

Case Study

Alaska Airlines

Using workforce management and an at-home agent program to make its customer service soar

The Company

Alaska Airlines is the ninth-largest U.S. airline and is the dominant West Coast air carrier. Headquartered in Seattle, Alaska Airlines manages more than 800 agents located in three contact centers throughout North America, and is innovative in the way it has leveraged technology to deliver a better customer experience. Alaska Airlines was the first airline to sell tickets on its website, allow web check-in and install self check-in kiosks at airports.

The Business Challenge

The Alaska Airlines contact centers manage reservations, flight information and notifications, baggage claims and other passenger requests that come from both online and traditional phone interactions. As its call volumes continued to increase and the calls themselves became more complex and lengthy, the airline recognized that it needed to place an emphasis on retaining the contact center's knowledgeable and skilled agents in order to keep service levels high and improve the average speed of answer.

In addition, the supervisors in the contact center were challenged with managing a complex operation and coaching an agent staff. Balancing the schedules for more than 800 agents was time consuming and it was difficult to ensure they had the right agents working at the right times to deliver high service levels while containing costs. The airline recognized that it needed a better process that would allow it to reduce overtime, offer variable scheduling, allocate time for non-phone activities, give agents more control to manage their own work/life equilibrium, and find a balance among cost, service and quality.

The Solution

To address employee morale issues, reduce costs and better retain its highly skilled agents, the airline explored the possibility of allowing agents to work from home, an option that had been specifically requested by the agents. It was expected that an at-home agent set-up would help improve absenteeism and attrition, improve productivity, performance and work/life balance. To test this, the airline needed to do a pilot program first.

A key piece of technology for the at-home initiative was the company's existing Aspect® Spectrum® ACD which is used to manage the routing, reporting and some of the workflow for its contact center calls and supports critical, high-volume customer interactions. The solution tightly integrates automatic call distribution (ACD) functionality with sophisticated computer telephony integration (CTI) applications in both traditional circuit-switched infrastructures and session initiation protocol (SIP)-based Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) environments, while providing 99.999 percent availability. An IP connection between Aspect Spectrum ACD and the Web Powered Agent™ desktop application enables the Alaska Airlines agents to work from home and have the queued calls routed to them from any application, just as though they were physically in a contact center. Web Powered Agent is a thin client agent desktop application that enables the at-home agents to access customer information through screen pops and view their individual productivity, and provides supervisors with additional capabilities to manage staff.



Products:

- Aspect® Workforce Management and the Empower Enhancement Package
- Aspect Spectrum ACD

Results:

- Increased productivity and revenue
- Improved customer service
- Reduced staffing and operations costs

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Amy Gerfen
Reservations Manager,
Alaska Airlines



In addition, as part of the at-home agent program, Alaska Airlines also created requirements for employee eligibility. The company screened its existing agents for the pilot deployment and selected the top 20 individuals for the program. Supervisors then visited each home to test equipment connectivity. During the pilot, contact center agents were required to email daily reports regarding any issues that they encountered. The reports were logged and tracked to categorize and then address frequently occurring problems.

The airline also needed to implement a workforce management solution to improve the scheduling process and free up supervisors for coaching and training the agents. After comparing benchmarking data from various workforce management vendors, Alaska Airlines chose to implement Aspect® Workforce Management and the Empower enhancement package. Aspect Workforce Management enables the airline to accurately plan, manage and optimize performance for their multi-skilled and multisite staffing resources. Empower allows at-home agents to bid for shifts, vacations, and other events and to make changes to their schedules within parameters set by the contact center, giving the agents more control, which is helping improve morale.

“Aspect Workforce Management allows our management team to focus more on training, problem solving, and delivering the best customer service possible, instead of spending a large portion of their time on schedules and hours, and communicating across multiple work sites,” said Amy Gerfen, Alaska Airlines Reservations Manager.

The Results

As a result of the at-home agent initiative and Aspect Workforce Management implementation, Alaska Airlines is seeing increased productivity and revenue, improved customer service, reduced staffing and operations costs, as well as a rapid return on investment. Aspect Workforce Management and Aspect® Spectrum® ACD are enabling the company to maximize profits, reduce staffing costs and turnover, deliver superior customer service and improve the contact center’s overall performance to better meet the company’s business goals. As a result, they made the decision to permanently implement the at-home agent program at Alaska Airlines.

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About Aspect

Aspect is a global software and IT services firm specializing in applying Microsoft unified communications and collaboration to help customers achieve optimal results through enhanced business processes across the enterprise and in the contact center. Aspect provides IT consulting, integration services and business applications. For more information, visit www.aspect.com.

