

Why We Invest In Internal Documentation on Buffer's Customer Advocacy Team

Imagine that you are the only teammate online today in the Australian time zone in your company. You work in customer support and are trying to help multiple customers with questions that you've never come across before, and you can't ask your teammates who won't be online for at least another six hours. You feel isolated and demoralized, and these customers are losing their patience...

Or, what if you just joined a new company and your new teammates are welcoming and friendly, and they tell you that you can feel free to ask them whenever you have any questions. Even so, you feel bad about asking three questions for every ticket you're trying to answer, and it's hard for you to feel any sense of accomplishment as you're spending more time waiting for teammates to answer your questions than actually answering customer tickets...

As a global remote team, our teammates work across different time zones seven days a week. We want to avoid the frustration and inefficiency described in the two scenarios above as much as possible. On our Customer Advocacy team in particular, where we have teammates working on days when there aren't many others online, we want our Customer Advocates to feel supported and empowered, even if they are the only ones online and don't have the real-time support of another teammate.

Along with video calls, one-on-one conversations, and Slack messages, comprehensive internal documentation is integral to how we support one another as a team. It's almost like having

another helpful teammate (ok, maybe half a teammate!).

What is internal documentation?

Internal documentation refers to any written or recorded information a team creates for internal use, things like documenting processes, answers to frequently asked internal questions, or generally sharing knowledge across the company. At Buffer, we use tools like Dropbox Paper and Notion for our internal documentation and make sure it's accessible to everyone across the company and easily referenced. On our Customer Advocacy team in particular, we lean into using Zendesk Guide in addition to other internal documentation tools.

What are the benefits of internal documentation?

1. Democratize access to information

Good internal documentation enables every teammate to find important information rather than allowing it to be siloed. With a quick search, our Advocates can easily find steps on how to troubleshoot specific issues, policies to handle tricky situations, and best practices that we use to ensure our customer's security and privacy. This removes blockers preventing teammates from effectively supporting our customers.

2. Facilitate teammate growth

Everyone on our team can find the video recordings and written documentation of all of the internal training on various topics in our internal wiki. Some of the training is essential, and some of the training is more advanced or focused on specific growth paths. Having all of the training available on-demand to the team enables people to refresh

their fundamental knowledge from time to time or to level up in the knowledge that supports their professional growth. This also saves us lots of time from re-doing the same training whenever new teammates join the company.

3. Onboard new teammates

Along with saving time on re-doing the same training, we believe great internal documentation helps facilitate a smoother onboarding experience in many different ways. Although it is highly beneficial and encouraged for new teammates to ask questions and engage with everyone in the team, it is equally important to equip them to work well independently at their own pace without constantly depending on other teammates' schedules.

4. Ensure consistent quality

Even the most experienced support specialists cannot remember everything. When we have best practices and internal policies clearly documented, it reduces uncertainties and confusion around how we should approach specific situations.

How can you start this process for yourself?

At this point, it's possible that you're convinced that maintaining internal documentation is important. Maybe you're even thinking about how you can implement it for your company!

The first step is to identify one team member (or more) to be the owner of building it from the ground up. That is useful even if you're planning to have quite a collaborative process to generate content. Designating an owner gives you the best chance possible to reach your desired outcome. Otherwise, a new project like this can easily fall through the cracks.

Then you might want to identify the type of content that you'd

like to include and where you should store the content. Wherever you choose, the content should be easily accessible and searchable for your entire team.

This article is just scraping the surface of internal documentation. In future posts, we'll dive into more of the "how's" we use at Buffer, including things like:

- What is the process to identify information that needs to be added or updated?
- Where do we store internal documentation and why?
- How do we audit internal documentation to keep the information updated?
- How does our internal documentation team work together with the external documentation team?

Let us know which of those you'd like to see next! In the meantime, if you have any tips and stories about establishing your internal documentation and the benefits you're seeing, we'd love to hear from you via Twitter @buffer with the hashtag #CustomerSupportThoughts.

Happy documenting!

This post was originally published on our customer support thoughts blog.

<https://buffer.com/resources/internal-documentation/>