



Leading IT Service & Support

HDI's Certifications Ensure Your Customer Service Goals are Met

Whether you operate an in-house support center or an outsourcing operation,
HDI certifications ensure your customer service hits the mark.

HDI's Certifications Ensure Your Customer Service Goals are Met

Whether you operate an in-house support center or an outsourcing operation, HDI certifications ensure your customer service hits the mark.

Whether the support center function is provided in-house or via an outsourcer, providing excellent customer service is always the goal. To help organizations to provide quality customer service, HDI offers a series of certifications for support center professionals. These are not empty titles, but well-defined standards that provide personnel at all levels with the tools, techniques, and best practices they will need to provide exceptional customer service and support.

HDI offers certification for any support center job function:

- HDI Customer Service Representative
- HDI Desktop Support Technician
- HDI Support Center Analyst
- HDI Support Center Team Lead
- HDI Support Center Manager
- HDI Support Center Director
- Knowledge Management Foundations: KCS Principles
- ITIL v3 Foundation

HDI Certification is a key selling point for support center outsourcing firms like Technisource, one of the largest outsourcing providers in North America. According to John Migliazza, Technisource's National Practice Director for Technology Support Services and HDI Strategic Advisory Board member, the company operates five support centers across the country with over 650 agents and provides on-site support services in twenty more.

A major supporter of HDI Support Center Certifications, John says that approximately 80% of their work involves level 1 to 1-1/2 support, however, they also provide desk side and level 3 support for some specialized applications. While the HDI 2009 Practices and Salary Report seems to show a surge in outsourced functions in 2008 followed by a retreat in 2009, Migliazza says that Technisource is busier than ever.

Borrowing Skills and Tools

With ten years in the support center industry, Migliazza is bullish on outsourcing as a support center option. "We can offer the customer \$1 million worth of tools and an organization that is focused and passionate about customer service." The end result is faster speed to answer followed by better FCR performance.

Migliazza sees HDI Certification as a key element in their customer service focus. Technisource has two HDI certified trainers on staff, and HDI Support Center Analyst Certification is one of the key elements in their customer service focus. In John's words, "Customer service skills are king."

Industry Experience on Tap

Handling customers in pharmaceuticals, financial services, healthcare, the public sector, and a variety of other industries, Migliazza has a broad view of the support center industry. He feels that being a support specialist gives them a leg up in providing top-notch service, and all of their contracts include SLAs and performance requirements.

From a management standpoint, John does see differences in how organizations approach the support center objectives. "If the CFO owns it, the decision is all about price, but if the CIO owns it, the issue is service quality." He feels that with Technisource's focus on quality, flexibility, and value, they are well-positioned to take on large, complex requirements, but they are small enough to provide the type of personalized contact that the larger corporations may lack.

Bringing Outsourcing Back Home

The biggest trend Technisource is seeing in outsourcing is a move from offshore to onshore support. The quality issues are well documented, but companies found that there were plenty of hidden costs in going offshore that they hadn't taken into account. "When customers tallied up the additional travel, administration, and other overhead costs involved in an offshore operation, they found out that the economics were not as good as they originally thought," said Migliazza.

Looking ahead, it is clear that outsourcing will remain an option for organizations either as a primary strategy or to augment an in-house operation. The key will be picking a provider that understands your goals and objectives, defining the KPIs, and establishing a relationship that ensures the best overall outcome.

Targeting the Bullseye

The support center management at Target Stores shares some of those views regarding outsourcing. With over 300,000 employees and 1700 stores in 49 states, Minneapolis-based Target Stores is a retailing powerhouse. The job of supporting the IT needs of those employees falls to Brian Flagg, Senior Business Manager for Target's 24x7 Technical Support Center. Overseeing a staff of roughly 180 in-house agents and a number of outsourcing pilots, Brian takes a straight-on business approach to his job.

Flagg, also a member of the HDI Strategic Advisory Board, first cut his teeth in the support center business at IBM where he worked for over a decade. While there, he consolidated 44 independent support centers down to 14 and cut the \$75 million annual budget by half while improving performance and customer satisfaction. The support center "Mr. Fix-it" took up the challenge at Target in 2004.

Challenge Round

Target's technical support center is tasked with providing assistance to a mix of internal and external customers. In talking about his operation, Brian describes three distinct sets of customers they support:

1. Target's base of roughly 300,000 employees who are scattered across the headquarters, distribution centers, and the 1700+ stores. His agents handle calls regarding everything from traditional office PCs to handheld computers and cash register systems.

2. They also support the 12,000 vendors whose merchandise Target sells. The challenge for the Technical Support Center is to ensure that Target's electronic document interchange (EDI) systems interoperate with every one of those vendors' systems.

3. The company has recently initiated the Target Technical Support program where they provide telephone assistance for routers, iPods, and other electronic products sold to Target's customers.

When he arrived in 2004, Flagg found a support center with six vendors, no real-time monitoring, a 32% first call resolution rate, and little hope for improvement. The major performance measure was the number of calls handled per hour. However, rather than taking a blanket approach to the problem, Target applied a business-driven analysis to their support requirements with performance metrics and goals that looked at the particular needs of each set of customers.

Leveling Up

For the internal support requirements, they have incorporated many of the best practice tools and systems. Calls are screened with a skills-based routing system that sends them on to four different levels of agents designated simply A, B, C, and D. Low-complexity tasks like password resets and Outlook problems are passed to the A-level agents while progressively more complex problems are routed to the B- and C-levels. EDI support requires specialized systems integration expertise on a wide variety of platforms and those are handled by the D-level agents.

While primarily an in-house support operation, Target has been experimenting with outsourced support services in two specific areas. The Target Technical Support program is a relatively new service and is focused on Target's customers rather than its internal or supply channel users. For that reason they had chosen to outsource that function initially. According to Brian, this is a new operation and they weren't entirely sure what it would entail. By outsourcing the task they felt that they could provide the best level of customer service from the outset while gaining critical task expertise and performance data. By monitoring the call volumes, inquiry types, handling times, and other key performance indicators as well as customer feedback, they felt they could learn enough about the task to make an intelligent decision about whether it should be brought in-house.

Selective Outsourcing

Target is also looking at outsourcing some of their internal support functions but for a different reason. The largest volume of calls related to relatively basic A-level tasks, so they began investigating outsourcing options to handle those low-complexity requests. Over the past year they tested two on-site outsourcing contractors, but found they didn't measure up in terms of either performance or cost effectiveness. To address the cost issue, they began investigating off-shore options looking at providers in India, the Philippines, and Central and South America.

In typical business-like fashion, Brian doesn't have any ingrained preference for in- versus outsourcing. Like Technisource's Migliazza, he does see an overall shift in the industry over the past few years. "During the mid-decade there was a rush to offshore outsourcing," he notes, but now there's more of a preference for US-based support.

Target decided to test with a Manila-based provider. Flagg has found them to have the best mix of language skills, attitude, and technical capabilities. The test has been ongoing for about three

months, and they are still analyzing the results. With a well-tuned internal operation, a focus on efficiency and customer satisfaction, and a solid grip on costs, you get the feeling that when Target makes a final decision on in- versus outsourcing, it will be a good one.

So while the debate over insourcing versus outsourcing, onshore versus offshore continues to swirl, Target is taking the tried and true approach. However, whether the decision is to go in-house or outsource, delivering superlative customer service will be the goal. HDI Certification for the parties providing that service and managing that support center can help ensure that goal is met.

About HDI

HDI is the world's largest IT service and technical support membership association and the industry's premier certification and training body. Guided by an international panel of industry experts and practitioners, HDI is the leading resource for help desk/support center emerging trends and best practices. HDI provides members with a vast repository of resources, networking opportunities, and the largest industry event, the HDI Annual Conference & Expo. Headquartered in Colorado Springs, CO, HDI offers training in multiple languages and countries. For more information, call +1 719.268.0174 or visit www.ThinkHDI.com.