

Skype Vs. the Muse

Posted At : January 4, 2011 3:16 PM | Posted By : Mark Kruger

Related Categories: Humor and Life

I love Skype and have been using it for some time now. Recently we moved to using it regularly with both in-house and remote developers. It has gone very well, and of late even customers have opted for Skype as a communication method. So I decided to roll all our users into a "business" account for Skype where I could use VM, dial real numbers on occasion, use call forwarding and run usage reports. It seemed to make sense. Now *for me* Skype's interface is a little counter intuitive, but not too hard to use. Skype's site on the other hand would make Dora the Explorer throw herself in front of a lawn mower.

First, there's not a customer support number. I'm saying it obscured and hard to find. I'm saying it doesn't exist. I'm well aware that phone support is exponentially more expensive than email and chat - but Skype is purporting to be a kind of *phone company* after all right? It seems like integrated support right into the Skype client would be a no brainer, at least for paying customers. Imagine if Verizon chose to not offer phone support!

Now I can forgive the lack of a phone number. After all, Jesus didn't have a phone number either. But figuring out how to get support on the site itself turned out to be another poke in the eye. Skype has that "big button" interface that folks love. All the stuff you need is right up front staring you in the eye. That works great for Twitter where the entire site boils down to the statement, "In 180 characters or less, post banal and useless trivia", but for Skype there is some fairly complicated stuff we actually *do* need to know. How do we pay? What kind of firewall settings do we need? Do you have a Linux client? Where do we log in? So the "Simple Simon" approach gets in the way of mining for that more complicated information.

For example, the payment options are set up to be 1-2-3 simple. Choose bank, credit card or PayPal. I chose bank expecting it to ask for my ACH info so I could authorize a withdrawal. Instead it (eventually) lead me to instructions on how to call my bank and initiate the ACH myself. Why even offer that as an option in the checkout? I certainly don't want to do anything that requires more effort than what I can expend filling out forms online. So I went back and chose PayPal - which worked as expected. However, I now had a "pending transaction" on my account where Skype was expecting payment from me via ACH.

I figured there must be a way to cancel that payment - especially since I had purchased credit via PayPal already. I started hunting around the support section. This turned out to be a byzantine array of FAQ pages. But I did notice a link that said "forums". Surely someone else had experienced this same problem. I clicked on the link, but I didn't see a forum. Instead I found myself on the "Skype Community" page. There were links to things that *could* be forums (Linux, Mac, Windows, for business etc) but nothing "forum like" presented itself.

Since i had a billing question I figured it was in the "Skype for Business" category, but that category showed "Skype Manager" and "Skype Connect" as two sub topics. I clicked on "more topics" and nothing happened - It just redisplayed the same maddeningly unhelpful community page as before. Clicking on a forum I saw something forum-like - but I could not for the life of me figure out how to post a new thread. In desperation I

googled "Skype customer support" and found a link to customer service Chat. They were able to help me pretty quickly once I explained my problem - but I have now spent nearly an hour of my life that I'll never get back.

Conclusion

First, every business that sells something is a *customer service* business. You might believe you are a manufacturer, or a data aggregator or a consulting firm or whatever. In the end you have to relate to customers and you are ultimately dependent on how your customers feel about you. I tell folks with start-up ideas the same thing. There is no wonderful online model out there that runs itself and does not require you to do anything. When it's tried (as in PayPal and Skype) it tends to incur the wrath of the very folks you want to feel good about your product.

Second, your web interface should match the complexity and amount of information you intend to put on line. Sure, I know you are a fancy pants communication platform moving toward mobile at break-neck speed. But most of us still sit in front of a computer monitor (or in the case of the Muse 3 giant monitors :) and work 8 hours a day. We need easily accessible resources (both info and human) to be able to effectively use your product. So the Muse rating for Skype - great product... effective and easy to use client, good call quality (all things being equal), but ineffective support and poorly organized site information. That's my take. Now the post above is about as vitriolic as I get and I know it goes without saying on my site - but keep your comments civil and on point. I love humor and I don't mind rants - but let's not be hurtful or personal (with my apologies to Dora).