



OULUN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

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IMPROVING CUSTOMER SUPPORT PLATFORM

Case 9Solutions Oy

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis was done in co-operation with 9Solutions Oy to better understand how the case company uses their current customer support platform – Freshdesk, and if it is done efficiently. This thesis focuses on software-as-a-service based customer support and service platforms.

Freshdesk and two of its competitors are analysed via SWOT analysis to better understand their strengths and weaknesses. In addition, it is explained if and how they would suit the case company better. To gather information for SWOT analysis and other comparisons, multiple customer reviews and features presented of these customer support platforms are explained and compared against each other. To gather information about 9Solutions use of Freshdesk, working personnel of 9Solutions that deal with Freshdesk and Extranet were interviewed. The principle of SWOT analysis is further explained in the end of the theoretical background.

Literary sources are used to explain the concept of software-as-a-service and the importance of good customer relations. Additionally, the structure of how the Freshdesk platform is provided to 9Solutions is explained to better understand the overall process.

The conclusion of this thesis suggest that the current platform is already in such a use that changing platform providers at this point would be difficult and most likely unnecessary. Freshdesk as a platform is considered by the working personnel as a helpful tool but not without its problems. Making changes to the ticket logging system, article updating process and further usage of forum system would speed up the workflow and be beneficial. Two of the Freshdesk competitors were found to be more plentiful in their features and overall possibilities but the costs of such a platform may not meet the benefits for 9Solutions.

Keywords: Software as a Service, Customer Support, Communication

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	5
2	THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	7
2.1	Construction of Freshdesk supply chain in 9Solutions	7
2.2	Importance of Communication with the customer	8
2.3	SaaS and Freshworks	9
2.4	SWOT	10
3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	12
3.1	What is qualitative research and why does it fit this study?	12
3.2	Interview questions.....	14
4	FINDINGS	15
4.1	Analysis of Freshworks and competitors	15
4.2	Pricing of Freshdesk.....	19
4.3	Interview Results	20
5	CONCLUSIONS	23
5.1	Freshdesk against the competition.....	23
5.2	Interview conclusion	25
5.3	Theoretic conclusion	27
6	DISCUSSIONS	28
	REFERENCES	30
	APPENDICES.....	33

1 INTRODUCTION

Currently, many of the large corporations and organization that deal in business, outsource their customer service software. For example, according to Freshdesks website, corporations such as Honda, Hewlett-Packard, and Klarna use Freshdesk as their choice of customer service software. Likewise, according to the Zendesks website, companies such as Siemens, Shopify, and Netflix use Zendesks customer service software. These companies that offer software-as-a-service (SaaS) style products serve thousands of customers daily. (Freshdesk, 2022; Zendesk, 2022)

According to research done by Allied Market Research, the total SaaS market was valued at 121 billion dollars in 2020. In addition, this research projects the value to rise to 702 billion dollars by 2030. Reasoning behind this drastic change in the projection is presented to be the coronavirus pandemic. Many companies had to shift to employees working remotely which then caused an upsurge in demand for these SaaS platforms. SaaS platforms are efficient in their operations as many customer service features can be automated and accessed remotely. This has brought more attention to this kind of software and has made it more of a standard for companies to deal with customer service in this manner. (Allied Market Research, 2022)

9Solutions Oy is a company from Oulu, Finland that specializes in providing in-door location-based safety, communications, and smart care solutions. They offer technology solutions to support safe and high-quality care. Company was founded by Sami Herrala in 2009. 9Solutions currently employs over 50 personnel. 9Solutions started from a personal need for the founder and CEO, but in time it developed from idea of providing technology that can be used as real-time locating and alarm device to comprehensive safety and communication system designed for the needs of health and elderly care. (9Solutions, 2022)

The goal of this research is to gather information on how the case company uses their Freshdesk customer support platform and possibly suggest developments to the platform. In addition, this includes analysis of competing customer support platforms and the possibility of adapting them instead of the current one. This thesis has two main research questions. They are as follows:

- How does 9Solutions Oy use Freshdesk as a customer service tool and is it done efficiently?

- Is there a competitor that is better suited for 9Solutions other than Freshdesk?

The aim of the first research question is to find out how 9Solutions uses Freshdesk to offers customer service and support and how the employees feel about using said system in day-to-day work. In addition to this, the aim is to compare between current way of use and possibilities that Freshdesk offers to conclude if and how efficiently Freshdesk is used. If Freshdesk is not used to its full potential, ways of improvement will be presented to the case company.

The aim of the second research question is to explain and become more acquainted with other customer service systems such as Freshworks Freshdesk and its' competitors Zendesk and Hub-Spot. A SWOT analysis will be conducted of these competitors and so their advantages and disadvantages over Freshdesk will be analyzed and explained. Benchmarking Freshdesk and its competitors will be beneficial in explaining advantages and disadvantages over one another.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter will go more in detail about communication and its importance. Topics such as how Freshdesk is part of 9Solutions communication, how this kind of digital communication system can be managed and the importance of successful communication with the customer. In addition, terms such as “digital communication systems” and “SaaS” will be explained based on the context of this study. Finally, this chapter explains based on studies done before, what SWOT analysis is, what it does, and what kind of results it can provide.

2.1 Construction of Freshdesk supply chain in 9Solutions

Mentzer et al. (2001) define in their research “Defining supply chain management”, that supply chain is a set of three or more entities that take part in movement of products, services, finances, and information from source to the customer. Included in this definition are three different kinds of complexities that can be listed as “direct supply chain”, an “extended supply chain” and an “ultimate supply chain”. For this research we will go more in detail with “direct supply chain” as it is how Freshdesk is provided to 9Solutions and then to the customer.



Figure 1. Direct supply chain. (Modified based on Mentzer et al. 2001, p. 5)

Direct supply chain as pictured in Figure 1. is the simplest in construction. There are only three entities involved in it. These entities include the supplier, organization, and customer. In case of 9Solutions, this supply chain begins with a supplier, Novellus. Novellus is a Finnish company that is a reseller for Freshworks digital service systems. Novellus provides 9Solutions with a working system that is customized to their needs.

Next comes the organization 9Solutions. 9Solutions provides their customers with safety, communication, and smart care solutions. These solutions have their own information pages such as installation manuals and user instructions that can be customized in Freshdesk and presented on their Extranet webpage. Freshdesk also provides a ticket system that customers of 9Solutions can use to ask for these information pages and in general for questions about their products. The working personnel can then answer these questions through Freshdesk and provide customer support as needed.

Lastly comes the customer. Customer base of 9Solutions varies from hospitals to individual customers. The customer that opts in for a product of 9Solutions may need assistance with it in the future. Their products change and update so this means that the customers need to know what changes they can or need to make. In addition of sending an email to the customers about a software updates et cetera, 9Solutions can also update their product information in Freshdesk and then give a corresponding link to the updated article or provide it via a ticket if so requested. This ends the supply chain of 9Solutions Freshdesk communication.

2.2 Importance of Communication with the customer

Communication is an important part of a successful organization. Information needs to travel from entity to entity to ensure that qualifications are met, customers are satisfied and improvement and changes for the future can be made in an effective manner. Communication takes place in multiple steps. Organization needs to communicate with the supplier about what kind of goods they need and how much. Timetables need to be discussed to forward that information from organization to onwards. For example, if the organization and supplier fail to make plans with a financial supplier then they need to ensure that monetary problems do not become an issue or the whole supply chain may very well be compromised and come under the issue of being incapacitated.

Research done by A.E Ellinger et al. (1999) states that *“Customer satisfaction involves keeping customers happy both in day-to-day interactions and from a more global, long-term perspective.”* “Voice of the customer” part of this research focuses on the importance of keeping customers satisfied to ensure that business is conducted successfully, and that loyalty of a customer is earned. In this research it was found out that for e.g., positive relationship between to customer and the distribution service was more likely when the customer had opportunity to meet with the vendor distribution personnel four or more times per year. Customers were also more inclined to the opinion of wishing that more of their supplier were like that when comparison was drawn between supplier that had vendor distribution personnel meetings four or more times per year, compared to 0 meetings per year with the customer in favour of meeting four or more times per year. The conclusion of this research theorized that the higher number of meetings would be in association with better customer satisfaction. The results in the end had “surprising twist”, as in two instances, customers were more satisfied with zero meetings and four or more meetings in a year over one to three meetings. On the other hand, strong associations were found between customer satisfaction and the collection of customer feedback and between customer loyalty and collecting feedback. (Ellinger et al. 1999, pages. 122-125)

2.3 SaaS and Freshworks

Software as a Service (SaaS) refers to a business model in which a company distributes a software over the internet to its’ customers. In his definition, Chai explains that “In this model, an independent software vendor (ISV) may contract a third-party cloud provider to host the application. Or, with larger companies, such as Microsoft, the cloud provider might also be the software vendor.” Benefit of using software as a service system is that organization acquiring it does not have to run it on their own equipment. This also eliminates the cost of purchasing said equipment to be able to host it on their own. SaaS is also scalable. The company providing this software can offer their service in different forms depending on needs of the organization. Chai also explains that SaaS applications can be customized and combined with different applications that deal with business. (Chai 2021)

Freshworks is a software company that provides its customers with SaaS products. They have different software choices such as Freshdesk, Freshsales, Freshmarketer, Freshchat, Freshservice and Freshteam. According to their website, *“Freshworks makes it fast and easy for businesses to*

delight their customers and employees.” they also explain that *“We do this by taking a fresh approach to building and delivering software-as-a-service that’s affordable, quick to implement, and designed for the end-user.”* More than 50000 companies use SaaS provided by Freshworks. They aim to enable a better customer and employee experience. (Freshworks, 2022)

Freshdesk is a Customer Support Help Desk software offered by Freshworks. It can be used to solve customer support issue for organizations of different sizes. Freshdesk has its own products such as Omnichannel Suite, Support Desk, Contact Center, and Customer Success. Freshdesk can be used as a standard support desk that can provide customer service through one or two methods such as e-mail or over the phone, but Freshdesk also provides the option of omnichannel that allows multiple methods engagement such as social media, live chat, phone, self-service, screen sharing, email and more. Omnichannel is priced at a higher rate than Support Desk and it does not offer a free of charge option. On the other hand, Omnichannel includes more features than Support Desk and highlighted options such as 2000 bot sessions/month and 2000 minutes/month of incoming local calls attended on browser. Freshdesk’s pricing is further explained at findings. (Freshdesk, 2022)

2.4 SWOT

According to Doug Leigh (2009), SWOT is an analysis tool that is constructed of four main principles. These four principles are strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats. These principles are used to identify external and internal factors in an organization. Identifying these factors are beneficial because they can be categorized and ultimately changed and modified if need be. Leigh also states that *“Strengths are enhancers to desired performance while weaknesses are inhibitors to desired performance, with both being within the control of an organization. Opportunities are enhancers and threats are inhibitors to desired performance, though these are considered outside of an organization’s control.”* Enhancers by this explanation are factors that are directly beneficially related to target of the analysis. Inhibitors in the other hand are factors that can possibly weaken or restrain the target of the analysis. Both are equally important and should be taken into consideration. Table 1. shows how SWOT can possibly be used to divide exemplary strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to internal and external factors. (ibid. 2009, chapter 47)

Table 1. SWOT analysis example. (Modified based on Kay Dora Abd Ghani et. al. 2010, p.4-5)

Internal Factors	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well established organization with competent working personnel • Reachable and well-defined long-term objectives • Strong financial base and capabilities further expansion of the business • Well-rehearsed management team and administrative system that ensures smooth operation • Good public image and relation to working personnel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inefficient project management and planning • Lacks in experience and technical skills that then leads to quality problems and delays • Lacks in financial base and in finance management • Lacks in knowledge in market development and technology • Difficulties in finding competent working personnel
External Factors	
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government endorsement • Increase in the market for organizations product or service • Political relationships • Joint-ventures and cooperation with other businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External pressure to deliver • Fluctuations in market and its needs • Increasing competition • Changes in politics and economy that can affect transportation costs, storage costs and other various costs • Bureaucracy and changes in it that can further delay operations

These exemplary factors were taken and modified from research done by Kay Dora Abd Ghani et. al. (2010) These factors were created for a firm framework that was focused on private land and housing development. In many other frameworks, opportunities such as “Government endorsement” may not be in question at all. Therefore, correctly categorizing target organizations own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats is important. (Ghani et al. 2010, pages. 4-6)

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To acquire information for this study, two kinds of sources are used. This ensures that acquired information is based on peer-reviewed and the interviewed data can be compared with each other. This chapter itself focuses on the actual research that will be beneficial for the case company. This research is qualitative and the reasoning behind it will be explained later in this chapter.

As a primary qualitative source for this chapter, working personnel of 9Solutions are interviewed in a semi-constructed interview based on questions prepared beforehand and possible questions that come up during the interview. These preliminary questions can be found in the third appendix. In addition, information about Freshdesk competitors is gathered from websites of the service providers and websites that provide user reviews of these software.

3.1 What is qualitative research and why does it fit this study?

According to Pathak (2013), qualitative research is research that is done so by approaching the research matter from more of a personal and idealistic point of view. Research subjects are not considered as one part of large scale of answers but as more of an individual and precise source of information. While quantitative research can be considered as a more reliable source of information due to it giving out more of a generalized answer to the questions presented while researching information, it does not fit this study. (Pathak et al. 2013, page 192)

This research is a case study. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, case study is *“an intensive analysis of an individual unit (such as a person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment.”* In case of this research, the individual unit refers to 9Solutions and environment to Freshdesk platform. Developmental factors are the improvements this research aims to provide for the case company. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023)

Because the case company of this research does not have many agents working with Freshdesk system, it would be very difficult to gather empirical data in the matter. Therefore, this research focuses on conclusions based on usage of Freshdesk system from gathered data from interviews done to amount of two interviewees of the employees of 9Solutions. Conducting the interviews on personal meeting calls also ensures that individual opinions can be heard and hence understood

in more detail. If the interviews were done to a larger group of people, it would take more time to gather the data and then analyse it. It would not be very suitable for the timetable set and would complicate this study further which is not preferred or viable.

For this research, Freshworks Freshdesk will be measured in features, usability, pricing, and the current business performance in the market of SaaS offering competition. A SWOT analysis will be conducted of Freshworks Freshdesk and its competitors Zendesk and HubSpot. These two companies offer very similar customer service systems. After the SWOT analyses will be done, a conclusion will be drawn between these competitors. Freshdesk will be compared to Zendesk and HubSpot. This kind of research is benchmarking. According to research done by G. Anand and R. Kodali, the definition of benchmarking varies however, the main themes include measurement, comparison, identification of best practices, implementation, and improvement. In this case, measurement and comparison will be adapted to compare the competing platforms. (G. Anand & R. Kodali, 2008)

Review sources such as Capterra and G2 will be used to draw conclusions about the user experience of Freshdesk, Zendesk and HubSpot. Capterra itself allows customers to leave a star rating between one and five and includes separated pros and cons section where the users can write their opinions on the software. G2 is quite similar with the star rating between one to five but instead of pros and cons, on G2 you can see popularly mentioned words in the user reviews. Both websites also give information such as occupation about the verified users that have left reviews on these softwares and if they were given incentive to leave a review.

Websites such as the Freshworks, Zendesks and HubSpots own websites will be used as a source material. Mainly these websites will be used to present information about the pricing, customer base and the number of employees working in these companies. Gathering reviews from the actual software websites would have been possibly beneficial but were not chosen as they could include bias in them. As an additional source, Slintels website article of Freshworks Freshdesk was used to determine the customer base and market share of Freshdesk for the analysis. These sources were analysed to be reliable as no paid reviews were included in the benchmarking process. Common themes from the reviews were gathered together and included in the SWOT analysis.

3.2 Interview questions

A questionnaire prepared beforehand, was used as a basis for the interviews that were conducted to gather information about usage of Freshdesk for two different working personnel of 9Solutions. Interviews were conducted in an online environment, Google Meets. The interviews were held on 07.12.2022 apart from each other. Both meetings were voice recorded with permission from the participants and the estimated time for an interview was set at 15 minutes, but total of 30 minutes were requested to ensure that all the necessary information can be acquired. First interview was held to a customer success specialist and the second one to a senior product manager. Both had used Freshdesk and Intranet in their respective work.

Interview questions were not be as linear as presented on the second appendix and came with additional questions based on answers that were received during the interview. Reasoning behind these exact questions were to first get an idea of what kind of position in this company deals most with the usage of Freshdesk. Secondly, we wanted to find out if these employees are in favour of using Freshdesk and if they like working with it. Lastly, we wanted to find out if these employees use any other communication systems as is or in co-operation with Freshdesk as it is designed to be able to do so.

Targets of the interview were chosen by questioning the CEO of 9Solutions about employees from the company that mostly deal with the usage of Freshworks Freshdesk. This ensures that the person interviewed can answer the questions that this research aims to answer and draw conclusions from. As two people will be interviewed, one of them is from the Finnish department and the other from the Swedish department. This allows us to also see differences between the two departments and if they have a good connection between them.

After the interviews have been held, the discussion will be transcribed. Main points and ideas from the transcription are going to be color-coded and collected under similar themes. These themes will be used as main points of information during the conclusion of this research. Conclusion will draw important points and show similarities and differences in the interview answers.

4 FINDINGS

In this part, SWOT analysis tool will be utilized to benchmark Freshworks Freshdesk and its competitors Zendesk and HubSpot. Results of these findings will be later used in conclusion to explain benefits over one another. In addition, in-detail pricing of Freshworks Freshdesk will be explained thoroughly after the SWOT analyses. Finally, results from the interviews are presented in the last subchapter. Sources and questions that were used for the basis of interviews used this chapter and its subchapters can be found in second and third appendix.

4.1 Analysis of Freshworks and competitors

Website of Freshworks was used to gather data on Freshdesks userbase and features. In addition, sources such as G2, HubSpot website, Capterra and Slintel were used to compile information from user reviews to find similarities and differences. The information gathered from these sources are presented as a SWOT analysis in Table 2., 3. and 4.

Table 2. Freshworks SWOT analysis.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cheap compared to competition• Ease of use• Response time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slow updates• Limited possibilities
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start-ups• Free plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cash flow• Relatively small market share

Freshworks, founded in 2010 officially incorporated Freshdesk as their cloud-based customer support service in the same year. Freshdesk came into the market as a cheaper alternative to the competition and as explained on HubSpot website, directly to compete with rising prices of Zendesk. Comparing to competition, Freshdesk is cheaper to incorporate. This can be incentive to small businesses to adopt Freshdesk over competitions as the cost of the service is easier to han-

dle. Freshworks markets Freshdesk to be very user-friendly. Ease of use is also bolstered by reviews on G2 website that allows users of the service write their opinion. The term “Easy” is one of the popularly mentioned terms in these reviews. Response and resolution time has also been mentioned popularly, which indicates that Freshworks support to their own customers can be considered as good.

Freshworks updates to Freshdesk are rather slow to be implemented. Customers have been asking for different features to the system but after positive response, it can take multiple years to be implemented into the system. This also means that currently possibilities with the system are limited as new features are being implemented from a queue. According to reviews of Freshdesk on Capterra, for example, Freshdesks “Tools” is not efficient, and the automation tools are not built very well.

Freshworks solutions are price friendly to start-ups and small businesses. Freshworks also offers free plans on their solutions. For example, Freshdesks free plan offers customer service solution with up to 10 agents without any cost. They also offer 21-day free trial of the paid solutions to which possible customers can then upgrade if they find the free plan to not be enough for their operations. These free plans and trials can be good incentive for possible customers to at least they out their service and possibly stay as a customer.

As claimed on Freshworks website they currently serve over 50000 customers with their services. Compared to the competition, they are much smaller in scale. Because Freshworks cash flow is not as large in scale as the competitions, this creates a threat. With smaller customer base and lower pricing, Freshworks cannot implement upgrades and other improvements in a same scale as the competition. According to Slintel, as of 2022, Freshworks holds 3.18% of the market share for customer experience services. For a comparison, Zendesk holds 22,06%.

Zendesk is the first analysed competitor of Freshworks Freshdesk. Zendesk and the second competitor – HubSpot serve larger customer base in their day-to-day operations. Table 3. below is a compilement of data found on Zendesk in a form of SWOT analysis.

Table 3. Zendesk SWOT analysis.

Strengths	Weaknesses
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good cash flow • High quality of service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pricing • No free plan • Complex
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large customer base • Expandability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition

Zendesk, founded in 2007 offers their services to over 160000 customers in 160 countries. Zendesk is already well established in field of SaaS products, and this ensures that the company has good cash flow. Good cash flow itself gives the company leeway to try out new features and implement upgrades in large scale. Zendesk is also well reviewed on the G2 website with over 3000 perfect scores. Many of these reviews praise Zendesk to very well working and their problems with the system get sorted out in a quick manner. Popularly mentioned terms like “Chat feature” and “Customer service” are directly related to reviews of good customer service and the highly customizable chat feature.

Zendesk is an expensive solution to digital customer service. Their prices did not start at very high but over the time they have been rising. Their system is quite complex and offers many solutions which means that employees must be hired to service these systems. Zendesk does not offer free plans for their possible customers. This together with high price point can be a deterrent to the possible customer. According to reviews on Capterra, many of negative reviews have to do with the complexity of the system and high price point.

Because Zendesk has a large customer base, this ensures that opportunities in the future can be vast. New demands from the market and customers be addressed in a timely manner. Also, because many of the customers have written their own experiences with Zendesk, big enterprises looking for already well-established system can be encouraged to go for Zendesk as their customer service solution. With many of their features, Zendesk is very expandable. They do not only offer customer service solutions but also sales solutions to their customers.

Biggest threat to Zendesk is competitions. This market has many smaller providers of customer service solutions that can with lower pricing and user-friendliness, claim their possible customers. Also, Zendesk is not the only large competitor in this market which means that large enterprises

may go elsewhere for service. This competition does not see an end at this point which means that it continuously threatens Zendesk's operations.

HubSpot is the second competitor in the field of SaaS based customer support platforms for Freshworks Frshdesk. HubSpot and Zendesk are similar in size. Table 4. below is a complement of gathered data on HubSpot in a form of SWOT analysis.

Table 4. HubSpot SWOT analysis.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very customizable• Many different plans• Good cash flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expensive• Complex
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Large customer base• Free tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Competition

HubSpot, founded in 2006 offers their services to over 150000 customers in over 120 countries. HubSpot is already well established in field of SaaS product, this ensures that the company has good cash flow. Good cashflow itself gives the company leeway to try out new features and implement upgrades in large scale. HubSpot offers many different solutions to customer service problems on their website. Their plans are also very customizable which means that the customer service system can be very tailored to the company needs if correct features are chosen. HubSpot is very well review on the G2 website with 67% of the reviews being perfect scores. For example, popularly mentioned terms in these reviews are "Features" and "Platform" which are supported in the reviews with praises of many features to choose from and that it is a very customizable platform.

HubSpot is very expensive compared to the competition. Their enterprise option is priced to be starting at €1104 per month for the customer support solutions. If you are looking for marketing solutions, you can end up paying €3300 per month at starting. This is huge step up from some of the cheaper options from competition. This can be a deterrent to the possible customer as it is a big investment to implement HubSpot services to their company. HubSpot reviews on Capterra also suggest that the pricing alongside of complexity are the main negatives of HubSpot.

Because HubSpot has a large customer base, this ensures that opportunities in the future can be vast. New demands from the market and customers be addressed in a timely manner. Also, because many of the customers have written their own experiences with HubSpot, big enterprises looking for already well-established system can be encouraged to go for HubSpot as their customer service solution. HubSpot also offers many free tools that companies can use as a steppingstone to their service and get an idea how it works and can benefit their operations.

HubSpot's biggest threat now is competition. Because the expensiveness of their service, start-ups and small businesses may opt for much less expensive solutions. This market has many small providers which can claim HubSpot possible customers because of that reason. Competition in this field does not see end at this point which means that it continuously threatens HubSpot.

To conclude these findings, three of the chosen platforms were analysed via SWOT analysis which has brought out their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. One of these competitors is currently in use for the case company. Both possible competitors can be recognized as larger in their respective scale. Larger competition was chosen for the purpose of finding out if there were enough incentive to change. In addition, Zendesk and HubSpot had a lot of information available to choose for this research.

4.2 Pricing of Freshdesk

This chapter will go more in to detail about the pricing of Freshdesk and the features provided in different price points. Tables 5., and 6. below will present the pricing information available on Freshworks Freshdesk website.

Table 5. Freshdesk Support Desk pricing. (Freshdesk, 2022)

Free	Growth	Pro	Enterprise
€0 (Up to 10 agents)	€15 (Per agent per month, annually) or €18	€49 (Per agent per month, annually) or €59	€79 (Per agent per month, annually) or €95

	(Per agent per month, monthly)	(Per agent per month, monthly)	(Per agent per month, monthly)
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Different tiers of Freshdesk Support Desk include features that an organization can use to improve their customer service. Each higher tier includes features from the previous tier plus its own additions. Agent in Freshdesk's context refers to the employee doing customer service. Each tier includes 21-day of free trial and promise of 75% reduction in ticket resolution time, <3-month payback period and 54 hours per agent per year saved with automations. Freshdesk's Omnichannel is priced followingly:

Table 6. Freshdesk Omnichannel pricing. (Freshdesk, 2022)

Growth Omnichannel	Pro Omnichannel	Enterprise Omnichannel
€29 (Per agent per month, annually) or €35 (Per agent per month, monthly)	€59 (Per agent per month, annually) or €71 (Per agent per month, monthly)	€99 (Per agent per month, annually) or €119 (Per agent per month, monthly)

In similar manner to Support Desk, Omnichannel has different tiers that includes its own perks and more advanced tiers include features from previous tiers. All Omnichannel tiers also include 21-day free trial with a promise of contextual support everywhere, <3 month payback period and 54 hours per agent per year saved with automations.

4.3 Interview Results

Two personnel from the case company were interviewed. The first interviewee deals with customer contacts. These contacts can be made via tickets, emails, or phone calls. The second interviewee deals with product management. This spectrum is broad and can change from day to day. Mostly this includes dealing with the whole lifetime of the product from idealising to discontinuation.

According to the first interviewee, if a customer needs instructions, they can provide an extranet link to the document via Freshdesk which is then sent to the customer's email. These requests can be made via Freshdesk's ticket system. Sometimes they may send the document directly, but extranet links are used more often. If a new product is introduced, instructions that deal with it are added to the database in Freshdesk. According to the second interviewee, when they have a larger ongoing project, information is added to extranet in the piloting phase. When they are testing their product in a smaller scale, there needs to be documentation available at that point. This could include a document like user manual. All the necessary documents need to be available before the product is launched. Freshdesk's forum section is used for product notifications. They are sent via emails but can be also read from there. Personally, the second interviewee doesn't use the ticket system that much but sometimes may link articles if necessary.

The first interviewee considers Freshdesk as a useful tool. It can be used by multiple people and a permission to see tickets can be added to individual employees that could not see them previously. They can then add clarification. Extranet is useful because you can access databanks. Customer support can also search information from there and provide information immediately on the phone call. The general picture in Freshdesk makes it easier with reports. It gives visibility to information. Second interviewee responded that Freshdesk and Extranet makes work easier. Every time that someone can find the information from Extranet directly without asking from someone else, it makes work easier. Current construction is slightly complicated, but it still makes work easier.

The first interviewee explains that logging a ticket can sometimes be inconvenient because it requires filling out multiple sections before you can for example, close the said ticket. In addition, when the number of tickets gets to a certain point, an answer from the customer can be accidentally missed. It would be better if those tickets would move to the top of the ticket list when received. Second interviewee explains that it would be better if updating articles in Freshdesk would be easier. The current system requires updating each individual article in Finnish and English. This takes time. Also because of their own decisions, they currently have some lengthy articles that combine information. Working with these long articles can be difficult sometimes. They should maybe be divided to smaller articles. There can be difficulties with the permission system. Employees need to be set certain permissions to be able to update articles. The article updating process can also be difficult because of the formatting system Freshdesk uses. The interviewee also explains that the platform is possibly not as user friendly as it could be. The current directions make it easier to work with.

The first interviewee responded that there is not another platform used for customer service, but announcements are sent. Second interviewee responded that they use Google G-Suite and Odoo in addition to Freshdesk and Extranet. The functions in G-Suite are so broad that it offers many possibilities. Currently they use it, for example, to share certain documents that are not public in Extranet. Odoo is used for sending notifications via email.

The first interviewee explained that they were in contact with Novellus when they were forming the platform. After the platform was ready, there has not been much contact because they have been able to work with it themselves. If in the future they face difficulties beyond their own knowledge, they can then contact Novellus again. The interviewee also explains that they have not been in contact with Freshworks themselves but sometimes they send requests for feedback. Second interviewee explained that they have not been personally in contact with Novellus, but other employees of the company have contacted Novellus for some changes. The second interviewee also explains that they have not been in contact with Freshworks themselves.

The first interviewee explained that finding this kind of ready packaged system was good. They can then focus their own resources elsewhere. The second interviewee explained that outsourcing this kind of platform was noticeably better. If they had used their own product development time for this kind of task, it would have taken unnecessary resources out of creating products and it would have pushed other products to the future. The interviewee states that they should absolutely focus on their own strengths and skills instead of creating these kinds of supporting features that can be acquired from companies that are proficient in creating them.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In this part, all the information gathered will be concluded together. Findings of Freshdesk, Zendesk and HubSpot will be analysed against each other. In addition, conclusion of interviews can be found in the last subchapter. Sources used for this chapter can be found in the first appendix.

5.1 Freshdesk against the competition

This chapter will go more into detail about the competing platforms put against Freshdesk. Tables 7., and 8. are constructed similarly to SWOT analysis but the concept is different. The goal of this chapter is to present different attributes that would possibly make the competing platform better choice for the case company. The results can then be used to argue over the choice of staying with Freshdesk or changing the provider.

Table 7. Zendesk vs. Freshdesk

Strenghts over Freshdesk	Weaknesses over Freshdesk
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More solutions• More self-service and automation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More expensive• No free solutions
Opportunities over Freshdesk	Threats over Freshdesk
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has been in the business longer• Larger customer base	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complex system• Hard to get accustomed to

As strengths over Freshdesk, Zendesk offers more solutions and is more customizable than Freshdesk. Zendesk App Marketplace currently has 1347 different apps available in 20 different categories. 1007 of these offered apps are free to install for already existing Zendesk subscription. Freshworks Marketplace offers 911 different apps for usage in 15 different categories. Zendesk also has more pricing plans to choose from which gives leeway to the organizations looking to acquire said system. (HubSpot, 2022). Zendesk offers more self-service and more of an automated support service for customers. Their system offers more bots to be used for customer service and it has been made easy for customers to find the information they need by themselves. Freshdesk

also makes it possible to provide searchable information to the customer, but they are more focused on ticket system that is then handled by agents.

As weaknesses over Freshdesk, Zendesk is generally more expensive. HubSpot claims that Freshdesk was founded partly in response to rising price of Zendesk. Freshdesk's pricing ranges from €0 to €99. Zendesk's pricing ranges from €49 to €215. (HubSpot, 2022; Freshdesk, 2022) Freshdesk has an option of totally free subscription. This free subscription does not have many features and Freshdesk's website explains it to be more of an introductory tool. Freshdesk also offers longer trial for the paid options of 21 days compared to Zendesk's 14 days.

As opportunities over Freshdesk, Zendesk has been in the SaaS business longer than Freshworks. This has given them the opportunity of acquiring early business connections with organizations that are now much larger. Zendesk's website includes recommendations from these big organizations that in turn can act as an incentive for upcoming businesses. (HubSpot, 2022). Zendesk's customer base is already large which allows them to make investments in the future. They can also make changes and receive much bigger sample of customer feedback than Freshdesk.

As threats over Freshdesk, Zendesk is a complex system and making big changes at this point would be risky. Freshdesk is currently much simpler system which enables them to stay as is or upsize in the future. This can be deterrent for a possible customer. Many reviews of the G2 system explain that one of the key advantages of Freshdesk is the ease of usage. Zendesk on the other hand in this same review platform does not get appraised with easy usage. Zendesk's more popular mentions include words like "response time" and "features". (G2, 2022) Just as explained in weaknesses, Zendesk does not have completely free subscription model. They offer 14 days of free trial, but this time may not be enough for a company to try to integrate it into their system. Freshdesk was also previously praised for possibility of getting refund for the subscription period if it has not been fully used. Zendesk clearly states that they do not offer refunds.

Table 8. HubSpot vs. Freshdesk

Strenght over Freshdesk	Weaknesses over Freshdesk
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More free tools• Flexible plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More expensive• No refund policy

Opportunities over Freshdesk	Threats over Freshdesk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger customer base 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not very inclusive for upcoming businesses

As strengths over Freshdesk, HubSpot offers many free tools for its customers. This also means that HubSpot is very flexible in a sense that it offers a lot. There are many different packages that the customer may choose from, and they can even build their own bundle of tools on the spot. This means many different pricing plans and different kind of bundles that be customized to need.

As weaknesses over Freshdesk, HubSpot is expensive when it comes to SaaS based digital communication systems. Outside of their CMS products, the cheapest option is €41 per month. Pricing of this product increase quite exponentially as the next option is €414 per month and the next €1104 per month for enterprise level of customer service tools. HubSpot does not only offer customer service products, but the pricing is even higher for Marketing and Operations tools. HubSpot also has strict no refund policy for their services which can be frustrating to the customer as even if you do not use their products, you are charged if subscription is active. (HubSpot, 2022)

As an opportunity over Freshdesk, according to their website, HubSpot already offers their services to over 150000 customers in more than 120 countries. This puts HubSpot just behind Zendesk in terms of customer base but much further ahead of Freshdesk. Having this amount of revenue increases the possibilities that the company can implement. It is also good incentive to the possible customer when company is already trusted by many. (HubSpot, 2022)

As a threat over Freshdesk for HubSpot, competition in SaaS market is stiff and with limited number of possible customers, this creates problems for HubSpot especially because of the high pricing. New and upcoming companies may just not have the capital to invest into HubSpot. HubSpot does offer free tools as a sort of trial for new companies, but the features are very limited. This can deter possible customers from even trying your product in the first place.

5.2 Interview conclusion

The interviews gave good insights to both fields of Freshdesk. First interviewee deals more with the ticket system and the second more with adding information to the Freshdesk database and

presenting it to Extranet. Both interviews were held in a more of a personal manner instead of a straight questionnaire which allowed the interviewees to give additional information that had possibly not been thought about previously.

Both interviewees considered Freshdesk as a useful tool for their respective work. Responding to tickets, adding information, and updating it are important parts of keeping the customer happy and onboard with their products. Freshdesk system allows multiple employees to access tickets and data when given permission, which is beneficial. When a customer or another employee can find relevant information by themselves without taking time from someone else, it is beneficial. Given these statements, this would indicate that the current system in place is already a functioning part of their daily work. Making drastic changes such as completely going for a different platform provider could interfere with it. This does not completely disregard the idea of different platform provider, but it may have its own challenges.

Both interviewees had some issues with the usage of Freshdesk. The platform has complications that slow down the workflow. Logging a ticket can be complicated as it requires multiple sections filled. On the other hand, updating an article can be difficult as they need to be done individually and in two languages. This also adds problems with lengthy articles that need to be formatted in a certain way or information that needs to be updated can be even harder to find. These statements would indicate that the current problems with the platform are time consuming and possibly irritating. They also seem to be fixable with e.g., assistance from Novellus.

Both interviewees explained that Novellus was assisting them with the platform especially in the beginning stages. Neither of the interviewees could recall need of external assistance with the platform recently. Both interviewees had not been in contact with Freshworks directly. Only communication that could be recalled was a request for feedback from Freshworks. This would indicate that the platform is quite independent as of now.

Both interviewees agreed that outsourcing this kind of platform was beneficial. Their own resources and skills are better suited in their own area of expertise. 9Solutions does use other platforms for similar kinds of tasks. For example, Google G-Suite that they have in use, can do many tasks such as sharing documents. In addition, Odoo is used for sending e-mail notifications. Currently some of the features like the forum section of Freshdesk is not used for communication between employees. The forum is used for announcements about products. Perhaps the forum section could be

utilized further e.g., to request updating of certain articles inside Freshdesk. This would indicate that Freshdesk does need additional platforms to fully function at this moment.

5.3 Theoretic conclusion

In the beginning we looked at the possibilities of SWOT analysis. Some of the relevant results included factors like capabilities for future expansion and increase in market for products. Very similarly the SWOT analysis of Zendesk showed that it had good cash flow because of already existing large customer base. On the other hand, pricing and complexity of the platform affects the future opportunities and threats that they may face. Freshdesk itself had the price advantage when compared to Zendesk. This lowers the threshold of obtaining such as platform for e.g., a start-up. In case of 9Solutions changing to Zendesk could bring new possibilities but would need investment.

HubSpot very similarly to Zendesk already has a good cashflow and customer base which would indicate that the platform is good as is. Contrary to Zendesk, HubSpot offers free customer support tools that could be used to gauge the usefulness for 9Solutions. HubSpot is more expensive than Freshdesk which would mean that the platform changing process would need investment. HubSpot also proved to be very customizable to the specific needs of the company seeking this kind of service. This would again conclude that HubSpot is a possible competitor for Freshdesk and offers more for more.

The interviews had more to do with current usage of Freshdesk. Interviewees both agreed that the platform was quite easy to use as it is now. Similar results were listed in the Freshworks Freshdesk SWOT analysis. Slow updates were found as a weakness for Freshdesk but this result had no correlations with the interview results. The free plan was also a good incentive for 9Solutions as it was used to demo the platform in beginning stages of acquisition.

6 DISCUSSIONS

The chosen topic for this research proved to be more complicated than I originally thought. Trustworthy resources about Freshdesk and its competitors was quite hard to find. Many of them provided different and sometimes even contradictory information. This meant that I had to double check many sources and cross reference them with the information that Freshdesk themselves had sometimes provided. This also meant that I had hard time comparing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats between these different platforms because they had many similarities and a lot of the information available was opinion based.

The results were very close to the general idea I had about the platform. I worked on the platform for my practical training period and some extra with another student which gave me quite a good insight into what was efficient and what wasn't. This was further bolstered by the interviews that were held for two of the employees. They had some good additional information that I had no previous knowledge which was a good addition to this research. In my opinion both research questions were answered as best as they could be. Of course, the questions are quite vague in their exact target if the reader had no previous knowledge of this subject, I think everything opens up during the research.

As of the reliability of this study and its results, I would say it is reliable. The research method was qualitative which in my opinion gives a good hand on approach to the information available. In addition, because this was a case study, the results are exact for the case company in question. I also believe that the comparison between different customer support platforms was done in a wide scale and multiple sources were used to ensure that the information is reliable. I found out that it is quite usual for platforms to pay for reviews of their services. I encountered multiple such sources and had to be picky when choosing what to use. This of course made the process slower, but accuracy was a must. The SWOT analyses are very general in their findings. Exact results are hard to find because a lot of results are based on user experiences from different kinds of users.

My learning experience was interesting. This research took much longer to be finished than I originally anticipated. I had my own responsibilities outside of this work that needed to be attended to which would sometimes exhaust the motivation to keep writing. Currently I am close to the end of this research which itself is a relief. Stress and past midnight writing sessions have been part of it

more than once. Sometimes I've had to scrap complete chapter because the text was nonsense and had barely to do anything with the actual research. In the end, I believe that this has been one of the very important tasks I've had to do to achieve something. I have also learned a lot. Analyzing data and making it into a neat package was the hardest part for me. I believe there is still much room for improvement, but I believe it is a step in the right direction.

For future research it would probably a good idea to look in to more of the different platforms that are available for customer support. I had the original platform in 9Solutions use and two of the competitors that are more popular. The platforms of course have their differences but the sector for these kinds of software-as-a-service platforms is in rise, so perhaps in the future there could be more platforms to investigate from. In addition, if in the future 9Solutions needs more or different features for their customer support, they could consider changing the provider. In my opinion, this needs to be researched and considered again in the future.

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Questionnaire for the interviews

- What is your position in 9Solutions Oy?
- What kind of tasks do you do in your day-to-day work in the company?
- What kind of tasks do you use Freshdesk for?
- Do you think Freshdesk is beneficial for your work/what kind of tasks does it make easier?
And if so, how? For example, how is better/worse than your previous solution for customer service and communication?
- Are the changes that you would like to see to the platform and if so, what would they be?
- Do you use any other platforms for customer service and communication and if so, what are they?