrics? How are they leveraging those metrics to make decisions and provide visibility internally?

At SmashFly, we’ve shifted our cadence calls to strategy sessions because we want that focus on being a consultative and strategic partner that solves business problems. Quarterly strategy or business reviews allow us to present key KPIs, metrics, benchmarks, and recommendations to our customers. We then present a proposed roadmap of tactics that will help drive the overall strategy forward. Thinking ahead with the big picture in mind ensures we’re constantly moving the needle on their desired outcomes.

Another recommendation I’d give is to learn your audience and evaluate customers for the right level of engagement. Each customer is different but by going through that exercise, we engage with customers at the right frequency for both the customer and the CSM. Key things to look at are level of engagement, ARR, expansion opportunities. This has worked really well for my team and our customers.”



"Defining the role of a CSM internally and externally prevents unnecessary work and explains why a CSM does what they do"

Brett Andersen, VP, Client Success, Degreed

Name: **Brett Andersen**
Title: **VP of Client Success**
Company: **Degreed**

"A CSM's role needs to be clearly defined before someone or something defines the role for the CSM. If we're not deliberate about defining the purpose, responsibilities and metrics of the role, then the CSM / CS team often becomes the "catch all" role where anything related to client is pushed our way. However, if we start by clearly defining the role and are proactive about educating our internal teams and customers about the role, we'll prevent bad habits early on.

For example, if roles aren't clearly defined or communicated, we might unintentionally train our customers to do things we don't want them to do. At two different companies I've been with, we weren't clear on when a client should go to Support versus their CSM. Because the clients have a great relationship with the CSM, they would typically go to the CSM as their default. And so, all of a sudden, 20-40% of a CSMs time would be spent on troubleshooting or other Support-related requests that should have gone to Support – not to their CSM. Because every company is a little bit different, we need to define who owns what and what it takes to make clients successful. And which aspects do the CSMs own? It's critical to distinguish between your own company's outcomes (e.g., retention, adoption, expansion) and your customers' outcomes (e.g., ROI, business results, positive experiences or user success stories) and then to identify the drivers that typically lead a CSM to helping a client achieve those outcomes.
Another crucial point is internal alignment of the CSM's role. Companies should be aware of

5 questions to ask to get clarity on the role of the CSM

1. What's the purpose of this role? Why does this role exist? What is our company trying to accomplish by having this role?

2. What is the CSM ultimately responsible for? (e.g., Renewals? Advocacy? Engagement? Adoption?) What are the core aspects of the role?

3. How can a CSM do this role really well? Are the people we hire competent in the areas we need them to be?

4. What does a CSM need to do their job well? What processes, tools, technologies, routines, data are required?

5. How does a CSM know when they've done their job well? What are the metrics that indicate a CSM has been successful in their responsibilities?

what the best use of a CSM's time is to stay proactive, strategic, and credible with the client. Defining the role internally and externally prevents some unnecessary work and explains why a CSM does what she does. Have operating principles around how you make decisions, prioritize work, collaborate, execute, and grow different components as a team. And when hiring, be very clear on the difference between mindsets and skill sets. Be purposeful in the type of people you look for and the attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives they bring to the role, not just the skill sets and competencies they have."

About ClientSuccess

Our goal through our CSM From the Trenches: Mentors Edition series is that everyone who touches customer success – from CSMs to department leaders to company executives – takes away valuable information from a day-in-the-life of one of the most valuable positions in the company: the customer success team member.

ClientSuccess is customer success management software that helps companies build relationships that last™. Revolutionizing the way SaaS companies manage, retain, and grow their existing customer base ClientSuccess provides customer success leaders actionable insights, rich customer analytics, and best practices to proactively manage success throughout the customer lifecycle. ClientSuccess helps SaaS companies increase renewal and expansion revenue, reduce churn, and maximize the lifetime value of the customer. For more information, visit http://www.clientsuccess.com.