HOW TO WRITE A

CUSTOMER SERVICE E-MAIL THAT RATES A

PERFECT 10

by Leslie O'Flahavan and Marilynne Rudick

We all know that a good customer service e-mail is "one and done." It answers the customer's questions or solves the customer's problems so there's no need for a second round of contact. A great customer service e-mail goes beyond "one and done": it anticipates any related questions a customer might have and answers those, too. But what's a *perfect* customer service e-mail? It's all in the details. A perfect e-mail is easy to read, has no spelling or grammar errors, and has a subject line that does the heavy lifting—previews the e-mail's content. It offers other sources of help and makes it easy for the customer to contact you.

Use headings to help the

Here's an e-mail exchange between a customer and a customer service representative from a company we've called AutoBackup. We've dissected the e-mail, identifying the characteristics we think elevate it to perfection. Then take a look at our "Tips for Writing the Perfect Customer Service E-Mail," so that you, too, can write an e-mail that rates a perfect 10.

Customer's E-Mail –

From: KarenStocker@aabbcc.com
To: customersupport@AutoBackup.com
Subject: Laptop

I have AutoBackup installed on my desktop computer. If my desktop crashes, can I download the files backed up on AutoBackup to my laptop instead?

I don't want to back up my laptop files to AutoBackup since the files are duplicates from my desktop. But I do want to have access to the files on AutoBackup in case my computer crashes.

Thanks,

Karen

Use a helpful subject line.

Customer Service Representative's Response –

From: Vinny@AutoBackup.com
To: KarenStocker@aabbcc.com
Subject: Instructions for downloading backup files to a laptop [ID 40635]

Personalize the response.

Dear Karen,

Thank you for contacting us about whether you can download the files you've backed up on one computer to another. Yes, you can transfer backed up files from your desktop to your laptop if your desktop computer crashes.

Establish a polite, personal, and professional tone.

How to Transfer Your AutoBackup to a Different Computer

1. Log in to your account from the computer to which you would like to transfer your files.

2. Click on the My Protected Computers tab. You will see a list of computers that have AutoBackup installed.

customer scan.

3. Click on the Transfer button to bring up the installation page.

4. Follow the instructions to download and install AutoBackup on the new computer. Once installation is complete, you will see the Restore Manager screen.

5. Click on the Restore button to transfer your files to the new computer.

Provide easy-to-follow instructions.

If You Need More Help

The "Transferring Your Files" tutorial will take you through the transfer process step by step. If you have any other questions, please search our support knowledge base, e-mail us at customersupport@AutoBackup.com, or call us at (800) 123-4567. We are available Monday through Friday from 9 AM until 9 PM Eastern Standard Time.

Be sure to include your incident ID (40635) if you contact us again about this issue.

Thank you for using AutoBackup!

Make it easy for the customer to contact you.

Sincerely,

Vinny
AutoBackup Customer Support
www.AutoBackup.com

Link to additional support on your website.

Include a closing that reinforces the tone.

Make incident or tracking numbers meaningful.

Tips for Writing the Perfect Customer Service E-Mail

1. **Use a helpful subject line.**
   The e-mail has a subject line that previews the e-mail's content. Vinny did not simply reuse the customer's subject line ("Laptop") because it's not explicit enough to be helpful.

2. **Personalize the response.**
   From the start, Vinny addresses the customer, Karen, by name. He also restates her actual question, which shows that he's read her e-mail and is sending her a personal response.

3. **Write concisely.**
   There's no fat in this e-mail, no extra words or extra paragraphs. It's not loaded with promotional information about other products that AutoBackup.com hopes Karen will buy. Because all the information in this e-mail is relevant and the wording is spare, this e-mail is concise.

4. **Answer all of the customer's questions.**
   Karen asks, "If my desktop crashes, can I download the files backed up on AutoBackup to my laptop instead?" Vinny answers that question in the second sentence of his e-mail. Then Vinny goes one step further: he answers the question Karen did not ask, but still needs answered ("How do I do download the AutoBackup files to my laptop?").

5. **Include headings to help the customer scan.**
   The headings in this e-mail help the customer quickly find and read the section of the e-mail she needs most. If, for example, Karen's problem is solved, she'll simply ignore the "If You Need More Help" section.

6. **Establish a polite, personal, and professional tone.**
   A polite, personal, and professional tone in e-mail strengthens the relationship between the company and the customer. Vinny creates the right tone by using phrases such as "Thank you for contacting us" and "Thank you for using AutoBackup!" His e-mail is rich with personal pronouns, such as *you* and *we*, which give his e-mail a conversational tone.

7. **Provide easy-to-follow instructions.**
   Vinny numbers the sequential steps, making them easy to follow. He begins each step with a verb, an action word, and he's consistent in the way he presents the names of buttons (initial cap).

8. **Link to additional support on your website.**
   Agents can't know for sure whether they've provided enough detail for each individual customer. Perfect e-mails integrate other help content from the website, knowledge base, wiki, etc. Vinny has provided links to a tutorial and the knowledge base, so Karen can find additional help if she needs it. Better yet, now that Karen knows about these other customer support tools, she's likely to turn to them for help, eliminating the need to send an e-mail. That's one less e-mail you have to answer!

9. **Make it easy for the customer to contact you.**
   The access to help doesn't end with this e-mail. Vinny includes all the other ways Karen can contact AutoBackup if she needs more support.

10. **Make incident or tracking numbers meaningful.**
    If you want customers to retain incident or tracking numbers when they correspond with you, mention those numbers in the e-mail and explain why it's important to include them.

11. **Proofread for mechanical errors.**
    Vinny took the time to carefully proofread his e-mail. It contains no misspellings, errant commas, or grammar errors, which can give the impression that the company is careless or the agent is rushed.

An e-mail that rates a perfect 10 solves the customer's problems, anticipates and answers implied questions, and is easy to read. Its tone makes the customer feel valued. It's the kind of e-mail you'd like to receive and that every customer deserves.

About the Authors
Leslie O'Flahavan (left) and Marilynne Rudick are partners in E-WRITE, a writing training and consulting company that helps frontline support personal learn to write one-and-done e-mails to customers, and coauthors of *Clear, Correct, Concise E-Mail: A Writing Workbook for Customer Service Agents*. Leslie and Marilynne believe that writing is a teachable skill and that good writers are made, not born.