



# **CUSTOMER SUPPORT: AN ICING FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION**

## **CASE: HAPPYORNOT LTD.**

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Bachelor's thesis  
December 2013  
Degree Programme in International  
Business

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## **ABSTRACT**

Tampere University of Applied Sciences  
Degree Programme in International Business

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Customer Support: An Icing for Customer Satisfaction  
Case: HappyOrNot Ltd.

Bachelor's thesis 38 pages, appendices 2 pages  
December 2013

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The objective of this bachelor's thesis was to propose a more efficient customer support process in order to maximize customer satisfaction for the company HappyOrNot Ltd. It is observed that the growth of the company caused resources insufficiency. To tackle the problem, it needed a more organized and effectual support process to deal with the increase of support queries. Therefore, the central purpose of this thesis was to suggest improvement ideas for the functionality of the current customer support process.

The research leading to the goal of this thesis was completed into four parts. The first three parts were done by taking a closer look into the present process and roles of customer support. This revealed weaknesses and problems that ought to be solved. In the fourth part, an interview was conducted targeting the personnel who involve in the customer support work. The outcome of this was valuable and shows evidence for improvement.

To conclude, this thesis suggests a number of solutions for improvement. The suggestions coverage ranges from investigation on support tool alternatives to technical configuration, and finally to the amelioration of customer support servicing.

Information related to the business of HappyOrNot in this thesis is committed to the confidential background material, and therefore shall not be disclosed to the public.

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Key words: customer support, help desk, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer relationship management.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The motivation that drove me to examine *customer support* in the company HappyOr-Not is because of the company's concern about how well the customer support process is operating, and of my personal interest in the relationship of customer service and *customer satisfaction*, which affecting *customer retention*. During the time back then when I was a trainee working on the practical training in the company, though I was not involved in the business of customer support, I got to know and saw how it was run. Very interesting, back then most of the support issues were actually handled by the IT engineers. I intuitively found that this was not right, as IT engineers have programming tasks and technical development assignments to work on. Support issues should be handled by customer support agents. This question had been solved already nowadays, but the efficiency of the support process is still expecting improvements. Solely to discuss improvements for customer support would be monotonous. What if combine it with a study of customer satisfaction? This question inspired me and immediately came to the decision of conducting the study on the importance of effective customer support process to customer satisfaction. Eventually, organizations are interested to see economic benefits brought by high standard of customer satisfaction. After all, organizations put efforts for all the enhancements and of course would like to see positive returns.

## **2 THE OPERATIONAL BASIS OF THE THESIS**

### **2.1 Introduction to the Company**

One day, fifteen years ago in Finland, a customer visited a retail store. This regular activity ended up with an unhappy customer as he was treated badly in service. The sad shopping experience inspired this customer, who thought it would be nice to have some way to telling his feelings to the management of the retail store. Years after, the thought came true. The customer started the company, which delivers customers' feedback to management teams of a diversity of organizations around the world.

This company is called HappyOrNot Ltd., which was established in the year 2009. HappyOrNot provides solutions for management in different industries to improve their performance, and hence customer satisfaction. The company sells its service of monitoring customer satisfaction with the implementation of patented survey respondent devices at clients' premises. Customers can evaluate their service experience by simply pressing the smiley buttons. This enables its clients to improve their customer service and performance. HappyOrNot is the global leader in instant customer satisfaction reporting. Its service covers 25 countries and the main clients include industry leaders in catering service, healthcare service, airport, retail chains, etc.

### **2.2 Background of the Thesis**

Customer support is essential for the type of companies, like HappyOrNot, to which customer satisfaction is in high priority. Although customer support is functioning technically well, there are a number of features needed to be improved.

Customer support queries come from domestic (Finnish) and international customers daily. In spite of the massive amount of support queries from time to time, the picture of customer support at the company is not clear. Although there is a specific personnel handling customer queries, resources allocated to the customer support team is insufficient. As HappyOrNot is a fast growing firm, which aims at opening a wider international market, customer support functionality needs a reform, which will draw a clearer

picture about how it should be operated in resources optimization as well as investigation on potential customer support tools which will work more efficiently. In other words, customer support service sophistication is possible to be achieved. This not only boosts customer service efficiency internally, but also achieves customer satisfaction externally.

### **2.3 Objective of the Thesis**

Due to the fact that HappyOrNot is growing in a speedy gesture, a more effective customer support system is required. Spreading your seeds around the globe might be hard, but to keep them thrive is even more difficult. For HappyOrNot's clients' scope is expanding not only domestically in Finland, it also covers in the Northern Europe, the other parts of Europe, the U.S.A., and filtrating to the East.

Hence, there is a need that I would write my thesis on this issue. The purpose of this research study is to clarify the functionality of customer support system at HappyOrNot. This study is to look for a way that achieves an efficient method for dealing customer queries. A modified process of operating customer support with professional efficiency and enhancements is the goal of the study of this thesis. After all, the purpose of this thesis is to finalize the customer support system in an effective manner in order to maximize the customer satisfaction in return.

### **2.4 Research Question**

The research question of this thesis is intimately related to the aims why this study is brought up. The details have already been described above. Therefore, the research question can be divided into two parts, which enhance the customer support system of HappyOrNot theoretically as well as practically, and will eventually leading to the success of customer service achievement.

The questions of the Thesis are:

- i. Is the current customer support system relying on an effectual procedure which functions efficiently and effectively? And secondly;

- ii. What could be improved on the current customer support process in order to accomplish a higher level of customer satisfaction?

## **2.5 Methodology of the Thesis**

The information that has been acquired in this study is based on my personal working experience at HappyOrNot as a trainee as well as that provided by the company staff. Other sources are retrieved from literatures and academic articles written by scholars and professionals from the fields of customer service, customer relationship management, and marketing.

On top of these, a qualitative research is also conducted by interviewing selected internal employees of HappyOrNot. In a broad view, qualitative research method is an approach that allows researchers to examine people's experiences in detail, by using a specific method such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, content analysis, etc. By executing qualitative research method, it is possible to identify issues from the perspective of the study participants, and understand the meanings. (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011, 9.) The interview that targets the customer support personnel was carried out in an open question format. The idea of the interview is to find out opinions regarding the use of current customer support tool and the likeliness of deploying a new tool which could resolve the current problems.

## **2.6 Thesis Structure and Limitation**

In this thesis, I will examine the performance of customer support service operating in HappyOrNot and provide suggestions for improvement. The structure of the thesis will be consisting three parts. In the first part (chapter 3), I will put forward the theoretical framework that informs the importance of customer retention, by arguing the role of customer support acting in customer servicing is essential to accomplish a higher level of customer satisfaction, and thus, to discuss the possibilities of enhancing customer support service. Following the theoretical part this thesis will move to describing the state of customer support management in HappyOrNot at the present (chapter 4). Describing the current management and process of customer support in the company, as

well as taking a closer look into the roles of support personnel construct a solid image of how customer support is functioning in HappyOrNot. In addition, results of the interview which targets the support personnel will be reviewed. There we will see thoroughly the advantages and disadvantages as well as the problems of the current system, and hence looking forward to some development ideas. In the last part (chapter 5), this thesis will move to analyze and suggest improvements for the present customer support procedure in HappyOrNot.

This study has been limited to exploring the significance and benefits of introducing an improved customer support servicing process into HappyorNot for enhancing its customer satisfaction level and does not reflect the possibility of benchmarking its performance by observing how its competitors take care of their customer support domestically and internationally. On the other hand, efforts put towards the importance of customer support enhancement, and the investigation of new customer support tools that HappyOrNot may have considered to carry out, is attained. Finally, the attempt to compare certain statistics for the aim to detect underlying problems, and thus to seek performance improvement is constrained by the technical ability of HappyOrNot's internal system. Nonetheless, given that such information is not readily available, another approach to use the provided limited data as a source to achieve the same goal in a smaller scope was successful. Therefore, it is argued that the approach taken in this thesis is justified.

## **2.7 Reliability of the Thesis**

In this thesis, the sources that I have used vary from literatures to information provided by employees of HappyOrNot, as well as my personal experience. In 2012, I worked as a sales support trainee at the company. I witnessed the whole customer support process and spotted improvement possibilities. This empowered me with the evidence to pursue a more effective operation of customer support for the intention to raising general customer satisfaction level. Some ideas and arguments regarding customer service were derived from my personal experiences of working as a bank teller in Hong Kong. Further, parts of the points are referenced from another thesis, which study was to develop a company called Sievo's customer support (Sivonen 2009). However, the study of that thesis is focusing mainly technically instead of aiming to enhance customer satisfaction



by improving customer support process after all as researched in this thesis. Lastly, the authors and books that I have quoted in this thesis are mostly scholars and professionals from the fields of customer service consulting, customer relationship management and marketing. Therefore, the study of this thesis may be considered as reliable.

### 3 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE THESIS

#### 3.1 What is Customer Support?

“Customer Support is a range of customer services to assist customers in making cost effective and correct use of a product. It includes assistance in planning, installation, training, troubleshooting, maintenance, upgrading, and disposal of a product.” (Customer Support 2013.) So customer support is a problem-solving function.

Help desk is one the most common means of customer support management taken by organizations. Help desk is a centralized contact centre for problem solving. “A help desk provides a single point of contact for users in need of technical support, – – A help desk manages client problems and requests and provides solutions-oriented support services.” (Beisse 2012, 23.) Usually customers make contact to help desk via a physical location, a telephone number (hotline), an email, web site, or online chat service. Requests will then be resolved by support personnel as soon as possible, or referred to someone else for further investigation if applicable. (Beisse 2012, 23.) Customer support should be performed proactively in a business oriented and customer focused function that creates value to services, enhances customer satisfaction, keeps existing customers and attracts new customers. (Hiles & Gunn 2000, 3.)

After all, customer support, which aims to help customers and resolve problems that they encountered, is a form of customer service. Companies providing outstanding customer support fulfils high standard of customer service, which leads to increase of customer satisfaction.

#### 3.2 Customer Service

Companies compete with services, not tangible goods nowadays. But “*What is customer service?*” It is sure that this simple question bothers plenty of consumers around the globe. Here is one delighting definition as follows.

Customer service can be defined as the quality of the cake which is set before the customer. However, the concept of customer service has to be stretched further than this to include the “icing on the top” as well. The reason that companies are paying so much attention to this extra decoration finish is that in many business products and services have become almost indistinguishable from those against which they compete. Moreover, within a narrow band, prices are also likely to be similar. (Leppard & Molyneux 1994, 7.)

Customer service is a concept of service-based economy in the modern history. According to the book *Effective Customer Service*, customers realized to define quality due to globalization. Goetsch and Davis have stated that “As this realization began to sink in on a broad scale, customer service became more important than it ever had been. It continues to be a critical issue for organizations attempting to survive and thrive in the competitive arena of global business.” (Goetsch & Davis 2004, xi.) As the service sector dominates the existing business market internationally, businesses turn to more and more customer oriented. Hence, in order to become competitive in the service market, a company needs to provide effective customer support service for resulting high level of customer satisfaction.

In the fierce sea of service competition, a firm which seeks to survive must manage it. Christian Grönroos described:

Service competition can be defined as a situation where the core solution of a firm – a service or a physical good – is a prerequisite only for a competitive advantage, but where firms compete with a number of services surrounding the core solution. In order to be able to do this successfully the firm has to view its business and its customer relationships from a service perspective. (Grönroos 2000, preface.)

Customers look for solutions or packages which create value for them. A high quality product does not produce value to customers, unless maintenance and support work are taken care of in a proficient manner. Whatever customers purchase, it should work as a service for them. Companies should view the process from the service perspective concept. (Grönroos 2000, 4.)

### 3.3 The Service Perspective

For a company to be competitive, offering low price is never a sustainable solution. As soon as a competitor offers a lower price, the customer will leave you. Therefore, managers should view their businesses from the *service perspective*. This means providing a large range of services to outperform competitors with the same quality and price of core service/product to enhance the customer's value-generating processes. This service strategy is seen also as a *total service offering*, which involves physical product components, service components, information, personal attention and other elements of customer relationships. (Grönroos 2000, 4–7.)

### 3.4 The Importance of Customer Relationship Management

Companies and customers are relational due to the services provided by the former to the latter. The contact between a company and a customer occurs, and thus a relationship is formed. In order to keep the customers for prospering the business, the strategy of customer relationship management (CRM) needs to be implemented.

Customer relationship management (CRM) is a mind-set – the implementation of customer-centric strategies, which put customers first so that the firm can succeed (Longenecker, Moore, Petty & Palich 2006, 287). Said in another way, companies which adopt the strategy of CRM should treat their customers in a way that they would want to be treated as a customer.

In a customer-focused organization, nurturing existing customer is far more important than searching for new customers. In a sense, to determine and improve customer satisfaction is a key principle of good customer relations. According to a provider of CRM solutions, Brian Vellmure of Initium Technology, keeping existing customers is essential especially for small firms due to the following five reasons seen from an economic point of view:

- Acquisition costs for new customers are huge.
- Long-term customers spend more money than new ones.
- Happy customers refer to their friends and colleagues.
- Order-processing costs are higher for new customers.

- Old customers will pay more for products. (Longenecker et al. 2006, 288.)

Therefore, companies should better manage their interactions with customers in the CRM manner. CRM enables them identify their customer needs, attitudes and behaviours and thus, offering holistic total services, including professional level of support solutions. The ability of performing superior customer service will create long-term ties to customers through service customization. In return customer satisfaction brings customer loyalty, establishing a strong alignment between both parties. From link to link, a small step into the CRM prospers the business in a long run.

### 3.5 Customer Loyalty

As described above, what a company aims is to pursue customer loyalty after all. This is because customer loyalty is the main ingredient in economic success of a firm. In a sense of economic benefits, Rud has stated that “If you have \$1 to spend on marketing, you would be much better off spending it on customer retention than customer acquisition. Why? It’s much more expensive to attract a new customer than to retain a current one. Also, loyal customers tend to be less price-sensitive.” (Rud 2001, 258.) This explanation echoes with the five reasons regarding to keep existing customer given by a CRM solution provider, Brain Vellmure mentioned above.

So how to keep customers be loyal? In depth, it means putting efforts in a series of customer retention endeavor. Companies ought to earn their customers’ trust and confidence, provided that their customers feel happy, impressed and more importantly appreciated. In the book, *Customer Loyalty*, suggested professor Zeithaml’s “RATER” model (Table 1). The idea is to delight customers:

After fulfilling basic reliability expectations, an organization then must meet expectations related to responsiveness and assurance to enhance loyalty. Thereafter, it must meet expectations for empathy to receive yet another boost. Fulfilling expectations to promote loyalty is dynamic rather than static construct – expectation levels are always ratcheting upward. Expectations are dynamic – as are customers’ feelings. (Robinson & Etherington 2006, 10.)

TABLE 1. The RATER model (Robinson &amp; Etherington 2006, 10.)

<b>Reliability</b>	The ability to provide what was promised, dependably and accurately
<b>Assurance</b>	The knowledge and courtesy of employees; their ability to convey trust and confidence
<b>Tangibles</b>	The physical functionality of service facilities including their appearance
<b>Empathy</b>	The degree of caring and individual attention
<b>Responsiveness</b>	The willingness to help and provide prompt service; problem solving

### 3.5.1 The Benefits of Winning Customer Loyalty

Winning customer loyalty is just a start of a business. What follow are keeping them and gaining advantages arising from them.

Impressed customers talk about your company. They offer positive opinions, both prompted and unprompted. They share what they have experienced and they stake their personal reputations on the firm belief that others, too, could benefit from doing business with the company they have chosen. When that happens, a business grows. (Robinson & Etherington 2006, 1.)

This explains how essential it is to please and impress customers for the prosperity of business. Impressed customers tend to pass on their happy experiences. For this reason word of mouth is acknowledged.

Successful customer retention together with high quality customer support level affect company profits positively. The effects on profits through improved customer retention and hence longer relationships with customers are astonishing. This is proved by the study result which was done by US strategy consultants Bain & Company more than a decade ago among several service industries in the United States. The studies found that, the average profit per loyal customer grew constantly over the first five years. (Grönroos 2000, 129–130.)

There are six factors causing the rise of profits per customer systematically. These factors are illustrated in the following figure (figure 1).

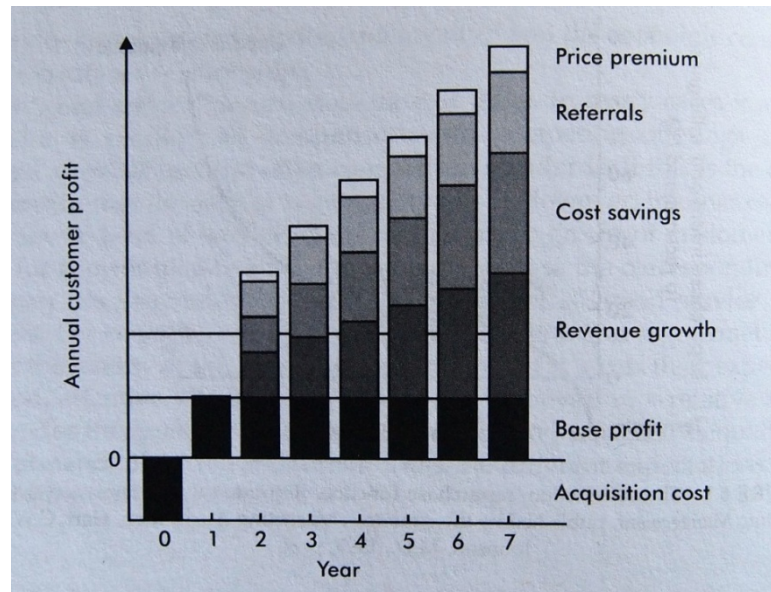


FIGURE 1. The profitability effect of loyal customers. Source: Reichheld, F.F., *The Loyalty Effect. The Hidden Forces Behind Growth, Profits, and Lasting Value*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996. (Grönroos 2000, 130.)

- i. Acquisition costs: The negative figure appears before customer relationship starts. This tells how costly it is to acquire new customers than retaining existing satisfied ones.
- ii. Base profit: The price paid by customer covers the cost of producing services in the first year.
- iii. Revenue growth: In general, when relationship grows, it brings more businesses, and thus, profits increase.
- iv. Cost savings: Longer business relationship smoothes performances and services processes. Therefore, operating costs per customer drops, which in turn boosts profits.
- v. Referrals: Satisfied loyal customers will spread positive word of mouth about the service provider in the market. Referrals bring new customers with lower acquisition costs.
- vi. Premium price: Old customers usually do not enjoy discounts as newcomers do. Thus they pay higher price. (Grönroos 2000, 130–131.)

In summary, winning customer loyalty is a win-win strategy for both the service provider and customer. The economic benefits to service provider by serving high quality support services are discussed above. On the other hand, customer who has established long relationship with a company avoids costs of looking for alternative business partner. Excellent service and long lasting relationship pay off twice. Both parties, service provider and customer have an opportunity to improve their profit margin.

### **3.6 Employee and Customer Training**

All the theories and practical approaches discussed above are essential for the enhancement of customer support. However, the fundamental elements are employees and customers. If none of them or either of them not co-operate as it should be, problems occur and hence goals cannot be accomplished. For that reason, the need for training arises.

#### **3.6.1 Training for Employees**

The global marketplace, in which intensive competitiveness exists, as a result, leading to higher customer expectations. In addition, the discrepancy between internal employees and those of competitors' in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes points to training need. Training for internal employees can be done via one-on-one mentoring, computer-based training, media-based instruction, and group instruction approaches. The purpose of training is to improve the individual performance of employees and the overall performance of organization so that the organization becomes more competitive. (Goetsch & Davis 2004, 161–168.)

#### **3.6.2 Training for Customers**

Customer training is as important as training for employees. This is because educated customers require less support and make fewer complaints. According to the book, *Effective Customer Service*, as many as one-third of all customer complaints results from improper use of product. Educating customers involves shaping customer expectations, and supply of user support.



In order to satisfy a customer, it is important to let him/her know what to expect from a product/service. This expectation is shaped by the promotional literature, such as marketing and user support material. For this reason, the accuracy of promotional literature is vital. In addition, customer-service representatives can also promote accurate customer expectations. Customer support through the provision of user manual, on-site technical assistance, or training provided as a company facility train customers in correct handling and usage of product. This turns a new customer into a satisfied, knowledgeable and loyal customer at the same time. All these friendly gestures will eventually increase customer satisfaction, and thus company profitability. (Goetsch & Davis 2004, 173–174.)

### **3.7 Communication Skills Affect Customer Support**

Communication skills are essential to providing high quality customer service, and thus customer support. Communication is an interactive process of listening and responding between a support personnel and a customer. Listening, understanding, and responding are the three unavoidable factors to solving customer problems effectively and efficiently. When such is done, customer satisfaction is created.

In a classic article in *Harvard Business Review* (HBR, Nov-Dec, 1995), Thomas O. Jones and W. Earl Sasser, Jr. discussed “Why Satisfied Customers Defect”. They described a study of Xerox company customers in which “totally satisfied” customers were six times more likely to purchase other Xerox products than those who were just “satisfied”. This is because “satisfied” customers tend to make choice if there was a chance, and will leave the existing company. Only “totally satisfied” customers will stay and become loyal. Although this was an old finding, the theory still applies nowadays.

The importance of placing emphasis on customer support excellence is to reduce the amount of dissatisfied customers. The reasons are customer may fancy excellent service than other aspects of a product. Secondly, to handle queries from dissatisfied customers is more support resources costly. Dissatisfied customers are more likely to cause:

- Lengthy support incidents
- Repeat call-backs or help desk contacts
- Complaints are often communicated to potential clients, who see a poor business image and lost sales
- Queries that need to be referred to a higher level support personnel or a manager
- Product return and request for a refund

Since dissatisfied customers consume more support resources, productivity of support staff decreases and may lead to a reputation for poor support service.

Always remember that customer support is vitally a customer service business and that the goal is to create totally satisfied clients. Each customer is a valued client. Therefore organizations should treat each support query as an opportunity to build total client satisfaction. To conclude, support personnel have to master communication skills in order to create total customer satisfaction. (Beisse 2012, 54–56.)

#### **4 HAPPYORNOT'S CUSTOMER SUPPORT MANAGEMENT**

This chapter contains confidential background material, and therefore shall not be published publicly.

## **5 IMPROVEMENTS FOR THE HAPPYORNOT'S CUSTOMER SUPPORT MANAGEMENT**

This chapter contains confidential background material, and therefore shall not be published publicly.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The approach of this thesis that proceeds from the study of theoretical framework to the description of HappyOrNot's customer support process and management, and finally come to the suggestions for an improved new process for the customer support is concrete.

By observing the process of customer support and how it is operated in HappyOrNot, I see improvement opportunities. The enhancement suggestions in the end of this study (chapter 5) do not represent all possibilities that are available. Besides the two new customer support tools investigated, there are plenty of other alternatives in the market. It is however to be decided by the management whether according to the cost concern or to the functionality interest. The measures that are suggested to reduce the amount of support queries are surely important at the present stage that support staff is in a shortage. The new support process proposal is especially major as it points to streamline the workflow, and particularly let the resellers to handle their own support queries directly for efficiency. Therefore, it is argued that they are the best solutions for the development of customer support process at the current situation of HappyOrNot.

Only when the current customer support process is reformed, the hope for customer satisfaction will be enriched. The essentiality of customer support is vital for HappyOrNot to convert customer problems into customer satisfaction. It is eminently sensible to make customers feel good about their dealings with the company. This will establish a long-term relationship which contributes to profit potential is fruitful. (Leppard & Molyneux 1994, 11–12.) When clients are happy and totally satisfied, they become loyal to the company and increase sales.

Customer support is the basis of customer service provision. In order to boost customer satisfaction, additional efforts are required. "Good is the enemy of Great" quoted from the book, *Good to Great*, written by Jim Collins, is inspirational. According to Robinson & Etherington, customer retention requires companies to make sure that their customers feel impressed, not just "OK", in order to earn their confidence and trust repeatedly. It is also important to differentiate services from the rivals by striving to offer a better level of customer service. This enhanced customer service is won by focusing very carefully,

thoughtfully and creatively on how the agents interact with customers. (Robinson & Etherington 2006, xi, 157.) There are always choices which are better and greater. To outperform the service of customer support, it is needed to make an extra step by providing what the competitors cannot provide. This is why the title of this thesis is named as *An Icing for Customer Satisfaction*.

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## **APPENDICES**

### Appendix 1. Questions of Interview: Customer Support Process

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## Appendix 2. Support Request Statistic Data

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