

# What to Do When There Is a Large Product Line

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Jerry was thrilled when he landed the customer support position with a major construction supply company. The company had an excellent reputation and an extensive product line, specifically designed for all kinds of typographical and climatic conditions. Jerry wasn't worried about learning all of the products because he was told that the company's new CRM system would allow him to access product information with a few clicks.

For a while, everything went well. However, by the end of the second week, Jerry's dream job seemed less than perfect. While he could access product information from the computer, it took several "clicks," and frequently customers became impatient. To short cut things, Jerry inadvertently answered a question without properly researching it. When he tried to correct himself after accessing the information on the computer, the customer got very annoyed. He questioned Jerry's capabilities and asked to speak to "someone who knows something." Jerry realized he needed product knowledge stat or risk losing his job!

If this scenario sounds familiar, you are not alone. Many companies have extensive product lines. As a customer or technical support representative, it is critical for you to be perceived as knowledgeable and confident. Obviously, you can't be expected to know everything about every product, but you should not be overly dependent on CRM systems for product knowledge. To learn more about your company's products, consider the following suggestions.

1. **ASK**—Ask your manager and other more experienced colleagues to list the ten products most customers inquire about. Make learning more about these products your starting point. Once you master these products, keep

expanding your knowledge base. Be a continuous learning. Keep a log of your customer issues and let these issues be your guide to the next series of products you will learn.

2. **Divide and Conquer**—Obviously it is impossible to learn everything. It is important to break down the vast array of information about the product. Researchers believe most people remember things best in groups of three. Thus, think in terms of learning three key things about three product lines each week until you feel a comfort level with the most common inquiries. The trick is to learn the three most critical aspects. For example, if you are a technical support rep in the construction industry, you might choose to understand product usage, the appropriate conditions, and any special warnings. If you are in the computer hardware industry, you might choose three critical problems and three remedies for Windows XP, Windows 2000 or Windows 98.
3. **Buddy Up**—No one likes to learn alone. Grab a friend and grill each other on breaks or at staff meetings. Try to really challenge each other. Put on your customer hat and analyze if your partner's answer would satisfy the customer. Suggest that your manager or supervisor have "lunch and learns" about new products or old products. When products have been redesigned, it is really critical that everyone be updated on any alterations, especially if there is a safety warning.

People who are successful in companies where there is a large product line will tell you that the more you know, the more likely it is that your customers will be satisfied and the more likely it will be that they will request you when calling your customer support center.

Jerry has just celebrated his first anniversary with his company. Because he took being a professional seriously and worked hard at learning about the company's products, he has just been asked to be the team lead. He and his supervisors are delighted with his performance and future prospects for advancement.

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