Why your business needs a help center

Help center best practices

A help center answers your customers' questions at any hour, takes repeat questions off your team's plate, and gives people, search engines and AI assistants one reliable source of truth about your product. Here's what that looks like in practice, and what it takes.

Customers get answers when they want them

Questions don't wait for office hours. A customer setting up your product late on a Sunday, or in a time zone your team doesn't cover, can find the answer and keep going instead of waiting until morning for a reply.

And not everyone wants to write to support. Some people don't want to wait, some find it hard to describe a problem in a message, and some prefer to learn a product on their own terms. A help center lets them solve the problem now.

Your team stops answering the same question twice

Every support team has questions it answers again and again. Write the answer once, carefully, and link to it from then on. Your frequently asked questions become frequently answered ones, and your team spends its time on the problems that need a person.

A link in a support reply also shows the customer where to look next time.

New customers get going faster

The first days with a product often decide whether people stay. Getting started guides and short how-tos help new customers reach their first success without booking a call. A help widget inside your product puts that help on the page where they need it.

Everyone gives the same answer

When answers live in people's heads, customers hear one thing from support and another from sales. A help center gives everyone the same version, and when something changes, you update it in one place.

The same goes for your team. An internal knowledge base with your processes and policies means fewer interruptions and a faster start for new colleagues. See Use a private help center as an internal knowledge base.

People find you through search

People type questions into search engines all day, including questions your product answers. Public help center articles can appear for those searches, both for your customers and for people who are still comparing options. Every useful article is one more way for someone to find you. See Help center SEO: get your articles found.

AI assistants give better answers about your product

People ask AI assistants about products too. When someone asks about yours, the assistant answers from what it can read. Clear, current, public articles give it the right facts to work with.

AI answers inside your own help center work the same way: they reply to questions in the customer's own words, using your articles as the source. See Make your help center ready for AI.

You learn what confuses customers

A help center shows you things a ticket queue doesn't. Searches that find nothing show what's missing. Articles with low ratings show what doesn't help. A troubleshooting article that everyone reads can point to a part of your product worth fixing. See Help center metrics that matter.

Signs you need one now

- Your team answers the same questions every week.
- Customers wait hours for answers you could have written down once.
- New customers need a call or a demo before they can get started.
- Your FAQ page has grown too long to scan.
- Colleagues keep asking each other how things work.
- You're moving into new markets or languages.

What it takes

A help center doesn't have to be a big project, but it does need some care. You need:

- **Time to write the first articles.** Start with ten, not a hundred. See The first 10 articles every help center needs.
- **An owner.** One person who makes sure articles stay accurate and gaps get filled.
- **A habit.** Update articles when the product changes, and check what people search for. See Keep your help center up to date.

What a help center won't do

It won't replace your support team. Some problems need a person, and a help center works best when reaching one is easy. It won't fix a confusing product either, though it will show you where the confusion is. And it only stays useful while someone keeps it current.

Make the case to your team

If you need buy-in, use the numbers you already have rather than industry averages:

1. List your five most common support questions and how many times each came in last month.
2. Estimate how long your team spends answering them.
3. Note how long customers wait for a first reply, especially outside office hours.
4. Propose a small start: articles for those five questions, then compare next month's numbers with this month's.

For example, if 120 messages a month ask how to reset a password and each one takes your team four minutes, one clear article can win back up to eight hours a month. Two or three questions like that usually make the case on their own.

How HelpCenter.io helps

HelpCenter.io gives you a help center on your own domain, with search, the widget for your website and app, and statistics on every plan. AI Answers reply to questions from your articles and link to their sources, on Catalyst or with the AI add-on on Bootstrap and Growth. You pay a flat price per help center, not per agent. See Plans and pricing.

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- Reduce support tickets with self-service
- Help center metrics that matter
- The first 10 articles every help center needs