Achieve a United Front, Front to Back

Ensure your back office delivers on the promise of a remarkable experience

The relationship revolution has put the customer in charge of the conversation. Customers don’t care – and often don’t know – where their requests are being handled. It could be the front office, the middle office, the back office – or, as is increasingly common, all three. Customers simply want their product delivered or returned, their claims processed, their loan approved or their prescription refilled quickly and conveniently. When their product or service provider fails to produce results, customers are quick to escalate their displeasure through social networks, forums, blogs, communities and the many venues now available for venting frustration which others look to for advice on what to buy – and what to avoid.

While the machinations within the back office should be invisible to the customer, with every failure transparent, organizations can no longer afford this “business as usual” approach. After all, 17% of customer loyalty is directly related to back office efficiency.1 Unfortunately, for many organizations, the front office is measured to the minute with every interaction tracked, captured, assessed and optimized while the back office remains a closed system. In a survey of contact center decision makers, 42% say that they are unable to effectively manage the end-to-end workflow of interactions.2 Customers may not see very far beyond their front office interactions, but the quality of their experiences is directly influenced by how effective people and processes are in the back office.

Inefficiencies in the back office not only drive down the customer experience but also drive up costs. Multiple studies show that 20% of front office interactions are due to back office issues – an increased volume of those kinds of negative interactions can mean additional front office staff and lengthening wait time for already angry customers. Because office processes are typically labor intensive, involve multiple hand-offs, and encompass manual tasks (i.e. filling out paperwork, scanning and responding to white mail, etc.) – the back office remains a significant cost-center for an organization and is often a target for cost-reduction strategies. Unfortunately, these strategies often fall short of achieving long-term, sustainable productivity.

The Front End Gains of a Productive Back Office

When organizations optimize back office systems, processes, and ultimately employees’ performance, the benefits carry over to customer interactions. By better aligning back office employees to customer service requests, organizations can relieve the contact center of a significant percentage of call volume and the associated costs while contributing to a better customer experience.

Studies support the bottom-line advantage of the links between back office efficiencies and both customer satisfaction and loyalty. McKinsey reports that improving back office efficiency and effectiveness from average- to top-quartile levels can increase an organization’s net margin by two percentage points.

Finance, HR, IT operations, and other support functions can represent 15 to 20 percent of a global company’s personnel expenses and are thus prime targets for retrenchment. Yet the savings are often fleeting—we find that barely four in ten companies meet their targets one year into a cost-cutting program, and by year four fully 90 percent of back office costs are right back where they started.


1 Forrester Research

2 The Next-Generation Contact Center, Forrester/Aspect, October 2012
Intelligent Work Allocation and Real-Time Process Visibility

To break the back office silo, organizations need a back office solution that provides the ability to allocate – and re-allocate – work intelligently. That means the ability to account for and integrate all of the work that is happening within the back office – work that arrives through white mail, email, or a legacy operational system. Providing real-time process visibility, and the means to measure what is delivered against what is expected, can help introduce long-lasting productivity gains and uncover opportunities for reducing staff, changing established processes, or even redesigning workflows around customer expectations.

Improve Staff Efficiency, Effectiveness and Utilization

Ensuring that the back office has the right number of resources to meet customer expectations can only be achieved through fully featured workforce optimization capabilities. Workforce management, performance management and quality management equip organizations to improve strategic planning by scheduling and maintaining both the right number and types of back office employees, measuring those employees to goals and expectations, and continually coaching and correcting for success.

One challenge of balancing staff with transaction demands is the variation in response times for different types of work. When tasks such as claims processing, order fulfillment, and other back office activities are completed at multiple sites or outsourced locations, solving this equation becomes even more complex. With the ongoing need to be agile in the face of both predictable and unexpected staffing changes, flexible forecasting and scheduling capabilities – as well as intraday performance evaluation and schedule tracking – are invaluable for attaining optimal efficiency and effectiveness.

When optimal schedules are combined with capabilities to distribute tasks according to business need, employee skill and employee availability – and can take into account the desired service levels – the back office becomes a powerful engine for a remarkable customer experience.

Continuous Employee Performance Improvement

Maintaining the right number and types of workers to service the business is just the starting point for effective workforce optimization. Focused performance management and coaching will help organizations align employees to key goals. Automated capabilities allow managers and supervisors to more accurately plan, evaluate and manage the performance of back office employees and take advantage of an increasingly blended workforce – one that is able to perform both within the contact center and the back office.

A worker’s productivity level can be measured and reported by examining factors such as the number and duration of tasks handled and the amount of time spent in productive versus unproductive activities. Dashboards and other reports compare outcomes to targeted values for key performance indicators. When results fall below preset thresholds, automated alerts can prompt supervisors and initiate online coaching that provides remedial instruction. Pre-defined coaching specific to each learning need provides immediate, consistent guidance, which is reinforced by a performance improvement plan that tracks the time and effectiveness of completion.

Capabilities for evaluating employees’ performance can also empower them. High-performing workers may be given the option to bid on preferred shifts and request schedule changes within selected parameters, helping to raise morale and increase retention. The benefits to the business are reduced administrative costs and increased efficiency that come with automated schedule changes and notices via email and screen pops. In addition, tools which allow managers to monitor real-time and historical schedule adherence, and track actual to targeted employee performance with performance scorecards, provide insightful feedback that helps organizations get the best return on their staffing decisions.

Ultimately, overall performance can be more closely aligned with business goals, and back office employees and other workers are individually empowered to achieve specific objectives in support of these goals.

A Closer Look at Employee and Operational Performance

Process analytics and task management technology allow organizations to keep track of employee productivity and task performance and adjust resources and tasks to meet service goals. Many businesses face challenges measuring the duration of certain back office tasks and have little information on process flow and employee productivity. With an ability to interface with operational workflow and BPM (Business Process Management) environments or apply desktop analytics to capture desktop activity, the tools for getting a granular view into how employees actually perform against the objectives set are now possible.
Solution Essentials for Optimizing BackOffice Productivity

Back-office optimization provides better insight into tasks and employees as well as the forecasting, scheduling and tracking flexibility needed to reduce the number of staff required to meet business objectives. The most comprehensive solutions:

- **Provide flexible “what-if” analysis and scenarios** to identify the right staffing profile to meet service level objectives for all tasks even in light of unexpected events
- **Optimize tasks across multi-skilled resource groups** to deliver against deadlines with a streamlined resource pool
- **Utilize multi-site scheduling capabilities** that provide a global perspective for environments that share tasks across sites
- **Enable convenient workforce data sharing** to gain a complete, accurate view of activity and productivity
- **Capture data on tasks and employees** to gain historical and real-time visibility into how goals are being met
- **Evaluate employees** by monitoring real-time and historical adherence to work schedules and achievement of goals
- **Track actual to targeted employee performance** with scorecards that help employees understand and optimize their performance, and help managers identify areas for improvement
- **Provide dashboards and reports** that measure an organization’s and individual employees’ overall productivity
- **Initiate online coaching** when an employee’s performance falls below a set threshold to improve individual and overall operational effectiveness
- **Empower employees** to manage their own schedules within preset parameters to increase morale and retention

Conclusion

Purpose-built back office optimization solutions can increase the productivity of back office operations and decrease costs. Specifically, they help to improve customer service levels while decreasing required staffing, institutionalize a culture of continuous improvement, and provide visibility into how effectively back office processes are being executed. These solutions also empower and improve employees’ performance through automated coaching and self-serving scheduling options grounded in business rules that do not compromise business results.

The ultimate reward is consistently quicker, more accurate responses to customers and confidence in the ability to deliver on the promise of an exceptional customer experience.

About Aspect

Aspect is the only software company with a fully-integrated interaction and workforce optimization platform for enterprise contact centers globally that need to profitably (and seamlessly) orchestrate people, processes and touch points in an era when the contact center is the new center of the customer experience. For more information, visit [www.aspect.com](http://www.aspect.com).