

What is a help center?

Help center best practices

A help center is a website where your customers find answers on their own: how-to guides, troubleshooting steps, FAQs and policies, organized by topic and easy to search. It's where people go when they get stuck, at any hour, before they write to your team.

You're reading one right now. This is HelpCenter.io's own help center, and it's built with HelpCenter.io.

In one sentence: a help center is the self-service home for everything your customers need to know to use your product, solve problems and reach a person when they need one.

What goes in a help center

Most help centers mix a few kinds of content, and each kind answers a different question. Here's what that could look like for an online invoicing app.

Content	The question it answers	Example title
Getting started guide	"Where do I begin?"	Send your first invoice
How-to article	"How do I do this?"	Add your logo to invoices

Troubleshooting article	"Why isn't this working?"	A client didn't get their invoice
FAQ	A quick question with a short answer	Can I change my plan later?
Account and billing article	"How do I pay, upgrade or cancel?"	Download your receipts
Policy	"What are the rules?"	Refund policy
Reference	"What exactly does this mean?"	Glossary of invoicing terms

Alongside the articles, a good help center always shows people how to reach a person when the articles don't solve their problem.

Who uses a help center

- **Customers** use it to get unstuck without waiting for a reply, including at night, on weekends and in time zones your team doesn't cover.
- **People comparing products** read it to see how yours works, and how well you look after customers, before they buy.

- **Your support team** sends a link instead of typing the same answer again, so every customer hears the same, correct answer.
- **The rest of your company** relies on it too: sales checks what the product can do, and new colleagues learn the product from it.
- **Search engines** list your public articles, so people who type their question into a search box can land on your answer.
- **AI assistants** such as ChatGPT and Claude can read public help centers when someone asks them about your product. Many help centers also have AI built in: readers ask a question in their own words and get an answer written from your articles, with links to the sources.

Each of these readers is a reason to have one. For the full business case, see [Why your business needs a help center](#).

Public, private or both

Most help centers are public, so anyone can read them and search engines can list them. Some sit behind a login and serve only paying customers or partners.

Others are private and made for your own team: processes, policies, support playbooks and onboarding guides in one searchable place. That's usually called an internal knowledge base, and many companies run one next to their public help center. See [Use a private help center as an internal knowledge base](#).

Help center vs FAQ page, knowledge base, forum and contact form

These terms overlap, and people often mix them up. Here's how each one relates to a help center.

Term	What it is	How it relates to a help center
FAQ page	One page of short questions and answers.	Fine for a handful of questions, but hard to scan as it grows. A help center includes FAQs, plus full guides, categories and search.
Knowledge base	The organized collection of articles.	The heart of a help center. The two terms are often used for the same thing. See Help center vs knowledge base: what's the difference?
Documentation	Detailed reference material, often for developers.	Can live inside a help center or next to it.
Community forum	A place where customers ask and answer each other's questions.	Good for discussion and ideas, but answers vary in quality and go out of date. Turn the best ones into help center articles.

Contact form or ticketing system	A way to send a message to your team.	For problems that need a person. A good help center makes the form easy to find, and can suggest articles while people type their question.
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What a modern help center includes

The basics haven't changed: useful articles in a clear structure. What has changed is how people reach them.

- **Search that works as you type.** Results appear while people type, and good search copes with different ways of saying the same thing.
- **AI answers with sources.** Readers ask a question in their own words and get a direct answer built from your articles, with links so they can check it.
- **Help inside your product.** A widget on your website or in your app brings search and articles to the page where people got stuck, so they don't have to leave it.
- **Your brand and your address.** Your logo, your colors and a domain like `help.yourcompany.com`, so customers know they're in the right place.
- **Works for everyone, on any device.** Pages that read well on a phone and work with a keyboard and a screen reader.
- **Your customers' languages.** Translated articles for each market you serve.
- **Feedback and statistics.** "Was this helpful?" ratings, your most-read articles, and the searches that found nothing.

- **Access control.** Public for everyone, private for your team, or behind your own login.
- **Open to search engines and AI tools.** A sitemap, stable addresses and machine-readable versions of your articles, so answers about your product come from you.

Help centers worth a look

A few well-run help centers show these ideas in practice:

- [Slack Help Center](#) leads with search and example questions, groups articles into a handful of sections such as Getting started and Workspace administration, and names articles after tasks.
- [Figma's help center](#) pairs search with a short getting-started path for new users, and puts Contact support next to its community forum.
- [Stripe Support](#) opens with "How can we help?" and a list of the most popular articles, so the common questions are one click away.
- [GitHub Docs](#) organizes a very large library by product area and says plainly when a feature has been retired, instead of letting its pages disappear.

How to start a help center

1. **Collect the questions people already ask.** Your support inbox, chat history, sales calls and onboarding sessions are full of them. Write each one down in the customer's own words.
2. **Group them into five to ten categories.** Name each category the way customers would, not the way your teams are organized. See [Plan your help center's structure](#).

3. **Write your first ten articles.** Start with the questions you answer most often, one question per article. See [The first 10 articles every help center needs](#).
4. **Choose where it lives.** Help center software gives you hosting, search, structure and statistics from day one. A custom build takes longer and needs someone to maintain it. See [Why use a hosted help center instead of building your own?](#)
5. **Make it easy to find.** Link to it from your website's header or footer, your product's help menu, your emails and your support replies.
6. **Improve it every month.** Look at the searches that found nothing and the articles with low ratings, then fix what they point to. See [Help center metrics that matter](#).

A quick checklist

Your help center is doing its job when:

- It answers the questions your team hears most often.
- Article titles use your customers' words, not internal jargon.
- Search finds the right article on the first try.
- Each article covers one task or one question.
- People can reach a person when the articles aren't enough.
- It's linked from your website, your product and your emails.
- It reads well on a phone.
- Someone owns it and keeps it accurate as your product changes.

How HelpCenter.io helps

HelpCenter.io is help center software. You write articles in a visual editor, pick a theme and publish to your own domain. Every plan includes search, the widget for your website and app, statistics, and a way for readers to connect their own AI assistant to your public help center. AI Answers are included on Catalyst and available as an add-on on Bootstrap and Growth. To try it, [create your HelpCenter.io account](#). The 14-day free trial needs no credit card.

Related articles

- [Why your business needs a help center](#)
- [Help center vs knowledge base: what's the difference?](#)
- [Plan your help center's structure](#)
- [The first 10 articles every help center needs](#)
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