

Hilton Worldwide Reservations

Efficient staffing for a call center that helps maintain a reputation for hospitality

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The Company

Hilton Reservations Worldwide handles reservations and information requests for 2,100 hotel properties, including the Hilton, Conrad, Doubletree, Embassy Suites, Hampton Inn, Hampton Inn & Suites, Hilton Garden Inn and Homewood Suites brands.

The Business Challenge

- Manage customer service interactions more efficiently and cost-effectively
- Maintain high-level of agent morale high

The Solution

A full-featured workforce management solution, Aspect® eWorkforce Management™ from Aspect Software that enables Hilton Worldwide Reservations to accurately plan, manage and optimize staffing resources. It integrates with the Aspect® CallCenter® ACD and Aspect® Enterprise Contact Server™.

The Results

- Highly accurate forecasting and scheduling
- Improved occupancy to an average of 90 percent
- Lower staffing costs
- Increased agent morale and reduced attrition by more than 20 percent



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Hilton Reservations Worldwide (HRW) is the customer-service branch of a hospitality chain that spans seven hotel brands with 2,500 locations in 50 countries. At five call centers in the United States, this global reservation system manages 1,300 customer service representatives whose mission, while it takes a complex mix of skills, can be stated simply—to make sure that the pleasant experience of lodging with Hilton begins when the phone rings in the contact center.

One of the people primarily responsible for seeing that this mission is accomplished is Sandra McFatridge, manager of Forecasting and Planning for HRW. McFatridge is in charge of high-level budgeting for HRW’s five domestic call centers and also manages the team that does the operational forecasting, scheduling, and intraday planning. McFatridge’s organization uses Aspect® eWorkforce Management™ software from Aspect Software to enable Hilton to accurately plan, manage and optimize their staffing resources.

Managing for Efficiency

“Aspect eWorkforce Management has really helped us to maintain the integrity of our data,” says McFatridge, who points out that accuracy has gone from within ten percent of actual to within three percent of actual due to Aspect eWorkforce Management. More important, the Aspect Software solution has improved occupancy, which is a key metric for HRW.

“In July of 2002,” says McFatridge, “our goal was 86 percent occupancy. We made some technology changes that helped us reach that goal, but because we tie occupancy to our budget, we wanted to minimize overhead by only hiring as many agents as we truly need. So we raised the goal to 90 percent. When we implemented Aspect eWorkforce Management in April of 2003, we saw immediate results. We immediately went over the 90 percent mark, and have consistently maintained 90 percent occupancy ever since. This has saved us US\$1.2 million in one year.”

“In addition,” she says, “we’ve maintained our call-handled percentage at 96 percent, and surprisingly enough, our attrition rate has declined. When you talk about high occupancy and high call-handling rates, most people think of agent burnout, but we haven’t experienced that. Our attrition rate has gone from between 60 and 70 percent to the low 50s because the workforce management tools allow us to provide balance for the agents. We’re asking for higher occupancy, but we forecast more efficiently, schedule more efficiently, and plan efficiently for off-phone activity such as training. So agents get time away from the phone even though their productivity is up.”

“There’s a lot of interest at HRW in shift bidding,” McFatridge says. “Currently we create the schedules and export them via spreadsheets to the call centers, and the centers have to take agents off the phone to come to the control desk to bid in order of their seniority. Having the process online will eliminate that. This will reduce the workload on the control desk so that they can focus on their real function, which is intraday management. It will also reduce the errors that happen in the manual process.”

Managing for Morale and Retention

But keeping costs down, McFatrige points out, can't be done at the service representatives' expense. "Agent morale is very important," she says. "The customer experience begins with us, and we want our agents to be satisfied with their work environment so that their satisfaction carries over to the customers."

HRW made a major step toward creating a friendly working environment by implementing the optional Empower module for Aspect® eWorkforce Management™. Empower includes eSchedule Planner, that allows agents to view their schedules and to request changes online, and Notification Server, which automates the process of notifying staff of schedule changes.

"Empower is really going to be an agent morale booster," says McFatrige. "It will improve the efficiency of the control desk, too, as they refocus on managing the business rather than entering data."

"The third thing we'll gain is quicker response when we need agents to work overtime or when we're overstaffed and want to allow people to take off early. Before, the central planning team had to go to the local control desks and say, 'you need to send ten people home,' or 'we need ten people for overtime,' and the control desks had to manually publish the information to the agents and then go out and recruit for it. Now it will be much more immediate. We can send a notification out through Notification Server and we get a much quicker response."

Managing by Educating

HRW also makes the workforce management solution contribute to agent satisfaction by using it as an education tool.

"We've recently put together a module that we'll first deliver to our current staff, and eventually use in new-hire training as well," says McFatrige. "We're educating agents on planning and scheduling so that they understand why we have to have the schedules that we do, and why not everyone can work Monday through Friday from eight to five. We tell them how we go about creating forecasts and why there are decisions sometimes not to offer overtime even though it seems to the agents that we need it."

A Satisfactory Solution from a Responsive Vendor

Is HRW satisfied with the solution and the vendor? McFatrige puts it this way. "I've been in call centers now for about nine years, and in workforce management for about seven, and in every company I've been with, we have looked at all the competitors, and always ended up with Aspect Software. Everyone you contact at Aspect Software is genuinely friendly and helpful. They really do want to make your center successful. They're willing to listen, and try new things, and help you figure out a new way to accomplish your business goals that the software might not have been originally designed for. They're always looking for ways to improve the software, based on customer feedback. So it's nice to know that they're willing to listen and make the product better, not just for me, but for other customers as well."

About Aspect Software

Aspect Software, Inc. founded the contact center industry and is now the world's largest company solely focused on Internet Protocol (IP) and traditional voice-based products and services for customer service, collections, and sales and telemarketing business processes. Each day, Aspect Software powers more than 125 million customer-company interactions at thousands of in-house and outsourced contact centers around the globe. Its trusted Signature product line offers automatic call distributors (ACDs), dialers, voice portals and computer telephony integration (CTI). The company's leading Contact Center Performance Optimization product line provides workforce management, quality management, performance management and campaign management applications. And, its pioneering Unified IP Contact Center product line delivers a comprehensive, multichannel solution. Headquartered in Chelmsford, Mass., Aspect Software has operations across the Americas, Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia Pacific. For more information, visit www.aspect.com.

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