

Agency Service vs Support Tickets: Identify which is best for you.

ocProducts offer two main avenues for requesting custom development work:

1. our Development Agency service
2. our Experts By The Hour support ticket service

These services have been created with different types of project and customer in mind.
In this document we review the key differences between them.

<u>Support Tickets</u>	<u>Agency Service</u>
100% payment up-front We always take 100% of payment up-front for our support tickets system.	Stepped Payment We can offer a stepped or phased payment for projects using our agency service.
Changes charged under basic process Any additions to the work not stated at the beginning in the requirements will be strictly charged as extra work.	Full Change Management process We will scope out the project and try to spot any missing functionality which has not been specified. After all is agreed we use our change management process for changes, as we adjust our staff resourcing.
Support time choice You can choose the priority of the work and timescale for it to be <i>initiated</i> (Please note: this may not always be 100% possible to guarantee). Actual development time (clock time) is not estimated for.	Assigned staff; Bug fixes in 5 working days Named staff are typically assigned to your project, with limited multi-tasking between projects. We always endeavor to fix all bugs within projects within 5 working days of them being reported to us.
Lower rate available for budget Lower priority work can be charged a lower budget rate saving you money.	Agency rates Projects are charged using our standard agency rates which can be found on our website.
Self-managed Support tickets will be simply handled through the support ticket system and you won't have access to a dedicated project manager. There is no coordination between team members, everything is done by reference to what is written in the specific ticket.	Project Manager You will have access to a dedicated project manager who will look after your project from start to finish. You'll get regular updates and advice. The project manager will coordinate work between multiple team members.

<p>All contact must stay in ticket</p> <p>All contact must be kept within the support ticket. There is no management review of work particulars. Tickets are processed in a queue, no work can be scheduled for a specific date/time.</p>	<p>Many contact methods</p> <p>When using our Agency service you have other avenues such as telephone contact, email contact and if requested/required contact via Skype.</p>
<p>Work done ad-hoc</p> <p>Work is done as requested. No overall specification is maintained. If new work depends on understanding all work, we may need to charge for review of that old work (if it has been a long time, or it is a different developer assigned to your ticket).</p>	<p>Proper specification</p> <p>A specification will typically be written up-front, in the form of a 'proposal'. This will then serve as a permanent reference guide to the project.</p>

Further guidance on support tickets

The support system is 100% based on support ticket processing, and is charged at a significantly lower rate than normal web development costs.

Support tickets are ideal for small quantities of standalone work. It is not recommended to use support tickets for projects that require any coordination or planning, as there is no provision for this. There are a number of limitations:

- Any ticket should contain a single issue, separate issues must be in separate tickets.
- Each ticket should be understandable alone. Assume that whoever is resolving the ticket has never worked for you before, and is not in communication with any other ocProducts staff. Any dependencies on prior work or prior discussions must be re-referenced, either directly, or by attaching a site guide that the ticket assignee can read through.
- Any request made to the staff that consumes time, such as to answer a question, perform an action, discuss future plans, or provide advice, would be considered a paid ticket; support is the primary function of the support system, not programming, and hence support is always charged (in order to pay staff salary). Feedback that is expected to receive no reply, bug reports, or enquiries prior to starting an agency project, are generally the only non-chargeable exceptions.
- Processing of the ticket happens within the requested SLA-time, or failing this, will be charged at a lower rate. Absolutely no extra scheduling or coordination is provided through the support system – we cannot provide time estimates, schedule work hours, coordinate with other staff or between other tickets, or install or receive special hardware or software.

- All communication must happen within the ticket. There is no e-mail or phone contact. No senior manager will be routinely going through all the tickets, although if something has been done against what was requested, you may of course make a complaint.
- Payment is designed to be made automatically, in advance. By special arrangement we may occasionally support payment via other means (for example, bank transfer), but this is not something we regularly do because it involves extra transfer/processing/management costs, and we have razor-thin margins.
- (All the other terms and conditions signed up to when you purchase support credits – if you haven't read these for whatever reason, you can read them at https://compo.sr/site/purchase/licence.htm?member_id=6&product=50CREDITS)

Only by following these rules are we able to break-even on our costs when running the support system. If they are not followed, we will make a loss.

Also note the following operating norms of the support system:

- Closing of tickets is an option for our customers, but not a routine part of the system, staff-side. We know at any point a followup question may come along in a ticket (which is both very common, and difficult for us to anticipate), so we manage tickets on the basis of us tracking outstanding questions within them, rather than them being open/closed.

The support system is designed *only* for support and minor programming, hence why it is not suitable for many other situations. If you require an ongoing project manager, and/or dedicated developers, either our agency service or a secondment service will be necessary. These are services we routinely provide to our customers as an important part of our service portfolio. These services either cost more, or require an ongoing commitment; it is understandable that some customers seek our lowest rate which is the support rate, but we have to be absolutely clear that a mere ticket-based service may not be suitable for you.

We recognise that some clients have very squeezed budgets and therefore will try and do more within budget-priority tickets than we are comfortable with (even though our agency rate is about 30% lower than industry averages). If you do this it is important to:

1. Exercise a high degree of self-management, maintaining your own specification document, and drip-feeding work.
2. Exercise a high degree of self-control, making sure you stick strictly to the support ticket requirements. If you don't do this, processing may take *substantially* longer, as we will be starved of financial resources (and hence human resources), and different people will be struggling between other projects to try and manage a coordinated response to your ticket.

Please be aware that we technically lose money on budget priority support tickets, once all our costs are considered (for example, salaries, hiring, and training costs). We can only afford to run them at the budget rate because it lowers overall down-time for our staff (i.e. between agency projects). We therefore regrettably cannot make exceptions to provide additional project management on top of a ticket, no matter how simple the request.

What about minimum credits for a ticket?

We have always had a minimum credit policy for handling support tickets. This is because even for simple questions we need to:

1. refresh our knowledge of our customer's website
2. properly take in the customer scenario(s)
3. discuss scenario(s) with our customer, often slightly beyond the scope of the ticket itself
4. often, open up access to the customer website to make changes
5. process the ticket properly and professionally

It is also useful for us to be able to skip the need to quote in the ticket, if we can do it within the minimum credit time of a ticket.

Customers may be concerned that if they open a lot of separate tickets, they will pay a lot more due to the minimum credit charge.

We cannot guarantee this won't *ever* be the case, but wherever possible we will process tickets in batches. If a support operator is sitting down and going through open tickets due for processing around the same time, by the same customer, they will only consider one instance of the minimum credit charge, which probably will not even be effective given the combined time is almost certainly more than the minimum charge.

What about routine actions?

Things like having your website updated to new versions can be done via a support ticket. As the cost of updating any website will depend on the nature of the particular website (notably: the complexity of the theme, and any particular overrides and new code to be manually upgraded), and the nature of the new version, we can't quote fixed regular costs for all our customers – so open an individual ticket to request a quote.

If you change your mind

If you do decide that you want to go with our agency service, rather than a support ticket(s), we will proceed as follows:

- Any monies invested as support credits but not yet charged, can be charged against an

agency service invoice

- We will take a step and re-evaluate your project using a formal process, writing a proposal for your overall project (or project phase if we decide to use an agile methodology)
- You will receive a quote for this proposal
- We will discuss the proposal and quote to ensure it works for you
- Staff will then be assigned, according to availability (this may take some time, as we do need to plan a long way ahead, in concordance between how projects are reliably managed and how staff are recruited). Staff will usually include a project manager and other production staff (for example, developers and designers).

Flexible service

If up-front quotes are not necessary then we also provide a flexible service (secondment service), where we can rent out developers by the hour for an extended period of time.