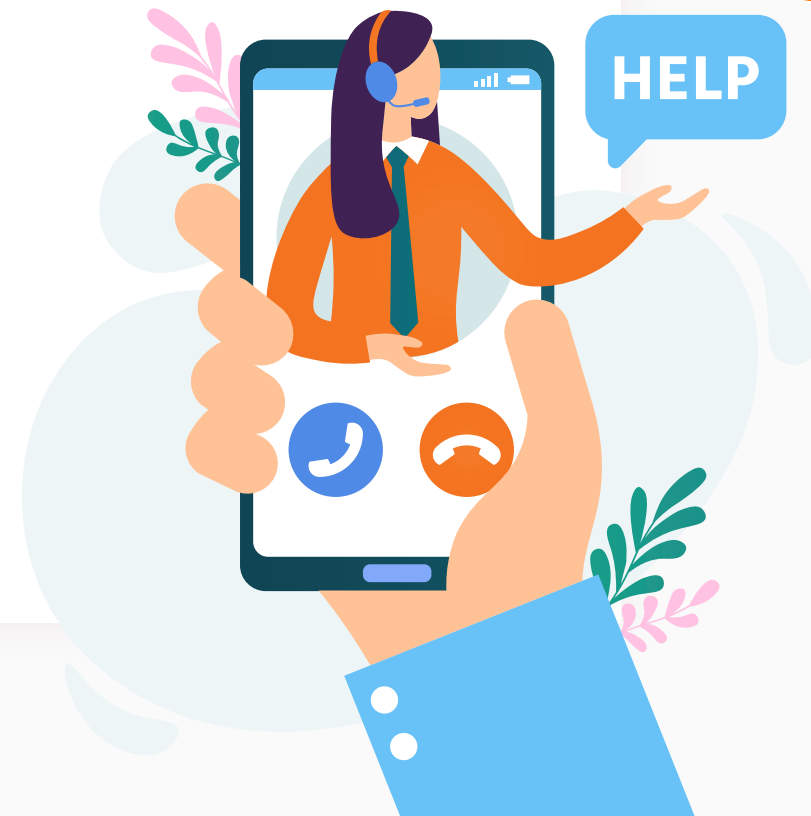


blueocean

How a Major US-Based Sports Association Launched a New Customer Care Program in the Middle of a Pandemic

Case Study



The Highlights

This national sports association leads the US in governing and promoting one of the nation's well-loved sports, including its annual pro championships, community involvement and coaching programs, charitable initiatives, and more.

Read on to discover how we:

Pivoted to
100% remote
recruiting,
onboarding, and
training

Launched on-
time despite major
challenges of the
pandemic

Received positive
feedback from the
client and their members
immediately upon
launch



The Challenge

The organization's support solution had not kept pace with changing dynamics in the membership experience nor the changing demographics of the sport and its passionate players and fans. Their relatively small program had been outsourced to a multinational provider for two decades. Eventually, that service lacked passion, was overly transactional, and presented contradictory and confusing reporting.

As a small client in a large ecosystem, the association struggled with the level of client service they received. While the organization went on a journey of digital evolution and enhanced membership offerings, they also went to market to challenge the status quo of their customer care solution.

The organization had been with their existing customer service outsourcer for 20 years and, quite frankly, were finding the level of recent customer service insufficient. In short, their partner:

- Lacked the ability to match the passion of their customers when discussing this particular sport
- Delivered customer service interactions that were transactional at best
- Presented reporting that was confusing and often contradictory
- Was not invested in the client relationship at a senior level

They knew that this combination of challenges would inevitably counteract the investment the organization was making in their mission of growing lifelong involvement in their sport, leading to diminished trust in their brand and a decreased membership base.

In 2019, the association determined that customer service should be a greater corporate focus and took the first step by hiring a new Customer Care Manager. From there, they made the decision to seek out a new customer care partner, while simultaneously implementing a new CRM.

They went through a robust RFP and selection process and looked for a partner who they genuinely enjoyed working with and who could offer a valuable, strategic partnership in a journey of evolution. Several members of the Blue Ocean leadership team were heavily involved throughout the process, collaborating with the association every step of the way. Ultimately, it was this clear cultural alignment that led them to the decision to partner with us.

The Solution

Our solution was contingent on establishing a clear view of what success would look like for our new client and a carefully crafted Statement of Work.

The key elements of our solution required us to:

- Build a dedicated team of frontline agents supported by a robust program management team, customize the CRM integration, and develop a suite of reports to guide us on the path to that success.
- Assign a vice president as the executive sponsor with responsibility for shepherding the client through the implementation process and then hold accountability for the health of the relationship in the long term.
- Execute on a proven implementation plan with clear milestones and commitment from required resources on both sides of the client-partner equation.
- Source people with the right combination of hard skills and soft skills plus a passion for sports where possible.
- Train impeccably so agents hit the production floor confident and capable of supporting complex membership issues and enterprise level service issues.
- Commit to a cadence of rigorous governance.
- Test. Measure. Refine.

Over 26 years in business, we have built an approach to implementation that delivers on seamless experience for our new client's customers. Senior involvement in every client program is at the foundation of our model. (Regardless of the size of their program, one of Blue Ocean's vice presidents is assigned to the account at an executive level and our full senior team sits in on at least two quarterly business reviews per year for each client.)

Blue Ocean worked with the organization to ensure we built a team of agents who were eager to help their customers and could get excited about those customers' passion for the sport. Besides this required personality fit, we collaborated on the training process to equip agents with the knowledge and tools to provide robust customer support.

Our new client was fully invested in the training process for launch, with a commitment to send a team from their HQ in New York to our HQ in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Our training coordinator worked hand in hand with their team to revise and refine new hire training to ensure a seamless experience for their customers and members as well as a positive successful introduction to the program for our frontline team.

In addition to the goal of providing superior and passionate support, another key objective was to improve the perception of the customer care department internally in order for other departments to leverage customer care for key initiatives and projects. Development of the suite of reports that meet internal stakeholder requirements and provide clarity and insight into the performance of the department was another vital piece of the puzzle. Blue Ocean's information services team and tech team were critical players in getting the CRM integration and reporting suites customized to deliver on our client's vision for their new and improved customer experience. Our goal was to drive accurate insights about customer behaviors and generate recommendations to improve the customer experience.

The Unexpected Complication

COVID-19 presents a major obstacle to launching a brand-new customer care program.

For months, the goal had been to launch Blue Ocean's customer care program in April 2020. Then, in January and early February we began hearing reports of a growing pandemic, yet to hit the shores of North America. By mid-February, Blue Ocean had a pandemic response team in place and were planning and preparing for major impact.

We considered the possibility of a lockdown in our risk management process, ensuring we could respond appropriately. On March 16, we enacted a full pivot to a 95% remote solution for our business and moved 425 employees to work-at-home over the course of 48 hours.

As the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, there was a new level of anxiety from the association regarding launching at this time. It was, in their eyes, a lot of change to handle at once. The guidance and almost daily involvement of the Blue Ocean VP executive sponsor and the daily contact with their Blue Ocean program manager was an essential element of successful collaboration in the most extenuating of circumstances.

Where we had planned to bring representatives from the association on-site for training and support post-launch, we now had to swing quickly to a virtual training plan. Assessing risk and preparing contingency plans were critical in helping us be adaptable throughout the process.

We plowed forward.

The Results

Despite the pandemic and related lockdown orders, we launched this new customer care program on time, in April 2020 (cue the fireworks!)

Success would not have been possible without the following factors in play simultaneously:

1. Blue Ocean had experience with virtual training and remote work environments. We had already gone through the learning curve and developed a robust remote training solution for a client that regularly had approximately 40 work-at-home agents on their team. Our training team didn't miss a beat in moving all brick and mortar training to our remote environment.
 - a. Our measures for success are:
 - i. remote training is the same length as brick and mortar training;
 - ii. agent testing, quality, and productivity scores meet or exceed average scores from brick and mortar classes.
2. Our colleagues at the association provided excellent support and leadership throughout.

"The fact that we were able to launch on time with everyone working from their homes is a scenario we never would have imagined. This took much more than a village and I'm beyond grateful to work with so many talented and dedicated people."

Digital Director at Our Client

From Day One, Blue Ocean has worked hard to gain a clear understanding of the organization's culture and mission, and this made a significant difference in the quality of interaction our agents delivered. There has been positive feedback both from the association themselves and from their members.

This alignment and collaboration was critical, especially in the early days when the pandemic changed everything including the nature of the contacts agents were fielding – with major games cancelled or postponed and access to sporting venues, including training and playing locations, restricted, members of the association were contacting the care team with unprecedented, unpredicted questions and issues.

Looking at the hard numbers, Blue Ocean achieved initial KPIs right out of the gate. One of the biggest challenges about launching a new program mid-pandemic is that there isn't really any historic data on call volume or types of support in similar circumstances. We've had to adapt and adjust accordingly, steadily increasing the size of our team over time.

We are currently in the process of building a Tier 2 team to support escalations and more complex support scenarios. We continue to focus on quality and agent coaching to ensure we are delivering the best possible customer care.

Curious how we achieved success? [Request our Sample Implementation Plan](#) for more insight!

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