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Scripting templates to help you deal with difficult customers



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With the economic effects of the pandemic still being felt, and the cost of living crisis now kicking in, it's inevitable that contact centres will be forced to field more calls from angry, emotional and distressed customers.

In fact, they already are. According to the Institute of Customer Service, 60% of customer-facing staff have experienced hostility from customers since early 2020, ranging from shouting and swearing to racial abuse, death threats, spitting and physical attacks. The Institute is [running a campaign](#) to highlight the issue.

But it's not just abuse. Contact centre staff in many sectors are also fielding a growing number of calls from distressed customers who may be struggling to pay bills or meet other commitments.

No agent wants to have to face a barrage of abuse when they're just trying to do their job. Calls from emotional customers can be upsetting for contact centre employees, especially if there is little they can do to help.

The increase in these types of calls risks exacerbating the very real phenomenon of employee burnout. MaxContact's [own research](#) has found that burnout has reached almost epidemic proportions since 2020. We found that 83% of contact centre workers say they are burnt out or believe they will be soon.

That's a real problem for contact centres. Emotionally exhausted employees make more mistakes and field fewer calls. A study by the [American Psychological Association](#) found that burned-out employees are 2.6 times more likely to be actively seeking a different job, and 63% more likely to take a sick day.

So what's the solution here? It appears likely that the cost of living will remain high for some time. The economic and psychological effects of the pandemic could be with us for years (even if there are no more lockdowns).

Strong agent support systems, and empathetic management, are essential. Training is important. But perhaps most crucial of all is the role of technology. Good systems can take pressure off agents so they have more headspace to deal with difficult calls. Good technology can help customers get the answers they're looking for more quickly and easily, making them less prone to angry tirades.

For example, automating responses with 'quick answers' to simple queries can be instrumental in protecting workers from frustration and burnout. At the same time, chatbots can dramatically improve a customer's experience by providing quick and easy answers to simple questions.



But one of the simplest and most effective tools in your armoury, in terms of reducing the impact of difficult calls, is conversation scripting and guidance. Creating and adapting conversation scripts that demonstrate empathy, understanding and a real desire to help can mollify emotional customers and make life considerably easier for stretched employees.

We understand it takes time to write scripts, which is why we've created this guide. Here, we'll provide scripting examples for dealing with difficult customers through multiple channels - inbound calls, outbound calls, webchat, SMS and WhatsApp and email. As well as this, you'll also find scripts for different use cases, including customer service, sales and debt resolution.





Inbound calls

It's clear that inbound call teams face the constant possibility of having to deal with angry or emotional customers.

It's important that they deal with them well. Inbound agents are, to many customers, the face of the business, and potentially the only direct contact with a company or brand they will ever have.

In this section, you'll find phone script starter examples for a series of difficult - but all too common - situations.



Customer service complaints – B2C

In the customer service space, the simplest words can often be the most effective. When a customer is angry, let them vent. Use phrases which show that you're paying attention and taking their complaint seriously. That in itself can reduce levels of anger.

"OK". "I see". "I understand".

"I'm really sorry that you've had this problem. Let me see what I can do to make it right."

When it's your chance to speak, demonstrate empathy and understanding. Sincerely apologise, then offer a way forward.

If you can solve the problem in that phone call, make it clear. This is likely to pacify customers who worry that the issue may take a long time to fix.

"I'd like to apologise for the inconvenience, and thank you for bringing it to our attention. I will get this sorted out for you straight away."

"I'm really sorry this has happened. Can I ask you a few questions and we can start getting this resolved straight away."

And if you aren't sure you can solve the issue in a single call? Taking details shows you're being proactive.

What if nothing calms the customer down, and they continue to be angry and confrontational? If continuing the call is likely to be counter-productive, try a different tack. Ultimately, agents need to be able to escalate the issue if the conversation is not getting anywhere.

"I'm sorry that you're not happy with this conversation. Would you like to speak to my superior?"



Tech or general support – B2B

B2B support lines are usually – though not always – a little less fraught. What callers want most of all is reassurance that the problem will be fixed quickly. They may be losing money for every minute of downtime, for example.

“I’m really sorry that you’re having this problem. Let me assure you that this is a priority for us and we will fix it as soon as possible.”

“I’d like to apologise for this, it shouldn’t happen. I’m going to take ownership of this problem until it’s fixed. Let me start by taking some details.”

“Sorry to hear you’re having this problem. Another department specialises in this, but I want to try a couple of quick things before passing you to them, as I don’t want you to wait longer than you have to. I’ve just sent you a support article that explains what you need to do. Are you happy to give that a try?”

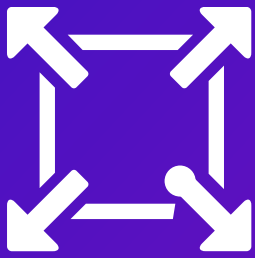
What if the complaint is about something the customer can easily rectify themselves?

What if the issue is technical and something you don’t have a quick answer for? When resolution might take time, you should give the customer the option of a call back or an email.

“You’re right that this shouldn’t happen and I’m really sorry it has. There may be a few things that have caused the problem. Can you hold while I run a few tests/discuss with my team? I’m mindful of your time though so I’m happy to call or email you back so you can get on with your day.”

“I’m sorry that’s happening. I know exactly the right team to get this resolved, and if you’ll bear with me, I can make sure they have all the information they need to help before I put you through. Are you ok to wait just a few minutes whilst I do that?”

Angry customers can be further inflamed by the thought that they’ll have to be passed between departments in the middle of a busy working day. So do it as sensitively and reassuringly as possible.



Outbound calls

An outbound call is when your agent calls the customer. It's usually a sales call, or an after sale courtesy call. It can also be for debt collecting.

Again, it's important to make the right impression, even with difficult customers. It will help you build a rapport and ultimately achieve your wider aims, whether that's more sales or fewer late or missed payments.



Sales

As we all know, sales calls can be tricky, especially with difficult customers. But lots of sales calls are awkward, because people are pausing what they were doing to take the call. It might have been an interruption they weren't expecting and didn't necessarily want. But that doesn't mean the calls can't be productive. Obviously, if the customer gets angry and abusive, politely back out of the conversation. If they remain merely uncommunicative, try these tips:

Slow down.

When we sense the customer doesn't want to be on the phone, the temptation is to rush the call. Don't. Take it slow and get the right messages across, and you might be surprised at the result.

Don't react

Customers can get cranky or annoyed. Agents can't. Stay calm and be genuine and polite and the customer will probably calm down too.

Be firm.

You have a job to do. Giving your messages politely but in a firm tone of voice will show that you're professional and confident. In other words, you're just the sort of person people want to buy from.

Let them talk.

Difficult customers may want to tell you about their issues before they let you talk about services or products. Allow them to vent, at least for a couple of minutes. They'll be calmer and more amenable to your messages as a result.

Ask questions.

If the customer isn't talking at all, it might be a sign they've switched off. So ask a few questions. People like talking about themselves. They may start angrily, but after a while become calmer. That's when you can start having the conversation you really want to have.



Outbound sales scripts

Start cold calls positively, and with a friendly - but not too friendly - greeting. At this point you don't know how the customer will react to informal language, so keep it conventional. Difficult customers may simply hang up if you greet them like an old friend.

"Good morning, Mr Smith" is better than "Hi, Mr Smith" or "Hello, Mr Smith." On no account say "Yo, Mr Smith"!

Agent: "Good morning, Mr Smith. I'm Dan from ABC. We've got an offer on right now that we think you'd be interested in. Is this a good time to talk?"

When cold calling, introduce yourself and your company and politely ask the customer if they're busy. Be prepared for the fact that they're likely to say yes.

Mr Smith (annoyed):
"I'm busy right now."

Agent: "No problem at all. When's a better time to call? It should only take five minutes or so and I'm happy to fit into your schedule."

"Thanks for taking my call Mr Smith. I know from our records that you've enquired about Product A before. I'm just ringing to let you know that right now there's a great offer that cuts a third off the price."

When you eventually have the conversation, make sure you've prepped beforehand to ensure you're providing value on the call.

Remember that difficult customers might not be disinterested ones. They might have a need for your product or service, but not the time to talk about it right now. So offer them contact options. There's no point risking annoying a potential customer by continuing with a call they don't want to take.

"I can tell you're busy Mr Smith, and sorry for interrupting you. I'll email you the information instead, and if you want to proceed, you have my contact details. I'll follow up so that I can answer any questions you might have in a couple of weeks, so that you have time to digest the information."



Debt collection scripts

Debt collection calls can be especially difficult. Not only are you more likely to be dealing with stressed, emotional customers, but there are also essential compliance factors to bear in mind. Remember, some customers may be vulnerable, too. Calls need to be understanding and empathetic, but at the same time direct and to the point.

On many occasions, a customer will simply have forgotten to pay, or they may say they didn't receive the bill. In these cases, give them the benefit of the doubt and ask the customer if they'd like to settle the bill then and there. If they can't, get a commitment to pay on a specified date. If they say they haven't received the bill, check their email address and send the bill again during the call.

But what if the customer doesn't pay on the agreed date? The follow up call should be more direct.

"Hi Mr Smith, it's Dan again from ABC. I'm following up on our call from 17 May on the unpaid bill. Unfortunately, we haven't had the payment yet. Are you in a position to resolve the outstanding balance today?"

"I'm sorry to hear you've had trouble paying. If paying in full is going to mean you can't afford other household bills, I think we can do something to help make paying easier. Would the option to spread out the balance over a period of time work for you?"

If the customer can't make full payment, it's important to consider their personal situation. Getting part payment, or putting them on a payment plan can help them to manage this and other potential debt too.



Or: →

“Are you having trouble paying? I’m confident we can do something to make paying easier. Would it help if we split the bill into three parts? If so, we can schedule the first payment tomorrow, and the others for the two weeks after that.”

“Hello Mr Smith, it’s Dan from ABC. Your bill for X service/product is now overdue. I’ve tried calling a couple of times already but haven’t been able to catch you. If you’re having trouble paying, there’s plenty we can do to help. Give me a call and we can run through the options.”

← If a customer is having trouble paying, they may be avoiding your call. You may have to get your message across via voicemail.





Web chat, SMS and WhatsApp

Your customers want to communicate with your business at the time of their choosing.

If you offer these methods of communication – and you really should – you need to answer them swiftly and be prepared to escalate complaints quickly. That's why pre prepared scripts or quick answers can be so useful. But customers don't want to read reams of information on a text or chat, so make them short and to the point.



Customer service

If a customer complains, your text reply should acknowledge their pain, apologise and offer reassurance that the matter is being dealt with.



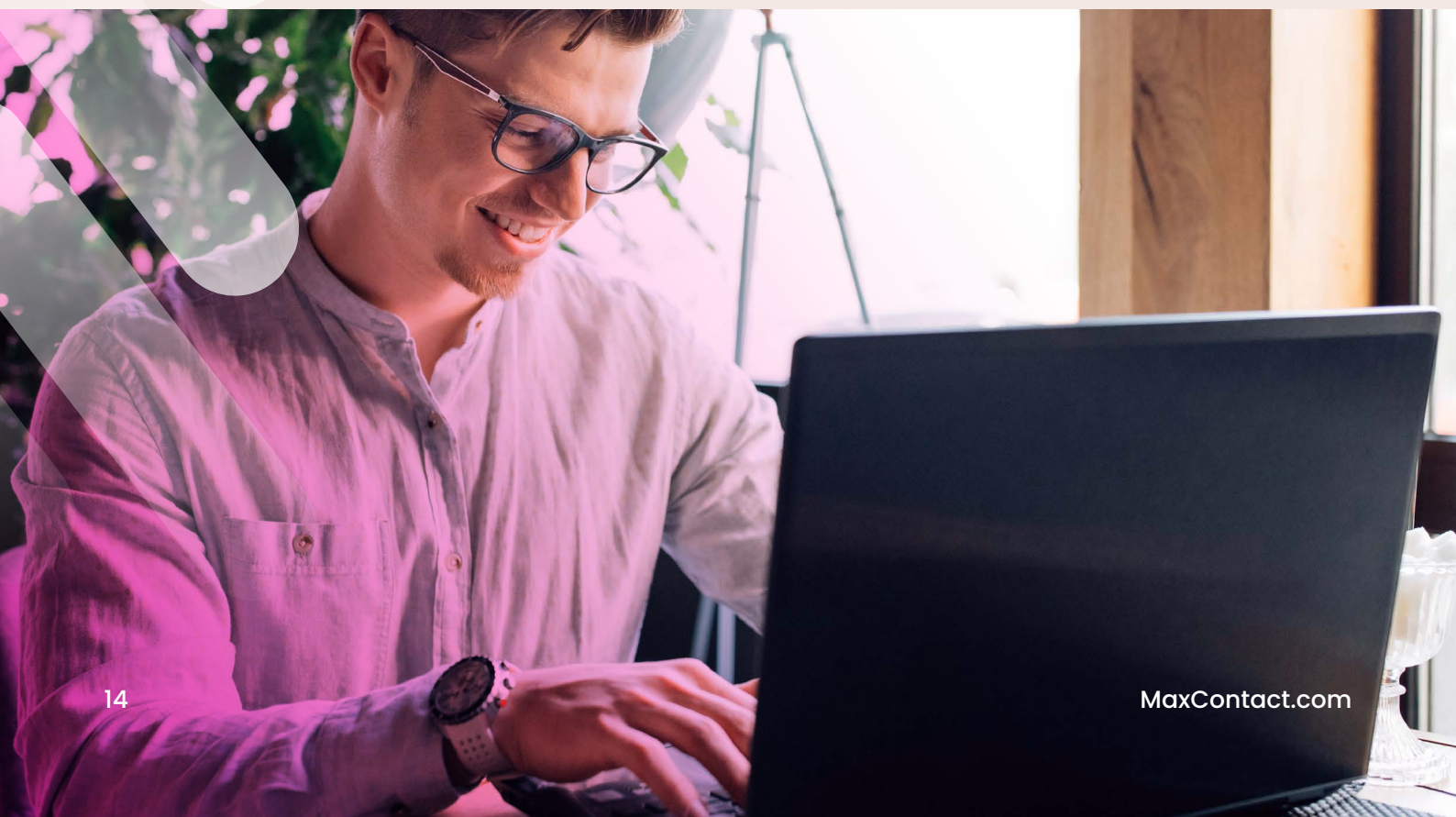
"I'm really sorry you're having this problem, that must be frustrating. If I can check some details with you, I'm sure I can get this resolved for you."



"I apologise for the inconvenience. I'm going to talk to the person who can tackle this for you straight away."



"Sorry to hear you're having that issue. Another department specialises in this, so I can transfer you straight to them so we can get this resolved, if that works for you?"





Tech support

With tech support texts and chats, the most important thing is to get the basic info you need quickly.



"I'm sorry you're having that problem. In order to resolve this quickly for you, can you please confirm your case number, business name and email address and I'll investigate further?"

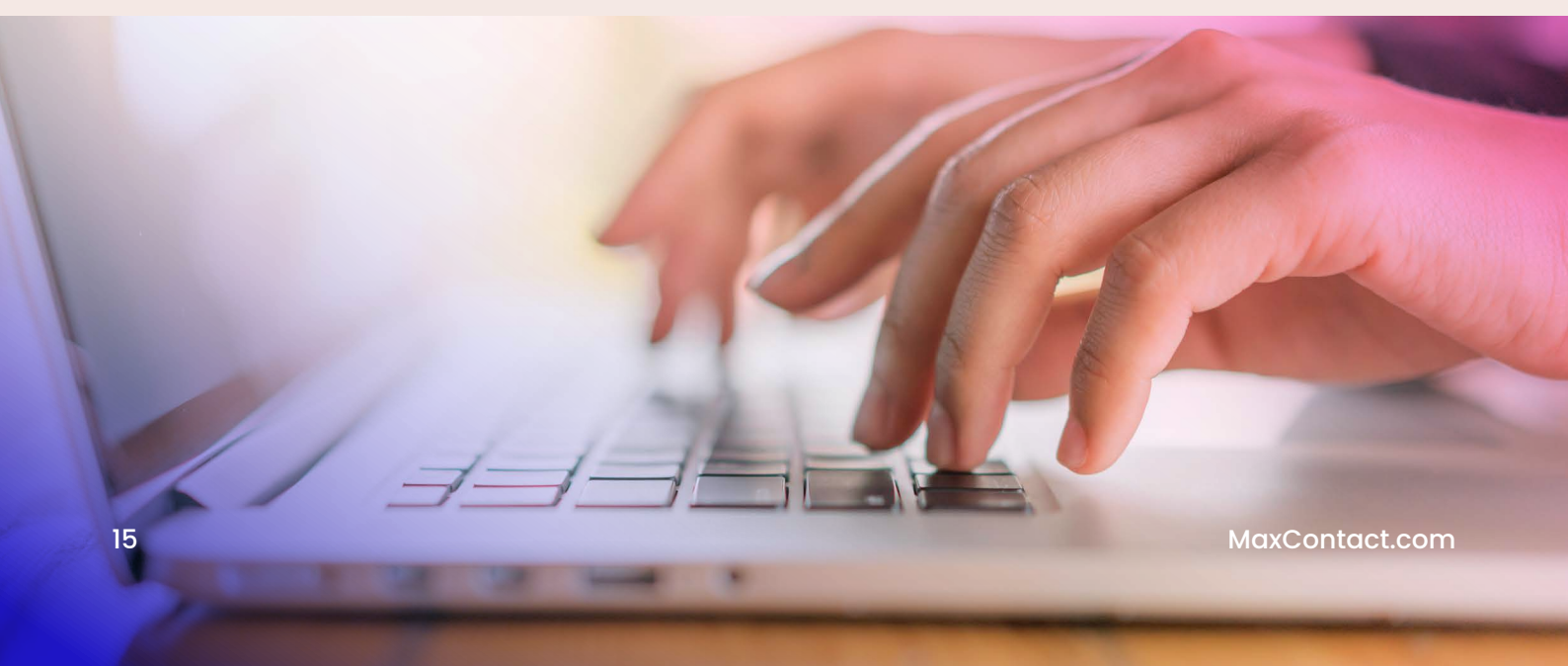


"I can appreciate your frustration. Let me investigate and sort this for you. I'll need to ask for some details first..."

"I'm sorry to hear you're having that problem. We've seen this previously, and when that's happened in the past, customers have advised afterwards that the issue was... [xxx] and the solution came from their provider. I can look into this more and advise on what our previous customers have found to get the issue resolved quickly if that would help?"



But what if it's not actually your problem? Say so, but remember you're still communicating with a customer, so making a good impression is essential.





Debt collection

This will probably involve following up with an unresponsive customer after an initial call. Remember to stay compliant at all times. Before you escalate to the legal department, try these text tactics.



“Dear XXX. Your payment of XXX was due on {DATE}, but we haven’t received it. Please send the payment no later than {DATE} via this secure payment portal {LINK}. Thank you, {COMPANY NAME}”

“Dear XXX. We still haven’t received payment for XXX, due on {DATE}. To avoid further costs, please pay by {DATE}. If you’re having trouble paying, please call us on 1234 – so we can explore ways to help. Thank you, {COMPANY NAME}”



Or:



“Dear XXX. We still haven’t received payment for XXX, due on {DATE}. You’re an important customer and we’d like to offer you a further 14 days to pay. Text EXTEND to 1234 to pay by {NEW DATE}. Thank you, {COMPANY NAME}”





Email

Despite advances in live chat and instant messaging, many people still prefer communicating by email. That's because it's relatively unobtrusive, it allows for plenty of detail and it creates a definitive trail of even the most complex conversations. Email volumes are actually still increasing.

But dealing with emails can sometimes be difficult. Emails from angry customers in particular can be unstructured, confusing and difficult to respond to. Here are some templates for your initial response.



Customer service

As always, your response to complaints should be sincere and understanding.



"Hi Mr Smith,

I've received your complaint regarding PRODUCT X and I'm really sorry you're having this issue. We appreciate you bringing it to our attention and we aim to have this resolved by {TIME/DATE}. If we aren't able to reach a resolution by this date, we will be in touch with an update.

In the meantime, we have some resources that might help, at {LINK}. I appreciate your patience and will be in touch soon with an update.

**Yours sincerely,
Dan, ABC"**

"Hi Mr Smith,

I'm really sorry your order didn't arrive when we said it would.

I've looked into this for you and your order is currently {ORDER STATUS}. That means it should arrive by {DATE}.

We'll be in touch the day after it's due for delivery to check it's arrived safely with you.

Again, I'm really sorry about this. I understand how frustrating it must be. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to get in touch.

**Yours sincerely,
Dan, ABC"**



When you eventually have the conversation, make sure you utilise information from your CRM, if you have any.



Debt collection

Once again, this scenario requires sensitivity and, above all, compliance.



"Hi Mr Smith,

I hope you're well. We haven't received payment for the amount of XXX that was due on {DATE}.

We'd really appreciate it if you could make this payment as soon as possible. Please click on the link below to check your bill and settle securely online.

{PAY NOW}

If you're having trouble paying, please don't ignore this email. Contact me on 1234 and I can talk through some options that may make it easier to pay.

**Yours sincerely,
Dan, ABC"**



"Hello Mr Smith,

I hope you're well. Unfortunately we still haven't received your payment for XXX, that was due on {DATE}.

You can pay at the link below.

{PAY NOW}

To avoid incurring further costs, please pay the outstanding amount by {DATE}.

Alternatively, please give me a call on 1234 and I can run through some payment options with you.

**Many thanks,
Dan, ABC"**



Sales

To some extent, sales email templates depend on what you're selling, and to who. But they tend to share certain standard features. You need to introduce yourself and what you're selling in the simplest way possible.



B2B

"Hi Mr Smith,

**I know you don't have much time so
I'll keep this short and sweet.**

**Our {PRODUCT/SERVICE} helps businesses like yours
{DESCRIBE PAIN POINT, e.g.: get paid more quickly}.
You don't have to take our word for it. We have the
statistics and customer recommendations to prove it.**

{LINK TO CASE STUDY OR RELEVANT BLOG}

**I've researched your business and I'm confident that
we can help you overcome your challenges. If we can
schedule a quick call - I can tell you how {PRODUCT/
SERVICE} works and what it can do for you. I can talk
you through real world examples where it has helped
businesses in your sector achieve their aims.**

**It's certainly not a hard sell though. If you don't want to
continue with the conversation after our call that's fine.
I can leave you some information and you can contact
me at a later date if you think that would be useful.**

**I look forward to hearing from you.
Dan, ABC"**



B2C



“Hi Mr Smith,

We’re all concerned by {DESCRIBE PAIN POINT, e.g.: how much we’ll have to live on in retirement} these days.

I’m Dan Bloggs, and I work for ABC, one of the {FASTEST GROWING/ MOST INNOVATIVE etc) businesses in {SPACE, e.g.: financial planning}.

After working with us, clients feel much more positive about their {PAIN POINT, e.g. retirement plans}. But you don’t have to take our word for it, our statistics and recommendations speak for themselves.

{LINK TO CASE STUDY, REVIEWS OR RELEVANT BLOG}

We have this impact because we {DESCRIBE SERVICE DIFFERENTIATOR, e.g.: use Artificial Intelligence to make sure your pension funds work much harder on your behalf}.

If you’d like to know more, please give me a call on 1234. It should only take ten minutes and it may make a big difference to your future.

**Your sincerely,
Dan, ABC”**



Writing your own scripts

In the previous sections we've tried to give general templates for starting a call, or writing or replying to texts, chats and emails when communicating with difficult customers. But we can't hope to cover all the situations you might need scripts for in one paper.

Writing your own scripts can feel daunting, but in most cases it's just about following a few simple rules. Here are five steps to writing effective scripts:



Keep it simple

With scripts, it's all about focus. Only ever try to sell one product or service. Have one goal in mind for the conversation, whether it's a further call or scheduling a demo.

It's the same with support and debt collection scripts. Keep the focus on one thing (problem A or payment B). Don't encourage a wider conversation about customer support or the cost of your product.

Be polite and - if relevant - sympathetic, but get to the core point of the script as quickly as possible. Don't waste words, and use simple language at all times.



Introduce yourself

Start every sales script by introducing yourself. It's important that you build rapport, so use your first name and personalise the conversation by using first person phrases - "I can", "I understand", "I will make sure" and so on.

If you know anything about the customer - do your research beforehand - bring it into the conversation. Mention the target company's latest product, or an earlier conversation a customer had with your company.



Write professionally

That means making sure you don't make obvious spelling and grammar mistakes. If you can't be bothered getting the details write* in an email, a customer might wonder if you'll bother to get them right in other areas of your business. A difficult customer may see it as more evidence of a lax attitude to customer service. Use online tools like Grammarly and Google's plug-in spell checker to help, but always get someone else to read your scripts for a second opinion.

**You see what we did there, and doesn't it make the sentence feel unprofessional?*



Compliance is key

Always write relevant scripts with compliance in mind. Check your industry's compliance rules before you put pen to paper or finger to keyboard.



Give customers opportunities to talk

As we've said above, a difficult customer may want an opportunity to vent. It's important that you let them. In general, getting customers talking is good, because it engages them with the conversation.

If it's appropriate, script questions for agents to ask to encourage conversational flow. Or mark in the script where the agent may want to pause to allow the customer to speak.



Consider scripts a work in progress

Scripts aren't one-offs, they're works in progress. Refine them over time using feedback from agents and evidence from call recordings. What works, and what doesn't? Are customers ever confused? Do conversations feel too rushed?

Tweak your scripts accordingly. The best way to do this is with a script editor that lets you make edits on the fly. MaxContact lets you add questions, create branching paths, and integrate third-party data, in real time and in just a couple of clicks. Importantly, it also lets you present your teams with useful in-the-moment information on one screen, so they don't have to jump between multiple windows.



Conclusion

Good scripts work. They lead to higher sales, better service and easier debt collection. They create trust and build rapport, even with difficult customers. They help you to keep tricky customers on side, rather than having them leave for a competitor while simultaneously bad mouthing your business.

MaxContact's powerful script creation tool helps you write, edit and refine great scripts, as part of our wider customer engagement solution. It means your teams always have the right messaging to hand, can counter objections naturally and have the information they need to double down on your best features and benefits. Scripting can also help your support teams quickly get to the heart of customer challenges, ensuring even difficult conversations come to satisfactory conclusions.

For more information on MaxContact's customer engagement software, please **visit our website** or ask for a no obligation demonstration.