CHURNZERO

ChurnZero's Ultimate Guide to Customer Success

Updated for 2025



Your guide to driving customer growth

Customer success (CS) is the heart of every subscription business: a revenue function, a strategic business partner, a customer hub, and an owner of customer data.

When building and scaling a CS function, laying the right operational, tactical, and strategic groundwork is fundamental to your future capacity for sustainable growth. This guide distills the expertise and experience of ChurnZero's experts and our partners across the SaaS industry to help you succeed.

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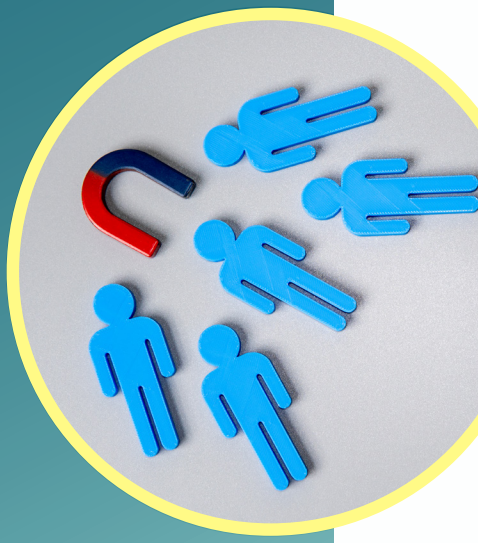
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What does modern customer success look like?

Customer success connects why customers buy your solution (their purchase intent) with what your customers get (realized value and outcomes) using a proactive and prescriptive customer management approach to reach both your customer and your company's goals.

But it's evolved to be so much more than that.

CS is a revenue engine

Customers don't renew on generic experiences. In order to keep customers aligned to their goals while still prioritizing renewals and expansion, it's critical to track data, communicate, and anticipate with predictive health scoring.

CS is a strategic driver

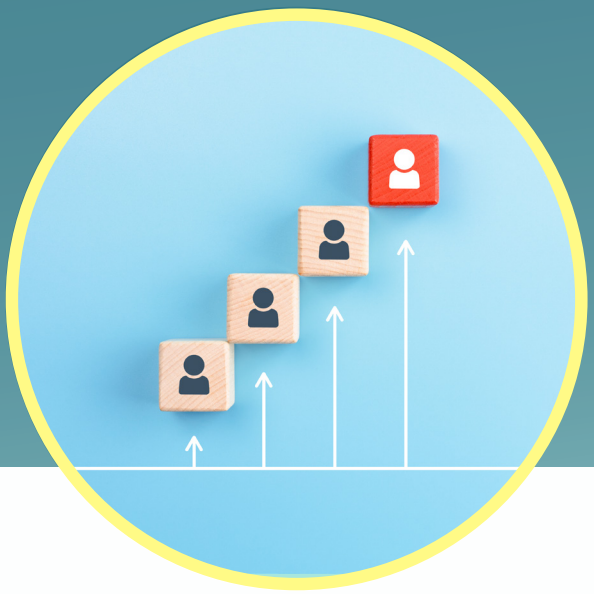
CS is built on being proactive, from preemptively addressing churn to anticipating customer needs and adjusting their journey on the go.

CS is focused on outcomes

It doesn't matter if your CS team is high-touch and consultative or automated and focused on self-service, the same tenets always apply: your product is helping customers accomplish their goals.

CS is a digital leader

The pillars of an effective digital customer success strategy include customer journeys, data and data hygiene, automation and AI technology, and content.



Customer success is a growth engine

When CS is aligned with revenue strategy, it's impactful across the company, from actionable insights for product and sales, to higher retention and more value added for customers.

It's easy to think of CS as a "retention function." But in a subscription economy, it's far more than that. CS tied to revenue outcomes is a strategic growth lever. The CS org holds the keys to driving net revenue retention (NRR), influencing customer lifetime value (LTV), improving your CAC:LTV ratio, and ultimately showing your board that growth isn't just coming from new logos; it's compounding from within your base. And that board is watching how much of your revenue is sticking, expanding, and scaling without a corresponding spike in costs.

When CS is a growth engine, your team has the numbers to prove financial impact and track NRR, expansion efforts, and customer-led growth.

According to ChurnZero research, CS is truly maturing as a revenue-driving function, with CS leaders reporting to the highest levels and managing sophisticated technology stacks.

- Most CS top metrics are revenue-driven
- Companies with higher NRR are also more likely to invest in CS
- About 40% of CS teams have owned expansion over the last five years
- When CS leaders were asked their top priorities for the next 12 months, retention and expansion were the top two by a significant margin

How are high-performing CS teams staying focused on revenue and impacting growth?

1. **NRR:** Whether your customer team is collaborating with other departments for revenue outcomes, or you outright own renewals and expansions—prioritizing net revenue retention (NRR) is how you will connect customer outcomes to revenue. Based on SaaS Capital's 14th annual B2B SaaS benchmarking survey results, NRR across all quartiles and ACV levels are growing.
2. **Renewals and expansion:** According to research from our friends at Growth Molecules, companies lose 15-20% of potential revenue growth when failing to map, identify, and act on conversion or upsell opportunities.
3. **Impact on product roadmap:** From strong onboarding and everboarding processes to integrated feedback loops and surveys, CS and product teams should be in lockstep for a customer's entire journey.
4. **Customer-led growth:** If your company is looking for operational and financial alignment, customer journey mapping can be the start of that alignment ripple effect. It starts with segmentation, strong ICPs, defined success stories, and collaborative data collection.
5. **Customer-centric executive buy-in and cross-functional alignment:** If your leadership team is aligned and all in, then cross-functional collaboration can follow.

> "CS leaders face scrutiny, pressure to deliver, and deep questions about what they own and where they belong—yet they continue to prove themselves as drivers of the sustainable revenue their companies need."
>
> **You Mon Tsang, CEO and Co-founder, ChurnZero**





Digital customer success strategy and objectives

The primary responsibilities in customer success should cover both the entire customer journey and the CS team's broader company goals:

- Operations
- Onboarding/everboarding
- Product adoption
- Renewals and expansion
- Advocacy

Let's dive right into value, objectives, and obstacles for each responsibility.

Customer success operations

As your CS team matures, your need to scale and automate grows. Having your own designated operations function is essential to maintaining high performance. Poor strategy, organization, and execution will hurt both productivity and scalability.

> "Being a good customer leader used to be primarily about human relationships: the emotional intelligence-driven aspects of customer work and people management on fast-growing teams. Today, the best CS leaders also come with something else: operational excellence. Just being the greatest at building relationships won't scale your operations or help your CSMs hit their goals."
>
> **Abby Hammer, Chief Customer Officer and Chief Product Officer, ChurnZero**

CS operations brings order and efficiency to busy, results-oriented teams. If this role still seems new or optional, just take a look at sales and marketing teams, where operations roles are standard (and indispensable).

How AI fits into CS operations

Automation and AI help your customer team scale with precision and protect margin without sacrificing quality. The most effective customer leaders approach automation as a tool to reinforce their segmentation strategy, onboarding workflows, lifecycle campaigns, and more.

Keep in mind that generic isn't enough. Proactive, human-led relationship-building is still key. Get the balance right, and you don't just reduce costs. You build a more resilient revenue base by ensuring every customer, regardless of segment, receives the level of engagement needed to succeed.

CS operations objectives

1. **Make better decisions with better data:** Include revenue forecasting, customer segmentation, account health scoring, adoption monitoring, customer satisfaction, and usage metrics.
2. **Be consistent and scalable with customer experience:** Design, personalize, and update customer lifecycle playbooks and journeys for onboarding/everboarding, renewal, adoption, and expansion.
3. **Align and measure team performance:** Include CS goals, KPIs, and workplace planning for individuals and teams.
4. **Ensure productivity by supporting the CS tech stack:** What tools are necessary for your team and your customers? And more importantly, can they inform each other in real-time?
5. **Position CS as a strategic partner:** Identify and drive strategic engagement initiatives with product, sales, marketing, and revenue operations.

CS operations obstacles

- **Waiting for the right headcount:** There's no magic team size that warrants an operations role. Operations is viable and financially beneficial because it focuses on process, procedures, and automation. All three will pay back your investment in the role. If you have a five-person CS team, and adding an operations role helps each CSM become 20% more efficient, do it.
- **Setting an inappropriate scope:** An operations role can be as broad or narrow as you need, depending on your company and its processes. Organizations that spread operations too thin, doing a lot with minimal results versus doing a few things exceptionally well, can hurt the team in the long-term.
- **Assuming another team member has the skillset and personality suited for operations:** CSMs and CS operations require different strengths. While transitioning a CSM into operations can work, it more often leads to burnout, stress, and ultimately rehiring specifically for that role.

Customer onboarding

Although onboarding marks the beginning of a customer's post-sale journey with your company, this pivotal phase plays a significant role in their likelihood to churn. Onboarding isn't just about product training and implementation deadlines. Onboarding requires a deliberate focus on customer strategy, including setting clear expectations and building a shared understanding of what success looks like for each customer, short and long-term.

> "Onboarding is a key driver of NRR and GRR because there's a strong correlation between churn and failure to launch. Customers' perceptions of value and impact don't emerge during the renewal conversation; they start on day one, which means we need a constant focus on onboarding to be strategic about renewals."
>
> **Lukas Alexander, VP of Customer Success, ChurnZero**

Your customer onboarding strategy is the foundation of your future retention and expansion revenue. Every task, meeting, and communication serves the ultimate goal of getting that customer to realize value. You aim to identify what's important to the customer, set expectations, and measure success.

The right onboarding strategy means more than just getting a customer using your product. User adoption drives down user acquisition costs, stretches marketing resources, increases customer lifetime value, and brings flexibility to your team's product resource investments.

The shift to an "everboarding" mindset

The concept of everboarding is simply combining and extending best practices in onboarding and customer engagement. CS tactics work concurrently within one, continuous loop. It includes all the big stuff we should already be providing: customer journey segmentation, health metrics, onboarding goals and training, personalized outreach, and product education.

Logistically, this is a big lift on the front end. But with integrated systems, cross-functional collaboration, and AI tools at the ready, everboarding can be a reliable, adjustable strategy for CS teams.

CS onboarding objectives

1. **Set up a cross-functional onboarding team.** Bring customer success, sales, product, and executives together to build out a customer journey that incorporates different perspectives. Customer feedback changes depending on the lens you're looking through (i.e. your team and its own goals). But it's all helpful to define responsibilities and metrics, as well as to build and maintain efficient internal workflows.
2. **Create an onboarding framework.** While it's likely any new customer may experience gaps in training or confusion at certain points, it's pivotal that your CS team treats these as opportunities to learn. Whether check-in meetings, customer feedback surveys, automated workflows, or a bit of everything, ensure that your onboarding process has checkpoints for both accomplishments and review.
3. **Segment your customers.** Without proper customer segmentation, there is no tracking. Use whatever system works best for your business: created terms like "decision makers and champions", or based on customer maturity, industry, or other demographics. Along with focused data on the new customer, this will open a world of comparative data and usage patterns that can inform how you adjust and improve onboarding.

4. **Align customer metrics with customer goals.** Common engagement expectations like CSM interactions (meetings, emails), support tickets and product questions (volume, frequency, topic), and access to resources (help guides, videos, courses) are part of keeping tabs on the efficacy of your onboarding process. But the metrics that really matter tie back to your customer's primary goal and time to value.

5. **Shift to an "everboarding" strategy (long-term and multi-phased).** A multi-phased adoption plan lays out a clear path to value that continues long after the official "onboarding" phase is complete. Instead of a deluge of information that stops just as abruptly as it started, opt for a steady stream of training, resources, and check-ins. If you've set up a team, built a framework with metrics that align with customer goals, and segmented your customers accordingly, then this step is a scheduled gut check, a reminder to iterate and keep going.

6. **Regularly talk with your customers.** The flashiest, most organized, metrics-heavy onboarding is pointless if the customer doesn't feel it was successful. Your structure and their progress should align, because ultimately the customer's perception is the reality.

CS onboarding obstacles

- **A disengaged customer.** There will always be obstacles and challenges with implementation and training; it's a new product and experience for your customer. This is why it helps to have check-ins, clear communications on the next steps in the process, and an easy way for the customer to provide feedback, continually.
- **A distracted customer.** Goals change, so it's important to set them early and review them often. If the product isn't a priority for your customer right now, you should have the steps in place to adjust scope or timing.
- **A customer with unrealistic expectations.** If your process remains engaging, adaptable, and flexible (per the above two points), then the customer will have clarity on what is reasonable and realistic to accomplish, every step of the way.



More resources:

Blog: How to turn SaaS implementation insights into a strategic asset.

Blog: Three effective strategies for improving customer onboarding with AI.

Blog: How "minimalist onboarding" could transform your product adoption.

Product adoption

Customers need to use your product consistently to realize its value and become loyal advocates. But consistency is hard, and adoption doesn't just happen; it requires changing habitual behaviors. Users must give up their old, engrained way of working to make room for new methods and modes. To drive ongoing user adoption beyond onboarding, you need an engagement strategy that delivers prescriptive guidance to grow user confidence and competence within your product in pursuit of their goals.

(To reinforce our point: double-back to our onboarding section to review our thoughts on shifting to an everboarding strategy.)

Product adoption objectives

1. **Time to value is progressive.** We need to stop tracking for a singular event. Customer goals can (and should) change as the relationship and products evolve. Stop building customer journeys and training for static behavior. A customer will never act the same on days 1, 30, and 100.
2. **Build small, meaningful wins into the customer journey.** Milestones keep us motivated. Think about achieving a fitness goal: you're less likely to keep moving forward if you only see results at the end. Achievements, celebrations, and small wins along the way are critical to customer momentum and outlook.
3. **Don't sleep on customer goal-setting early and often.** This is a top priority during onboarding, but make sure it's featured across your customer journey, from initial meetings to milestones and more. Understanding a customer's broader objectives and outcomes means a better long-term relationship and lower chance of churn.

Product adoption obstacles

- **Only training your admins.** Just as you should develop a cross-functional team to support your customer journey, you should hold your customers accountable, as well. An individual admin could change roles or priorities at any time, and no new product should be an island.
- **Only onboarding (instead of everboarding).** As discussed in the onboarding objectives: the new normal is a steady stream of training and content, AKA "everboarding" customers so they are continually supported.

Customer renewals and expansion

Recurring revenue is the lifeblood of SaaS companies, so your CS team needs a clear plan and process to facilitate renewals and expansion.

ChurnZero research shows that CS teams still "own" the renewal process and a good portion of expansion. But ownership isn't a strategy.

The best CS teams understand it starts with investing in value-building programs at the onset, balancing incentives, and prioritizing readiness and timing over pursuing every single upsell.

Renewals

Accurately forecasting renewals means CS teams can better prioritize their customer outreach and intervene before it's too late to save a churning customer—eliminating unwelcome surprises and lost revenue.

Customer renewals best practices

1. **Set a plan with your internal team.** Determine how you'll forecast and report on renewals, and broadcast this wide and often. Your team should operate with clear benchmarks if you expect them to deliver.

2. **Be transparent about the renewal process with your customers.** Don't assume a customer's budget or upcoming company goals. Be transparent about renewal timelines and costs, and if you offer renewal options (i.e. term lengths, packages, other incentives), then discuss those frequently.

3. **Measure metrics to build the real customer story.** A general renewal plan will mean nothing if you're not listening to specific customer engagement data. Prioritize retention outcomes (cancellations, downgrades, discounts), feedback data across departments (surveys, support tickets, A/B testing, user-generated content), and company events or incidents (system outages, product changes)

4. **Build a "challenges map" to anticipate obstacles.** There will always be external factors affecting customers (and the data you collect). To plan for potential business and team challenges, construct a list of obstacles that is true to your CS team's and company's circumstances (everything from non-recurring revenue and company growth to economic uncertainty).

Expansion

Customer expansion has a substantial impact on your company's bottom line, helping to recover revenue lost to churn and rising customer acquisition costs. Expansion increases your customer lifetime value, and therefore company profits, while decreasing your company's reliance on revenue from new customers.

Expansion is also the quantification of a value-realized partnership. The most successful partnerships are win-win: the customer sees success, so they want to do more business with you.

Those CS teams excelling at expansion are framing products and opportunities to business goals (not just functionality), training customers to gain value and expand at the right pace, and training internally to develop natural commercial conversations.

Customer expansion best practices

1. **Lean into buying signals.** Indicators for customer growth can arise from both inside and outside of your product. Stay attuned to product usage, knowledge base searches, resource downloads, review site searches, support tickets, surveys, and license utilization increases.

2. **Demonstrate realized and potential value.** Develop a clear methodology for quantifying and demonstrating customer value (i.e. product performance, cost savings, case studies).

Renewal and expansion mistakes to avoid

- **Renewing bad-fit customers.** If the customer is a drag on growth, a waste of resources, or harmful to employee morale and industry reputation, then cut your losses. It's okay to let a bad-fit customer churn.
- **Tackling the renewal process alone.** No CSM should be solely responsible for renewals. Your CS team, CS leaders, and company leadership all have different relationships and responsibilities with your customer, and everyone is motivated to support that renewal.
- **Rushing expansion offers.** It's poor form to ask a brand-new customer to consider buying additional licenses or products. If your pricing model is based on user licenses and your customer is overutilizing, then have a conversation (instead of sending a surprise invoice). Demonstrate that you are a partner and advocate first, and future expansions should naturally follow.
- **Prioritizing selling over advocacy.** Timing and value are important when expanding your customer base. Look for ways to offer value and provide information on what else is available. It's just wrong to sell for the sake of selling.



More resources:

Product info: ChurnZero Renewal and Forecast Hub

Blog: A data-driven framework for customer success renewals forecasting

Blog: Apply the REACH framework to drive expansion in customer success

Customer advocacy

The best CS leaders develop customer relationships with empathy, trust, and a human connection. As with any relationship, these intentional soft skills are what shift customers from satisfied to advocates.

Not only do customer advocates sing your praises, but they also provide honest feedback on your products and services. This candid advice is central to driving product enhancements, which in turn builds more trust for future referrals, references, and outstanding reviews.

Customer advocacy objectives

1. **Track and celebrate customer wins.** Every step forward, positive action, or product lesson learned is a chance to celebrate and encourage customers. Compile a list of winning actions to track, and make sure customers feel supported and celebrated along the way. Examples include: first login, early adopter of new features, training course completion, anniversary, feedback participation.

2. **Identify existing (and potential) customer advocates.** Make it convenient for existing customer advocates to continue sharing their experiences. And since every customer can be an advocate, ensure your "everboarding" and customer journeys are on point—that consistency could bring in new advocates from your customer base (or even the detractors list).

3. **Incentivize advocacy for everyone.** Whether it's intrinsic recognition or extrinsic motivation (nothing wrong with the occasional prize or discount!), create an incentive plan for customers who provide testimonials, case studies, referrals, and reviews.

Customer advocacy obstacles

- **Waiting for public praise from customers.** It's great to identify advocates in public channels, where customers have already expressed value. But don't forget about querying the CS team for happy customers, longstanding customers, or those quiet customers who continue to expand their accounts.
- **Not thanking customers for that recognition.** Make sure your advocates are consistently aware of how much you appreciate them. It's less about the incentive (SWAG, promotional articles, discounts), and more about the gesture.
- **Ignoring passives or detractors.** The ultimate goal is to help customers realize value. If they're not finding it, it's even more important to adjust and improve the experience. Your biggest evangelists can come from the detractors list (and people love a good comeback story).



More resources:

Blog: The psychology behind effective customer success

Blog: How to manage conflict in customer success



Cross-functional alignment

In fast-growing companies, cross-functional misalignment is one of the biggest challenges that CS leaders face. It impacts your work, your team, and your customers' experience.

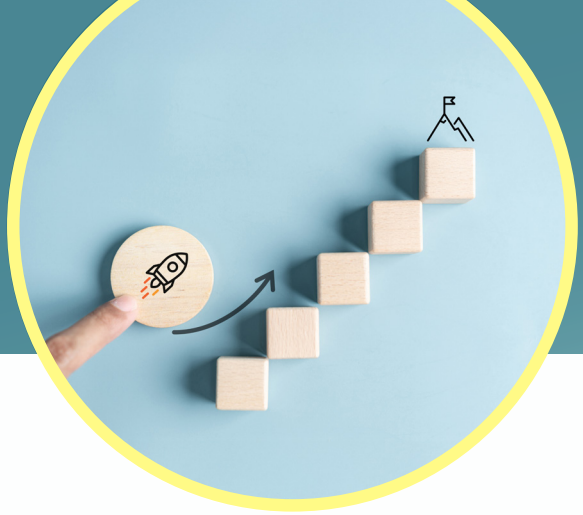
Internal collaboration between CS and other teams is trending up. But alignment isn't something that just happens—it takes work. The teams must have a shared understanding of customer needs, the company's vision, and each other's roles in fulfilling both. Without mutual respect and commitment, the collaboration among all functions falls apart.

Better alignment among CS, product, support, sales, and marketing drives increased product adoption, retention, and ideally deeper customer relationships.

So how do we get everyone on the same page?

- **Establish clear charters between CS, sales, and AMs.** The boundaries between teams should be intentional, not political. Ambiguity creates tension and inefficiency. Alignment creates velocity.
- **Diversity of perspectives is key.** Bring in leaders from product, onboarding, sales, enablement, support, marketing, and operations. The CEO and CRO are also required participants.
- **Group customer journey mapping.** Assign cross-functional teams to align on customer personas and map each journey by phase. Take care to consider both customer and internal perspectives (i.e. tasks/activities, outcomes, transitions). Build out a framework that supports the product roadmap and includes ownership and timelines.
- **Pay attention to friction points.** Common transition points, such as sales to onboarding, can seem solid in isolation but leave our customers feeling unprepared. Set expectations early and often for internal teams, and make sure those internal goals are aligned with customer outcomes.

Starting with shared accountability, and a willingness to collaborate across customer and company goals, sets any CS team up for a top-notch customer success strategy.



How to build a top-notch customer success strategy

You have the right teams and stakeholders in place - now it's time to craft the full customer experience:

- Ideal customer profiles
- Customer segmentation
- Customer goal setting
- Customer journeys
- Renewals and expansion
- Compensation plans
- Key performance metrics
- Customer-centric organizational alignment

These strategic areas will keep your CS team focused on achieving goals, allocating resources, reducing customer churn, expanding accounts, and exceeding your customers' expectations.

Ideal customer profiles

Having a clear definition of your ideal customer is one of the most beneficial things you can do for your business. Your ideal customer profile (ICP) dictates everything from the product features and functionality you build to the words you use and the emotions you evoke in your marketing.

Defining your ICP should be a company-wide affair. Involve all departments that touch the customer during their lifecycle—particularly product, sales, customer success, and marketing. Bring these teams together to decide on an initial ICP, then plan on actively revisiting it as your product, services, and market evolve.

Now, it's worth noting that you will sell outside of your ICP. That's to be expected and is not your sales team being irresponsible. Part of the reason your ICP changes is from purposely pursuing customers who might be slightly outside of your scope and testing whether you can successfully service them.

This is where you'll start to refine how you serve "stretch-fit" versus "bad-fit" customers:

Stretch-fit customers

- Deliver initial value
- Offer solutions to broader use cases across customer base
- Anticipate potential future value in reasonable timeframe (pending products, contracts, buyers) based on customer goals

Bad-fit customers

- Manage expectations of immediate or future value in reasonable timeframe
- Only offer solutions to specific, individual issues
- Acknowledge misfit between your company/product and customer goals/ structure

In practice, sales and CS are often misaligned on defining stretch versus bad-fit customers. Communication is key. According to customer retention benchmark report results from SaaS Capital, early-stage companies often focus heavily on new sales (closing deals with anyone willing to write the check). As a company matures, this will show up as churn in GRR.

> "As a customer leader, you can influence the discipline it takes to walk away from bad-fit deals. Sharing post-mortems, quantifying the cost of misaligned wins, and highlighting the opportunity cost of distraction can help shift mindsets across sales, marketing, and the C-suite."
>
> **Sarah Kiley, Chief Sales Officer, ChurnZero**

By prioritizing ICP-fit accounts, and consciously deprioritizing non-strategic customers, you can protect GRR proactively while making significant efficiency gains too.

Leading companies use signals like product usage depth, integration velocity, time to value, support interaction patterns, and Net Promoter Score® (NPS®) by segment to pinpoint their best-fit customers. On the other hand, chronic escalations, lack of measurable outcomes, and low platform engagement often reveal poor-fit accounts. These indicators help teams refine the ICP and proactively manage risk.

Top tips: establishing your ICP and customer fit

- **Start with the product team.** ICP should never be owned by just one department, but the baseline proposal should start with product. As the function most intimately familiar with your solution, the product team should know who you're targeting and what problems you aim to solve.
- **Confirm with data, not anecdotes.** If you want to legitimize concerns about bad-fit customers, you need to substantiate those claims. What proof points and metrics can you cite? What's your baseline to identify where and how the fit started to deviate? Take a step back and listen to what customer data is telling you.

- **Set boundaries.** Stay in lock-step with sales and conduct more upfront vetting during the sales process. This clearly outlines limitations and sets reasonable expectations to prevent fallout down the road.
- **Accept when churn might help.** As the product and market matures, your business decisions will inherently push some customers out of your ICP (and bring others in). When a solution is new, it's often beneficial to churn some earlier customers, especially when testing and refining the alignment between your value proposition and ICP.



More resources:

Blog: How going the extra mile to understand customer propelled Squire into a $750 million SaaS company

Customer segmentation

If your customer success strategy is still centered around catching churn in real time, you're behind. The top CS leaders are engineering retention by building systems that detect risk early, reinforce value continuously, and empower every team member to act

When a main driver of CS programs is risk avoidance, teams become susceptible to reactive processing. Prioritizing factors like upcoming renewal dates or "squeaky wheel" customers makes for a volatile, unfocused program.

How do you structure programs around a more proactive, customer-centric approach?

Start with strategic segmentation, a foundation for a proactive customer retention program. Segments divide your base into groups of customers and users with similar characteristics and needs, empowering you to provide programs, services, and prioritization tailored to each group. A thoughtful and thorough approach to segmentation is the key to improving adoption, minimizing churn, and maximizing expansions.

Customer segmentation examples

- Key customer information (role, contract size, license count)
- Customer lifecycle stages and milestones
- Company maturity
- Customer behavior
- Desired engagement
- Potential value
- Goals driving partnership
- Product use cases
- Product fit
- Influence/strategic value
- Demographics, firmographics, technographics
- Usage and value gained

Top tips: customer segmentation

- **Let marketing and sales inform, but not dictate.** It's a myth (and a problem) if you assume you must follow the same segmentation strategy as marketing and sales. When you default to using a set of prescribed segments and try to apply data to fit that strategy, then you're skipping ahead. Results won't be accurate, or even clear.
- **Stop using one-size-fits-all segments.** Even if two customers share the same goal, they may require distinct ways of achieving those goals. Consider the types of engagement you need to provide to get different types of customers to reach their outcomes.
- **Avoid over-engineering.** It's easy to get excited and build a million segments. But slicing your customer data beyond practical application leads to overwhelm, unsustainable work, and subsequent inaction.
- **Refine based on your (also refined) ICPs and customer goals.** Goals change. Keep an eye on product consumption, feature activation, and business outcomes along the way. Coordinate this data with updates to your ICP so that segmentation remains up to date and cross-functional.
- **Keep an eye on churn analysis.** While prioritizing churn can be reactive, it shouldn't be ignored. Maintain a regular cadence of check-ins regarding signals, value realization, and financial impact, because it all affects...you guessed it: segmentation and ICP.

> "The most effective customer leaders approach automation as a tool to reinforce their segmentation strategy. Use it to deliver the right touch at the right time, whether through onboarding workflows, usage-based alerts, or lifecycle campaigns that keep your customers progressing toward their goals. These efforts extend your team's reach and create consistency at scale."
>
> **Sarah Kiley, Chief Sales Officer, ChurnZero**



More resources:

Experiment: Play the "same price tag" game. Pretend all your customers pay the exact same price for your product. What other criteria do you focus on now, and how will you differentiate those customers? With Annual Recurring Revenue (ARR) no longer a factor, it's easier to weigh other options like use case, tenure, outcomes, and feature usage.)

Blog: AI for customer success operations: how to design a segmentation strategy with AI as your assistant

Customer goals and outcomes

There's a ton of advice out there about customer goal setting, but most of it isn't scalable. Goals are often treated as terribly unique to each customer. We're led to believe the only way to set customer goals is to discuss them at length with each individual customer. Unless you have unlimited resources, that's not feasible.

A more effective solution is to develop a data-informed approach to identifying customer goals. This framework should be based on your product's functionality, as well as your customer's purchase intent, product fit, feedback, and data.

And to be clear, just because you don't use a high-touch model doesn't mean that goal setting isn't viable. Your strategy's efficacy boils down to how you track and react when customers don't achieve their goals. Unless you offer a 100% custom service (which no SaaS provider does), you should have a baseline for how customers use your product. More importantly, that baseline should reflect the usage behavior of your most successful customers who continually renew. Look at the specific actions and accomplishments of those customers. From there, figure out how to repeat that model so you can stop reinventing the wheel every time you onboard a new customer.

Top tips: customer goals and outcomes

- **Establish clear roles on both sides.** Hopefully you've clarified cross-functional team roles. But also know who is responsible for product-related goals, internal expectations, and primary contacts on the customer's side.
- **Start with short-term goals.** Don't force yourself to measure customers against goals that need more time, progress, or evaluation in the long-term. Identify immediate milestones early (e.g.: the welcome call) by asking your customer what they want to accomplish in the first three to six months.
- **Stick to goals within your control.** If a customer is fixated on a goal that you only partially influence, take the time to clarify elements you and the product can impact. Then set clear expectations about how those elements will feed into the larger goal.
- **Share your data with customers.** Candid conversations are critical, and those only happen when data resides with both CSMs and the customer. If you've already agreed on what constitutes success, then a shared dataset will show the customer's progress toward that defined outcome.
- **Get customers invested in their own success.** The most successful CS programs promote accountability and collaboration. That means we need to approach customer goals from both the vendor and customer perspective. Actions mapped to both sides will yield better results.



More resources:

Blog: How to hold customers accountable, and other outcomes based customer success best practices

Customer journeys

You have an ICP, you've segmented your customers, and you've prioritized goals and outcomes. Now, what's your plan to help customers achieve success?

Customer journeys outline clear expectations of what's needed from both your internal team and your customers. Think of this as packaging the work you've already done into a cohesive but flexible customer program. Examples of customer lifecycle journeys include customer onboarding and everboarding, adoption, renewals and expansion, and advocacy; elements you've already reviewed and planned for!

Before diving in: remember the customer journey should prioritize the customer perspective.

The most common mistake companies make when creating their customer journeys is to start by mapping meetings, processes, and goals they internally want to have. Rarely do these align with customer goals and outcomes. A well-designed customer journey shows a customer the pathway to success, instills confidence in the steps to get there, and holds them accountable when they miss actions or change course.

We recommend a four-step process to sketch out your base map, the starting point of any customer journey:

1. **Define the customer's end goal.** Hopefully, you've already established these goals and outcomes at the start of your customer relationships. If not, double-back and reassess.
2. **Identify milestones and events.** What does the customer need to experience to work towards their goal? And what's the quantifiable value in this phase? In other words: what data can we track to stay on course?
3. **Layer in internal meetings, processes, and resources.** What are the top items that you, as the vendor, need to provide in service of the customer's goal and timeline?
4. **Add contingencies.** Goals and plans get off-track. How can you foster responsibility and collaboration in these scenarios?

Top tips: customer journeys

- **Divide and conquer.** The biggest challenge to building customer journeys is believing there needs to be one across all customer segments. Customer journeys are easier to define and manage when broken up into smaller journeys. Onboarding is a great place to start, since you and the customer have already established process and timeline expectations.
- **Practice what you plot.** A journey has no purpose if it's not operationalized. Milestones and touchpoints exist to produce a specific event or chain of events. If customers aren't taking action, then all you have are vanity steps.
- **Build a unified customer POV.** If every department understands the customer journey through their own lens, that fractures the customer's experience. Cross-functional collaboration is constant, and democratizing customer insights across the company breeds consistency and reliability.



More resources:

Blog: How to redesign your customer journey for future scale

Renewals and expansion

As a subscription business, you need customer retention and account expansion to fuel your growth engine. And we believe it's vital for CS to own renewals, as well as how to navigate the murkier territory of expansion ownership.

> "CSMs should, ideally, own renewals and expansions if the company's structure permits it. Over the past decade, this role has evolved significantly, and I believe we've earned the right to own the bottom line. I also believe that CS teams should collaborate with other departments where specialized skills are better suited for achieving commercial outcomes."
>
> **Lukas Alexander, VP of Customer Success, ChurnZero**

Renewals

Let's start with what not to do when it comes to renewals:

- Don't reintroduce the salesperson from a year ago.
- Don't bring in an account manager who hasn't been working with the customer.
- Don't assume your CSM is inherently lousy at having money conversations.

So how do we foster a smooth renewal process? With the individual (usually CSM) who's invested the most time and effort to develop the customer relationship and deliver value. They have helped that customer realize goals and outcomes, and have demonstrated ROI. And if there's a lack of experience with having money conversations? That can be fixed with practice, role playing, and professional development.

To own renewals, CS must tie what it does to definable, measurable business value. If there are no clear deliverables, the function's contribution and worth become blurred within the organization.

If it's not an option to own renewals right now, work on finding other metrics to prove your value and move beyond customer interactions and NPS.

Expansion

While most CS teams are solid in their ownership of renewals, ownership of the expansion process tells a more complicated story.

ChurnZero research shows that 40% of CS teams have owned expansion over the last five years. Account management teams increased their ownership from 20% to 29% since 2022 (while sales ownership of expansions decreased from 33% to 24% in the same time period). Yet, only 44% of CS teams reported being compensated for expansions in 2024—down from 57% in 2023.

Expansion ownership isn't as clear-cut as renewals. Your strategy and processes will depend on the following:

- CS involvement in upsells and cross-sells.
- Complexity of the new product being sold.
- Level of CS insights into buying signals.
- Opportunities for revenue sharing.

Top tips for renewals and expansion

- **Set negotiation boundaries.** Create rules around what a CSM can offer during renewal or expansion negotiations without requiring leadership approval. CSMs can negotiate with more authority and efficiency when they understand the guardrails.
- **Rules of engagement should be a partnership.** Cross-functional collaboration means everything. A united front (across leaders and teams) strengthens your offer and negotiations.
- **Continually amend those rules.** It's impossible to account for every expansion scenario, so be ready to refine, and refine again, when new situations arise.
- **Use a phased approach when transitioning teams.** To ease fears between sales and CS, and demonstrate proof of concept, try a phased transition approach to renewal and expansion ownership. Experiment with a subset of customers (perhaps a segment where renewals aren't as strong). Test the new structure and ask customers about their experience to substantiate your case.



More resources:

Blog: Negotiation tactics for customer success managers

Research: 2024 CSM Confidential Report

Compensation plans

Your compensation plan should relate to the behavior you want to incentivize (sounds obvious—still incredibly important). Consider what matters to your business and what actions you want to influence. Those factors will change based on team structure, company maturity, and goals.

How you compensate your CS team is often connected to how directly their contributions tie into the company's performance. Popular compensation models like a base salary or base salary plus bonus are relatively standard, but we don't recommend them for CS teams:

- **Base salary:** CS team primarily responsible for adoption, not accountable on business "hard numbers", no connection between performance and pay (lack of incentive).
- **Base salary plus bonus:** Base salary structure with bonus tied to company's overall performance (general incentive, not tied to output or performance).

At ChurnZero, we're big advocates of the base salary plus variable model. While CS is still a growing function, there is no universally established variable model. However, there are clear benefits and a few standard factors to consider:

- It's an effective way to tell people where and how to direct their focus and energy.
- Clearly ties individual team member responsibilities to department goals.
- Can align with customer base makeup, account ownership, and renewal/expansion opportunities.
- Opportunity to employ a base-variable split for certain scenarios based on team complexity and the stability of book of business (e.g. enterprise team with low churn and how expansion potential uses 60/40 split, while an SMB team with history of volatile customer base uses an 80/20 split).

Top tips for compensation plans

- **Compensate based on behaviors.** To avoid setting your team up for failure, concentrate on the team's precise responsibilities and areas of influence. For example: don't hold your onboarding team accountable for renewal and expansion rates.
- **Limit the variables.** The number of factors should be manageable for you, understandable to your team, and controllable throughout the year.
- **Avoid broad metrics.** Loose factors may do more harm than good. Don't risk encouraging low-quality engagements and crediting superficial interactions because you're focused on "number of customer touchpoints." Instead, be transparent about the metrics that matter for performance.
- **Reward proactivity (rather than lagging indicators).** Identify factors that influence your lagging indicators and reward the team's proactivity, so there are no surprises when a customer's health isn't as strong as expected.
- **Test rotating variables.** Maintain a few "pillar" variables throughout the year, with one variable factor that changes quarterly. Each quarter, the team selects the variable that aligns with current goals.



More resources:

Blog: Customer success under the CRO: five tips for customer leaders

Blog: How to create more effective job descriptions for customer success roles

Key performance metrics for CS teams

If your CS team doesn't have baseline metrics, start with your "why." This is your theory about how a customer needs to use your product to realize success. Compare that theory against the usage behavior of your most successful customers, as well as your churned customers.

By conducting use case studies to validate, or invalidate, your theories, you can develop a more acute understanding of behavioral patterns. Asking a broad question like, "What does a customer have to do to renew?" won't yield meaningful responses. Instead, ask a more precise, actionable question like, "What does a customer have to do with these three features by X date to renew?"

Remember: don't compare apples to oranges. When sourcing metric baselines from fellow colleagues or industry experts (including us!) make sure their guidance is rooted in context similar to that of your business.

Top customer success metrics

From acquisition costs and account expansion to customer churn and satisfaction, the number of SaaS metrics is dizzying. But CS is a strategic growth lever, and CS leaders need to find and focus on the measurements that matter to prove revenue outcomes.

> "Customer success teams will become the most important and impactful department in SaaS companies. And there is no world where the function does not exist at B2B subscription companies."
>
> **You Mon Tsang, CEO and Co-founder, ChurnZero**

Here are the top four metrics we think every CS leader should prioritize.

Net revenue retention

Net revenue retention (NRR) reflects your ability to retain and expand customers. NRR calculates total revenue (including expansion) minus revenue churn (contract expirations, cancellations, or downgrades).

Arguably, NRR is the single most important metric to customer success. It captures the total impact of customer expansion, contraction, and churn. Companies with NRR higher than 120% consistently earn premium valuations because their growth doesn't rely entirely on acquiring new customers.

Based on SaaS Capital's 14th annual B2B SaaS benchmarking survey results, NRR across all quartiles and ACV levels are growing. And a reminder: the sky's the limit when it comes to NRR benchmarks and goals (i.e. the ability to go above and beyond 100%, unlike GRR). And the higher your NRR, the more your growth rate will increase.

Sidenote: comparing NRR against GRR

Compare NRR against your gross revenue retention (GRR) or customer/logo retention to ensure strong revenue retention isn't masking an underlying issue with customer retention. An imbalance between these metrics is a red flag.

The difference between NRR and GRR is that GRR doesn't account for expansion revenue. It also tends to decline as companies grow. Over time, your customer base becomes more diverse, leading to more opportunities for churn. Use the two metrics in conjunction with one another to tell the whole story on customer retention, and take cues from leadership on which metric to prioritize as the company matures.

The higher your NRR, the higher your company's growth potential, as you're not constantly expending resources and revenue to replace churned customers. High NRR also alleviates stress on sales to offset that churn with more new business.



More resources:

NRR formula and examples

GRR formula and examples

Customer lifetime value

Customer lifetime value (CLTV) is the gross profit a customer delivers to your business in their lifetime. Your ratio of CLTV to customer acquisition cost (CAC) tells you how profitable a customer will be over their lifetime compared to the marketing and sales costs spent to acquire them.

Strike a balance between the date of a customer's acquisition and the amount of time it takes to increase their profit. If a large portion of customers churn at the one-year mark, then don't spend all that budget to acquire and retain customers for their first year.

This is a company health metric. High CLTV means you're building long-term, profitable relationships. Low CLTV suggests customers may view your company as transactional, with poor retention or expansion execution.



More resources:

CLTV formula and examples

Customer health scores

Customer health scoring evaluates a customer's overall engagement and satisfaction with your company in a single score, used to gauge a customer's renewal likelihood. There are several ways to express customer health, including assigning points, implementing rankings (A, B, C), or using a color-coding system to indicate good, average, or poor health.

Predictive health scoring helps you anticipate potential issues, so you have more opportunities to course-correct and control the scope of the impact. After all, the defining characteristic of CS is its proactivity, and health scoring is a metric that embodies and delivers on that promise.

An effective health score is dynamic with multiple weighted factors that include both quantitative and qualitative attributes. If you don't use health scoring, you'll want to track the individual factors that comprise a health score, such as customer satisfaction, product usage data, license utilization, onboarding time, journey tracking, etc.

Remember that a customer's decision to renew is influenced by multiple teams, not just CS. It helps to get granular by breaking down health scores to see where specific teams have the greatest impact. For example, a new customer's health score is heavily influenced by marketing and sales, while a tenured customer is more affected by CS and product.



More resources:

Health Score examples

Customer Health Score Handbook

Customer satisfaction

It matters less which customer satisfaction metric you use, and more that you're consistent with how you survey and respond to customers:

- **Net Promoter Score (NPS):** can be a strong pre-renewal indicator for CS teams
- **Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT):** good indicator for quality support interactions
- **Customer Effort Score (CES):** helpful with customer implementation assessments

You can segment by role to separate the sentiments of everyday users from executive sponsors. Survey results from business decision-makers have a stronger correlation with renewals and expansion.

Top tips on KPIs for customer success

- **Avoid vanity metrics.** The number of emails exchanged or meetings scheduled will not reflect customer engagement or satisfaction.
- **Understand customer usage behavior.** If you want to increase product adoption, you must understand how customers use (or don't use) your product. A minimum list of usage metrics to track include login history, time in app, engagement with sticky or new features, and actions of power users.
- **Not all usage metrics are created equal.** You wouldn't qualify a customer as "healthy" just because they log in. When setting customer usage goals, shift away from "number of active days" and more towards "X percent growth in use of Y feature" that can correlate to retention. Delineate between tracking a behavior and how it influences a core business metric.

- **Be ready to shift your targets.** As you exceed or miss your numbers, adjust until you hone in on a sensible goal. The more data you accrue, the easier it is to assess historical performance and reset targets. Remember: the most important thing is to just get started.
- **Make metrics personal.** Educate other teams on how they impact your own metrics. For example, when sharing NRR with sales, break it down by rep so they understand their personal impact on revenue. And share open-ended comments on functionality from satisfaction surveys with the product team.



More resources:

Blog: The five customer success revenue metrics that matter

Customer-centric organizational alignment

The most effective way to align teams and leaders is through shared metrics. Quantified accountability builds a strong foundation and motivation for collaboration. Ideally, these are core business metrics all employees feel responsible for, even if they're not part of the team that directly owns them. By establishing a personal or team connection to a metric, you can start to influence behavior. And exact metrics will depend on the context of your collaboration: what's the goal, who's involved, and so on.

But simply defining your metrics isn't enough. You must promote your shared metrics across the company. Team members should know what the metrics are, why the metrics matter, how the metrics directly affect the business, and how each member influences those metrics. Your team aligns around the metrics, and your metrics align around the customer. Which brings us to the core of our organizational alignment: customer-centricity.

The misconceptions of customer-centricity

Being customer-centric is a concept that sounds good in theory but often lacks a plan and follow-through for practical application. Part of the change is convincing leadership, teams, and individuals across the organization that there's a better, more customer-focused way of doing things.

Two common misconceptions can actually guide us in the right direction:

1. **Customer-centricity is only applicable once a customer signs a contract.** In reality, it puts the customer at the forefront of all the decisions, starting from the first time a customer encounters your business, all the way through renewal. This is why every department needs to align with customer metrics and journeys. It doesn't mean every team needs to track and share the exact same metrics to measure their own impact, but there should be a common thread tying it all together.
2. **Customer-centricity means the customer is always right.** Instead of agreeing to every request, customers should be confident in your work and your word. A customer-centric approach means building mutual respect and trust. From the onset of the relationship, you need to set clear customer expectations to establish dependability and credibility, then trust and satisfaction.

Top tips to align your organization around customer-centric practices

- **Structure your collaboration.** Most cross-functional efforts wither because they lack a framework. Set guidelines for how CS is expected to contribute to other teams' projects and decisions. Define the cross-initiative owner and individual participants, so the customer team's goal is clear from the start.
- **Check in with leadership.** Organizational alignment has no finish line. You must constantly work to maintain order and improve. Establish routine touchpoints with fellow leaders and a shared understanding of metrics tracking and benchmarks. This collaboration helps gauge progress and satisfaction.
- **Tell a better story with data.** CS is naturally relationship-driven, so it's easy to fall back on secondhand customer stories to substantiate claims and progress. However, supporting through data is significantly more compelling than emotion. Find a way to tie the revenue to customers you've lost, or you risk losing to functionality, usage behavior, or processes.
- **Compensate accordingly.** If you want your team to have a vested interest in customer-centricity efforts, compensate them based on the metric that best measures their contribution. As mentioned in the previous section, variable pay is a powerful motivator to guide team members and fairly hold them accountable.

More resources:

Industry research: True customer-centricity: an operating model for competitive advantage





What does a mature CS organization look like?

A CS team structure depends on organization size, solution complexity, and go-to-market strategy.

However, you need these essentials for an optimal customer experience:

- **Functional reporting structure** that includes leadership, management, and operations, all reporting up to an executive with revenue goals
- **Customer success charter** that aligns team, customer, and business priorities (retention, onboarding, adoption) with a level of revenue ownership
- **Tech stack** that incorporates tools for journey mapping, health scoring, renewal and expansion forecasting, usage tracking, and a level of automation

CS reporting structure

Rather than worry about the number of CSMs you have on roster or whether the team reports up to a CRO or CCO, it's important to ensure you match team member skills and roles to your general CS strategy, growth engine, and organizational goals.

Unfortunately, CS teams are historically underinvested both in terms of people, and the non-headcount budget that's essential to equipping CSMs with the tools to scale (but systems and processes can go a long way to building an efficient team).

Remember that customer success isn't a one-size-fits-all role. It requires a nuanced understanding of a company's product, customer base, and unique challenges. What works for one company, even if they have a similar product and customer base, may not work for yours.

With this in mind, where do you start in finding the right blend for your small customer success team tactics? The simple answer is this: Start with your team. Focus on their strengths, then fortify each team member with technology, empower them to succeed, and revisit how you measure their success.

1. **Define who owns what across the customer lifecycle**

   All go-to-market functions face challenges around overlapping responsibilities in customer relationships. This can lead to confusion over who owns renewals, upsells, and proactive engagement, which can, in turn, lead to cross-functional friction, more isolated silos, and a far worse overall customer experience.

   To prevent this, clearly define who owns what in the customer lifecycle. For example, sales owns new logos, CS owns adoption and renewals, and expansion is a shared goal where CS handles simple upsells like additional licenses, add-ons, or a higher tier of the same product, but sales gets involved in any cross-sell that involves adding additional product lines.



More resources:

Blog: How to match your CSMs' strength and skills to your customer success model

2. **Build a CS model that connects customer and org goals**

   A service model ties into customer segmentation characteristics, such as revenue size, to clearly define and differentiate the level of engagement that each customer gets. From there, you can determine how much time this takes a CSM to provide, including preparation and follow-ups.

   Now, you can understand whether your CSMs' books of business are too big for them to fulfill your service model based on a 40-hour workweek—minus the internal engagements such as one-on-ones and team meetings that are easy to forget when assessing capacity.

   The closer you can get to this ideal, the better you'll be at helping CSMs manage their time and understanding that you have their back. And if you're not even close, it's on you to speak up to company leadership and say: we need to do this, because our CSMs are unable to put their best foot forward for our customers.

3. **Keep responsibilities and roles adaptable**

   If you're a director-level leader or above, look out for new managers who might be struggling, especially if they've been promoted from CSM roles.

   Often, they've retained some of their old customers, or have a hard time letting go of old customer relationships. For this reason, it's harder to make the switch to management in CS, and it means extra workload that diverts new managers from managing. Leaders need to draw a harder line on this. At a minimum, make sure your managers aren't taking on new customers.

   Team leads are another dynamic to consider when it comes to team size and structure. Adding a team lead may help you (at least temporarily) stretch the capacity of a single manager by a couple more direct reports.

Moving an existing customer success manager into a team lead role can also be a great way to reward high performers, develop their leadership skills, and even help them get ready for additional future promotions. Just be wary of asking that individual to sit in a player-coach role for too long a stretch, as this may result in the opposite of the desired effect: too much work, not enough help, burnout, and even moving on from the company.

More resources:

Blog: The top CSM habits that separate the best from the rest

Customer success charters

Customer success charters are a mainstay for CS teams and strategy. But are they overdue for an update now that roughly half of CS teams own renewals and expansions?

Most CS charters haven't evolved much in recent years. Onboarding and adoption remain the top priorities, with "revenue" activities such as renewals and expansions lower on the list.

Customer success charters (2021-2024)

Priority	2021	2022	2023	2024
1	Onboarding	Onboarding	Onboarding	Onboarding
2	Adoption	Adoption	Adoption	Adoption
3	Engagement	Engagement	Renewals	Renewals
4	Renewals	Renewals	Engagement	Engagement
5	Expansion	Expansion	Expansion	Expansion
6	-	-	-	Enablement

GRR and NRR—or the priorities of retention and expansion—also belong at the top of CS charters, because customer success is a revenue-owning function.

Onboarding and adoption are key drivers of NRR and GRR, because there's a strong correlation between churn and failure to launch or adoption issues. Customers' perceptions of value and impact don't emerge during the renewal conversation; they start on day one, which means there should still be a focus on onboarding and adoption to be strategic about renewals.

CS tech stacks

As of late 2024, nearly 70% of CS teams at larger companies ($500 million or greater) have adopted customer success platforms (CSPs), while teams at smaller companies tend to lean on support and CRM software. Whether this discrepancy points to budget cuts or misaligned strategies, it's critical for a CS team to have the right technology for managing customers and building revenue.

AI's role in the CS tech stack

As of late 2024, only 21% of CS leaders said their teams had incorporated AI into their tech stacks, despite its transformative potential to streamline everyday workflows.

By setting up AI driven systems to handle routine tasks, you'll free your CSMs to spend more time on personalized strategies that drive greater customer loyalty and value. Companies who adopt AI early are already seeing stronger profitability and operational gains.

However, the more CS use cases you buy AI products for—such as automation, summarization, health scoring, and predictive analysis—the harder it becomes to pull point solutions together into operationalized workflows.

Our recommendation: rather than taking the long road of constructing your own AI infrastructure with point products, look for a customer success platform like ChurnZero with purpose-built, onboard AI functionality. This can include:

- **AI account summarization** for meeting preparation and executive updates, pulling from health scores, communications, survey feedback, and engagement history.
- **AI-generated meeting follow-ups** based on customer calls and meeting data, with highlights, analysis, and transcripts, action-items, and AI-driven follow-up workflows.
- **Customer relationship and sentiment tracking** with AI analysis of emails, meetings, surveys and other interactions, for deeper insight that product data doesn't always provide.
- **AI agents** to surface changes and trends across your customer base to keep your team ahead without manual research.



More resources:

Blog: To drive AI adoption faster, find your team's AI champion

Blog: When is it time to centralize your customer team's AI?

Guide: The AI adoption roadmap for customer teams

"It makes sense to try AI point solutions, especially if your CS team is still figuring out other things like your renewal process and plays. The issue over time is that AI point solutions lead to different people doing different things. Your CSMs' AI prompts on how to engage a customer, or their descriptions of healthy versus unhealthy, are different. One day, you wake up and everything and everyone is a bit out of sync. At this point, it's time to integrate your AI processes to achieve standardization and repeatability."

You Mon Tsang, CEO and Co-founder, ChurnZero





Does customer success need its own platform?

The biggest mistake CS leaders make when trying to build a case for new tools or a customer success platform is starting with the tool, not the business objective. Instead of product features or ROI details, align the tool to your key business goals and show where your current system or tools fall short.

A CSP is purpose-built for ongoing engagement and complex lifecycle management. These platforms are designed to help CSMs:

- **Monitor customer health in real-time** using product usage, support data, and sentiment analysis.
- **Automate key touchpoints** based on customer journey milestones (onboarding, renewals, expansions, etc.).
- **Flag churn risks proactively** before they become a problem.
- **Facilitate success plans** and business reviews to drive long-term value and adoption.

While some CRMs allow for basic account management, they still lack the tools to proactively manage customer retention, identify churn risks, or drive product adoption. A CRM primarily records static information, such as contacts, past interactions, and deal history, rather than providing dynamic, real-time insights into how a customer is actually using the product or whether they're at risk of churning.

> "From the outside, a customer might look healthy—they're logging in, not submitting tickets, and renewing on time. But if usage is declining, champions are going dark, or support sentiment is slipping, your team won't know until it's too late—unless they have the right tools."
>
> **Sarah Kiley, Chief Sales Officer, ChurnZero**

A dedicated CS platform eliminates bottlenecks by providing real-time product usage insights without requiring manual data exports. It offers pre-built dashboards, automated workflows, and templates that non-technical users can easily customize, and enables CS teams to act independently without constant developer requests.

More resources:

Resource: CSP vs. CRM
Blog: Five clear signs your customer success technology needs an upgrade

Start now and keep it simple

Congratulations are in order: you've made it to the end of this guide (and the conclusion to boot, you overachiever, you). Our hope with this CS handbook is to provide you with the materials to build your own CS team and strategy.

The downfall of most CS programs is not choosing the wrong KPIs or team structure but believing you must have everything perfect before you even begin.

Always make time for strategic thinking, but jump in! We are here as your platform and partner when you're ready.

About ChurnZero

ChurnZero is the platform and partner for customer growth. Our software provides game-changing capabilities to understand, strengthen, and grow your customer relationships, enabling you to drive revenue repeatably and efficiently at scale.

We do this by connecting AI, analytics, and automation to the customer experience. ChurnZero's dynamic health and relationship scores, forecasting, reporting, trend tracking, and proprietary Customer Success AI™ tell you exactly what customers want and need, and why.

You can keep customers engaged with scalable, hyper-personalized communications and strategic journeys at the touch of a button. You can manage more customers effectively with consistent execution, and less time spent manually monitoring for risks and opportunities.

Along with product innovation, we're known for our partnerships with customers. Your team gets award-winning customer success, training, implementation guidance, and support to help you deliver the best possible customer experience and build more revenue.

Find out more about ChurnZero.

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