

# The Ten Best Web Support Sites of 2009

## 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.

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## ■ 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?
  - Site provides easy access to *all* resources from a single support home page or product-specific support page (4.0)
  - Easy access to most resources from a single page, but some content (e.g., training, downloads, or phone support) is harder to find (2.0)
  - Support resources are scattered; no primary point of contact (0.0)
2. What's your impression of the support site's pathways to relevant content?
  - Links are clearly defined; few clicks to reach relevant 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 support site's overall consistency of design?
  - All pages are based on standard, easy-to-learn templates (4.0)
  - General design consistency, but many non-standard pages and elements (2.0)
  - Major design inconsistencies across site; navigation is hard to learn (0.0)
4. How would you rate the layout of link-intensive entry-point pages (e.g., support home)?
  - Clear, uncluttered layout; prominent placement of high-traffic links (4.0)
  - Layout is reasonably clear, but little distinction between high- and low-traffic links (2.0)
  - Layout is disorganized and cluttered (0.0)
5. How would you rate the quality of site navigation instructions and menus?
  - Friendly, very clear, brief (4.0)
  - Adequate but some jargon and misleading menu terms (2.0)
  - Bureaucratic, hard to understand (0.0)

## ■ 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, in multiple file formats (e.g., tech notes, documentation, forum postings, tutorials, error code tables, PDFs) (4.0)
  - Search engine provides access to a substantial knowledgebase of tech notes and usually displays several relevant documents (2.0)
  - Search engine provides access to a fixed FAQ-style list of questions and usually displays only one response (0.0)
  
2. What's your impression of how the search function displays results?
  - Retrieves documents filtered by relevance or other user-defined criteria; clear titles and summaries (4.0)
  - Retrieves many documents, but not enough summary text to help user decide which are most useful (2.0)
  - Many results seem to be off-topic (0.0)
  
3. What's your impression of the FAQ (or similar fast-track solution) sections?
  - Well-written answers to genuinely "frequent" questions (4.0)
  - FAQ exists, but too many questions or questions seem haphazardly chosen (2.0)
  - No FAQ, or hard to find (0.0)
  
4. How would you describe the writing and editing of the knowledgebase text?
  - Well-organized, easy to follow, uses graphics or multimedia when appropriate (4.0)
  - Adequate but sometimes wordy and hard to understand (2.0)
  - Text is skimpy and assumes considerable technical knowledge; reads like unedited notes (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.*

## ■ Interactive features

*Please assign scores for the following five criteria:*

1. How broad is the interaction between the site and its users?
  - Site serves as a central portal for *all* post-sales customer interactions, including support, training, consulting, and user community (4.0)
  - Portal for multiple services, mostly related to support (2.0)
  - Services are limited to knowledgebase and downloads (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. What kind of discussion groups or forums are supported by the site?
  - One or more active forums, moderated by company or community representatives (4.0)
  - Forums seem lightly used; no moderators (2.0)
  - No forums (0.0)
  
4. Does the site invite users to sign up for e-mail alerts (e.g., software and driver updates, bugs) newsletters, RSS feeds, etc.?
  - Yes, and recipients can personalize content based on personal profiles (4.0)
  - Yes, but all recipients get the same e-mail message content (2.0)
  - E-mail is mostly promotional; little support content (0.0)
  
5. 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)

## ■ Customer experience

*Please assign scores for the following five criteria:*

1. How would you describe the site's use of technology to deliver a high-quality customer experience?
  - 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. Does the site let users create meaningful personal profile pages?
  - Yes; profile includes extensive customer history (e.g., product ownership, support activity, service agreements) and auto-fills some forms (4.0)
  - Yes, but profile is mostly a basic record of product ownership (2.0)
  - No personal profile pages (0.0)
3. 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 (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)
4. Does the site offer resources that reflect various customer learning styles?
  - Site provides extensive choices, such as standard documentation, online tutorials, webinars, technology white papers, troubleshooting wizards, application tips, alerts, etc. (4.0)
  - Primary resource is a knowledgebase, but site also includes some tutorials and documentation (2.0)
  - Only learning resource is a knowledgebase or FAQ (0.0)
5. Does the site offer personalized content for different types of customers?
  - Developers have segmented the site for different groups (e.g., major accounts vs. consumers, new users vs. power users) (4.0)
  - Segmentation is based chiefly on entitlement (e.g., free vs. paid content) (2.0)
  - Site seems to have a "one size fits all" approach (0.0)

## ■ The major site development challenge

*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?
  - Primary goal was to improve the customer's support experience (4.0)
  - Primary goal was to deal with internal issues, budget limits, technology (2.0)
  - Developers seem to have focused on resolving relatively minor issues (0.0)
  
2. In terms of the company's available resources, how ambitious was the challenge?
  - Intense ongoing improvement effort, with difficult project management and team coordination requirements (4.0)
  - A one-time development project, well-managed but fairly low-risk (2.0)
  - Business as usual, not much extra effort or resource commitment (0.0)
  
3. How did the site's developers validate their solution to this challenge?
  - Collected new information from interviews, customer surveys, Web logs, usability tests, competitive analysis (4.0)
  - Relied chiefly on own internal experience with the site and knowledge of customer base (2.0)
  - Decisions seem to have been based on site developers' personal opinions (0.0)
  
4. How did the site developers know that they had achieved good results?
  - Analyzed their results with formal ROI and customer satisfaction metrics (4.0)
  - Measured success mostly by subjective, anecdotal feedback (2.0)
  - Little evidence that success was measured in any way (0.0)
  
5. How would you describe the "lessons learned" from this challenge?
  - 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)