

SmallCo vs. BigCo Support

by
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In the course of selling our products, I speak to prospects who believe that big software companies are better equipped to support them than are small ones. Yet I speak to even more prospects who have received awful support from big software companies.

Let me state, at the outset, that no one rule will fit all companies. Some mis-directed, small companies give awful support and a few big companies give good support. However, you will usually get better support from small software companies than from large software companies. Why is this?

I think there are a number of reasons:

1. **Successful small companies are usually market-driven — from the top executive down through the ranks.** "Market-driven" is stronger than the big-company jargon "market-oriented." It implies that the company's survival depends upon finding and satisfying a market.
2. **Every sale is important to a small company.** Its people will work hard to ensure the customer is successful with the product so that it is not sent back.
3. **People in small companies see a clear relationship between customer satisfaction and their paychecks.** There is a clear relationship between revenue and how much the company can afford to pay its employees. Furthermore, small companies are likely to offer bonuses or other incentives based upon sales — sales that don't come back. Thus, the employees will work hard to ensure each customer is satisfied.
4. **People in small companies tend to feel more empowered and thus more responsible.** A product being returned is a personal disappointment.
5. **Small software companies give direct programmer support.** They cannot afford to hire go-betweens. Whoever develops a product, supports it — there is no one else. Direct programmer support is the ideal support scenario for the customer, since the developer of a product can best explain complex issues relating to its use and can best make fixes and improvements expediently.
6. **Support is accessible at small companies.** Big companies are characterized by lengthy navigation through complex phone menuing systems followed by long wait times. At small companies, you are not frazzled by an ornery phone system nor stuck with lengthy waits on hold — typically you are talking to the programmer within a couple minutes. Also, support hours are often not so rigid as with big companies — the clock doesn't

always stop at 5:00 on the dot. Small companies typically work long hours and you might be able to talk to a programmer or get a response to your email after hours — even on a weekend!

7. **Comments and suggestions are welcomed.** Small companies are market-driven and are eager to know how they can better satisfy your requirements. It is not even clear how to make suggestions to some big companies, and few customers would have much faith that an email sent to the company would get to anyone, let alone to the right person.
8. **Not a lot of red tape.** No inter-departmental communication is needed, no committee meetings, no forms to fill out, etc. to get a problem fixed.
9. **Big companies want big customers.** If you buy a royalty product from a big company and you anticipate only moderate shipments, guess what kind of support you will get from them. You guessed it! **Small companies need every customer.**

Hence, if you are in the market for good support, you should be looking for a small company, which will jump through your hoops to please you.

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