

The Ten Best Web Support Sites of 2017 Site Scoring System

Scoring Instructions for Judges

For each of the 25 criteria described on the following pages, please assign a numerical score that reflects your judgment about this item. Most of the questions deal with your subjective impression of the site, supplemented by information supplied by the entry essays, so please draw the best conclusion you can from the available information.

Each item is worth 0-4 points. We've offered brief text descriptions that correspond to scoring levels, but there is no single blueprint for a perfect support site. If the site developers have found an innovative way to deliver a quality support experience, feel free to assign a higher score than our text descriptions might suggest. (Similarly, you should downgrade a poor implementation.)

Note that we have two categories of entries—the Open group and the Small Company group (annual revenues under \$500 million). Although the scoring questions are the same, Small Company entries only compete against each other. In addition, we will exclude the five lowest-scoring criteria for each Small Company entry in computing total average scores. This approach is intended to “level the playing field” for companies that don't have the resources to support complex, full-featured sites.

For each item, you may assign any score between 0 and 4.0, to a tenth of a point (e.g., 3.5). Since a site's overall standing will be based on a cumulative score (maximum 100 points for Open entries and 80 points for Small Company entries), it's important that you assign a score for every item; answers like “n/a” or “how would I know?” are the same as giving a score of zero points. However, if you can't locate a feature (because of password problems or difficult navigation) or if an entry essay doesn't provide essential information, feel free to assign a low score for that scoring question.

Finally, the comments: We'd like you to describe the three most important enhancements you'd recommend for each site. Length is up to you—anywhere from a few notes to a mini-essay, if that's what you feel like writing. As always, the comments are optional, but we've found that most people who enter are very eager to hear feedback from the judges about how to improve their sites.



The Association of Support Professionals
38954 Proctor Blvd., #396
Sandy, OR. 97055 USA
www.asponline.com

■ Overall Usability, Design, and Navigation

Based on your first impressions of the site and your subsequent exploration of key features, please assign scores for the following five criteria:

1. What's your impression of the support site's overall organization?
 - Strong, consistent organizational model helps users quickly find *all* post-sale support and service-related resources (4.0)
 - Tech support resources are well organized, but other post-sale content (e.g., forums, training, downloads, or phone support) is not well integrated into the main support site (2.0)
 - All elements of the site are poorly organized and hard to find (0.0)
2. What's your impression of the support site's pathways to relevant content?
 - Link-based pathways are clearly defined; usually, less than three clicks are needed to reach popular services and content (4.0)
 - Pathways are logical, but some obstacles (e.g., excessive clicks, multiple logins) interfere with access to content (2.0)
 - Redundant, confusing pathways to content (0.0)
3. How would you rate the layout of link-intensive entry-point "portal" pages (e.g., support home page)?
 - Entry-point is well organized: visitors can easily find links to most high-traffic content and services (4.0)
 - Layout is reasonably clear, but content categories seem arbitrary and some major resources (e.g., forums, contact info) are hard to find (2.0)
 - Entry point is mostly promotional and fails to link users directly to important content areas (0.0)
4. How would you describe the clarity and accuracy of navigational links and menus?
 - Customer-oriented terminology is used consistently to describe content; no jargon; no need for trial-and-error navigation (4.0)
 - Some links are vague or don't lead to expected destinations (2.0)
 - Much inconsistency, misleading links, and menu terminology (0.0)
5. How does the site help new customers and first-time visitors?
 - Site includes a general orientation feature (welcome message, site tours) (4.0)
 - No general orientation feature, but instructions on individual features are clear (2.0)
 - Site is difficult for new visitors to understand (0.0)



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■ Knowledgebase and Search Implementation

After exploring the site's content and trying a few knowledgebase queries*, please assign scores for the following five criteria:

1. What's your impression of the site's overall knowledgebase integration?
 - Search engine extracts relevant content from *multiple* sources of information, including third-party / community resources (4.0)
 - Search engine extracts relevant content from multiple sources within the company, including forums (2.0)
 - Search engine deals primarily with knowledgebase content (0.0)
2. What's your impression of the Knowledgebase search tool?
 - Incorporates advanced features, such as autocomplete, synonym recognition, spell checking, Boolean filters (4.0)
 - Standard features, with optional advanced filtering and user-defined relevancy criteria (2.0)
 - Keyword searches based on text matching; many off-topic results (0.0)
3. How well does the search engine identify highly relevant articles?
 - On-topic articles tend to appear in the first page of search results, and there are rarely any near-duplicate results (4.0)
 - On-topic articles tend to appear in the first two or three pages of results, often mixed in with near-duplicate results (2.0)
 - Most searches generate an excessive number of off-topic and near-duplicate results (0.0)
4. How well does the search engine identify highly relevant articles?
 - Answers to "frequent" questions are well-written and illustrated, often with more breadth than occurs with single-topic tech notes (4.0)
 - FAQ exists, but answers are mostly just links to standard tech notes (2.0)
 - No FAQ, or hard to find (0.0)
5. How would you describe how the site gathers feedback from knowledgebase users?
 - Asks for document quality scores and suggestions about how to improve each tech note (4.0)
 - Asks only if the document solved the user's problem (2.0)
 - No knowledgebase feedback method (0.0)

* Suggestion: To create a test query, select a question from the middle of the FAQ list and reword it.



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■ Interactive Features

Please assign scores for the following five criteria:

1. How would you describe the site's use of technology to interact with customers?
 - Developers make good use of advanced tools (e.g., remote diagnostics, configuration wizards, wikis, webinars, etc.) (4.0)
 - Competent implementation of standard Web technology (2.0)
 - Significant technical glitches (e.g., sluggish performance, multiple logins) (0.0)
2. What options are available for online case management (including repair and parts orders)?
 - Qualified users can open new cases online and track pending cases (4.0)
 - Users can submit e-mail or chat queries but can't track resolution status (2.0)
 - No way to submit cases online (0.0)
3. If the site fails to resolve a problem, what escalation options (free or fee-based) do users have?
 - Easy access to telephone or chat support (4.0)
 - Escalation to telephone or chat support is available but hard to find (2.0)
 - No telephone or chat escalation options (0.0)
4. How does the site support downloads of patches, drivers, and upgrades?
 - Site helps users determine specific download needs with auto-detect tools, advanced filtering, or product profiles (For Web-based/SaaS products, upgrades should occur automatically.) (4.0)
 - User selects downloads from menus or lists; process is fairly intuitive (2.0)
 - No downloads available, or download process is difficult to use (0.0)
5. How does the site deliver support content and services to users with smartphones and tablets?
 - All content and features are accessible on all major mobile platforms (Android, Apple, Microsoft) (4.0)
 - Partial implementation: knowledgebase, chat, phone, forums, and manuals are accessible on at least some major mobile platforms. (2.0)
 - No support for mobile platforms (0.0)



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■ Community Engagement

Please assign scores for the following five criteria:

1. How broad is the interaction between the site and its users?
 - Site actively solicits customer / community engagement in creating new content, brainstorming, taking part in user groups and forums, and other “voice of the customer” activities (4.0)
 - Customer engagement is largely limited to online forums (2.0)
 - There are no forums or other customer engagement channels (0.0)

2. How do the site managers measure the success of their online forums?
 - Key metrics emphasize forum participation: specifically numbers of active members and postings (4.0)
 - Key metrics emphasize call deflection (2.0)
 - No formal metrics for communities (0.0)

3. What kind of participation do the forums attract?
 - Forums provide a platform for discussions of success-oriented business tactics as well as break-fix technical problems (4.0)
 - Forums are mostly limited to solving product-specific support issues (2.0)
 - Forums are largely inactive, with few recent postings (0.0)

4. How do forums attract outside expert contributors?
 - Forums showcase experts with well-crafted VIP programs, including awards, ladder boards, and / or special access to resources and information (4.0)
 - Top contributors are acknowledged, but in-house support staff handle many questions in order to deliver faster responses (2.0)
 - No special efforts to identify or reward top contributors (0.0)

5. Does the support organization invite users to create personal profiles?
 - Yes, and the profiles allow users to advertise their skills and interests for networking purposes (4.0)
 - Profiles are available, but rarely contain much information (2.0)
 - No profiles are available (0.0)



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■ Site Development Strategy

Based on your review of the site-challenge essay and your experience with the site, please assign scores for the following five questions:

1. How would you describe the company's overall site development strategy?
 - Ongoing, multi-year initiative to deliver state-of-the-art customer experience (4.0)
 - Catch-up project to remedy major deficiencies (2.0)
 - Ongoing site maintenance focused on relatively minor issues (0.0)

2. How did the site developers gather information to guide their strategy?
 - Collected data from interviews, customer surveys, Web logs, usability tests, and competitive analysis (4.0)
 - Research emphasized technical data about specific infrastructure components and tools (2.0)
 - Decisions seemed to be based on site developer's personal preferences (0.0)

3. How did the site developers measure the success of their efforts?
 - Measured site performance and customer satisfaction against long-term trend lines (4.0)
 - Measured success mostly by subjective, anecdotal feedback (2.0)
 - Little evidence that success was measured in any way (0.0)

4. How did the site developers try to build support for their strategy?
 - Actively sought buy-in from internal and external stakeholders for the site improvements; involved users in beta testing (4.0)
 - Conducted a pre-launch marketing campaign to raise user awareness of the site enhancements (2.0)
 - Little effort to generate support (0.0)

5. How would you describe the "lessons learned" from implementing this strategy?
 - Insightful, strategic, applicable to broad range of situations (4.0)
 - Lessons are mostly technical and apply only to company itself (2.0)
 - Few insights gained from site development experience (0.0)



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