5 WORKFORCE OPTIMIZATION INNOVATIONS THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR CONTACT CENTER

Is your contact center ready?
Are your agents ready?
Read on to find out.
As the customer experience becomes the next battlefield for market share, contact centers must adapt to higher consumer expectations – expectations for additional ways to connect, more self-service options, personalized interactions, and effortless service. Companies that fail will lose their customers to the competition. Those that make the transition will have an unprecedented opportunity to create loyalty and profitable growth.

So it’s no surprise that companies are stepping up their customer experience game. They are adopting a myriad of new customer service channels and technologies. They are empowering customers to help themselves. But are they forgetting about the importance of their agents?

77% of consumers wish companies offered more ways for them to interact with representatives.

(Aspect Omnibus Survey)

72% of consumers stopped doing business with a company because of a bad service experience.

(Aspect Omnibus Survey)

Only 5% of consumers say that their customer service experiences exceed their expectations

(The 2014 American Express' Global Customer Service Barometer)
Are your *agents* ready?

Like the rest of the contact center, the role of the agent is changing. They are now tasked with helping customers across more channels, interacting with more systems and dashboards, and dealing with more complex issues as they increasingly serve fewer "simple" inquiries.

It’s impossible to fully engage and delight the empowered, mobile consumer without empowering your agents and supervisors. Yesterday’s workforce optimization (WFO) tools were not designed for today’s omni-channel contact center, its customers or its agents. The ability to fully maximize contact center performance and productivity – and subsequently the customer experience – requires the next generation of workforce optimization solutions.

As companies increasingly understand (and experience) the power of empowered customers, they’re changing their strategic priorities from maximizing operational efficiencies to delighting clients. They are *84%* more likely than in 2012 to indicate improving the quality of client interactions as a top objective driving their WFO programs.

*(Aberdeen Group 2014)*
Following are 5 workforce optimization innovations that can make a real, measurable impact in your contact center and for your customers.

**Innovation #1: WFO for the Omni-Channel Contact Center**

**Over the decades**, workforce optimization solutions have evolved to include some very sophisticated and effective tools, but these tools are designed to work with only one channel: voice. While customers still call companies for help, a growing number are chatting, texting and even tweeting. In fact, of the most popular customer interaction channels, use of voice for customer service is showing no growth while IM/Chat is growing at a rate of 13% per year according to Forrester Research.
Unfortunately, much of the great thinking that has gone into building WFO tools as we know them simply does not translate to non-voice channels. The fact is that the dynamics of non-voice interactions are quite different from voice interactions, requiring new mathematical models to accurately forecast demand and schedule agents in non-voice channels. A whole new set of metrics must be incorporated into our forecasting models such as: chat concurrency (how many simultaneous chats is the agent handling), agent composition time, customer composition time, agent wait time, customer wait time and number of messages exchanged in a session. For WFO professionals, it’s a radically different way of thinking about customer engagement.

Top performing businesses differentiate themselves through their ability to tailor messages based on the needs and wants of each client—while ensuring that these messages remain consistent across multiple touch-points.

(Aberdeen Group 2014)
The new generation of WFO solutions supports forecasting models for the omni-channel contact center. These models account for the unique characteristics of each channel, required skills and blended agents capable of handling multiple channels and conversations at once. Today, few vendors offer this important capability.

Likewise, as text-based channels continue to grow in importance, analytics tools must adapt for quality management of chat, SMS, social and email. We will also see the rise of new types of WFO performance management KPIs that address the entire customer experience and drive the right agent behaviors across these new channels.

Aspect provides a holistic view of the customer experience through all speech and text-based channels including voice, chat, email, Web, mobile and social media.
Agents spend **14%** of their time looking for information across disparate systems due to poor use of existing WFO functionalities as well as ineffective processes in making existing data available through the WFO systems. This results in approximately $840 K each year in unnecessary costs due to poor productivity.

*(Aberdeen Group 2014)*

**Innovation #2: A Modern User Experience for Agents and Supervisors**

**Roughly 60% of agents** are Millennials or younger. Technology dominates their lives and they have little patience for outdated systems that hold them back from doing their jobs. Yet, WFO applications are complex and historically difficult to use, which stands in stark contrast to the user interfaces they are accustomed to.

Simple tasks such as viewing and changing schedules should be fast and easy, but most WFO solutions use outdated user interfaces that create frustration and impact both agent and supervisor morale. They also result in underutilization of powerful WFO features. In fact, the same workforce optimization systems that are designed to get the most out of the workforce often become barriers to productivity because they are so hard to use.
The *agent* experience matters.

According to the Aberdeen report "Agent Desktop Optimization," lack of effective technology tools is the #1 factor influencing agent experience. In fact, companies are almost twice as likely to cite ineffective technology tools as a primary factor influencing agent experience, compared to agent compensation and benefits. In other words, agents are almost twice as likely to demand better technology tools to do their jobs than to make compensation-related demands.

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**Technology is a Key Determinant of Agent Productivity**

- Technology tools facilitating agents’ ability to conduct day-to-day tasks: 47%
- Sense of empowerment in addressing customer needs: 35%
- Compensation and benefits: 25%

Source: Aberdeen Group, October 2014  
Percent of respondents, n=373
Eliminate the negative effects of a poor WFO user experience with a solution built on the same modern UI design principles pioneered by Apple, Google and Microsoft. A web-based, graphical user interface with intuitive icons and widget-based dashboards results in higher productivity, more rapid learning and better agent engagement, which is essential to delivering great customer experiences.

Aspect removes the technology barriers between WFO systems and agents with a revolutionary graphical user interface that is intuitive and easy to use.
Innovation #3: Mobile WFO Tools

Smartphones keep us connected and productive – in our lives and our jobs. The new generation of WFO solutions includes mobile apps that give contact center staff anytime access to the information they need. The ability to remotely monitor, stay informed and quickly communicate from anywhere is critical to adapting to and efficiently managing fluctuations in the contact center.

Contact center agent satisfaction and engagement are often overlooked, yet they’re extremely important pieces to drive superior customer experiences.

(Forrester, Engaged Agents, Satisfied Customers, 2014)
Today’s well-designed workforce management mobile apps empower agents to easily self-manage their schedules remotely, including the ability to see the status of their requests online without having to call in, ask supervisors, or access their desktop to view the status of their requests. Once approved, changes are directly incorporated into the system without further manual intervention, saving time and reducing errors. Supervisors gain the tools they need to track schedules, agent requests and intraday performance from smartphones and tablet devices while they are on the go. The result is increased efficiency, accuracy, engagement and job satisfaction for everyone.

And, if unexpected volume spikes occur, a broadcast SMS, email or push notification can be automatically or manually sent to all applicable agents requesting voluntary overtime. Interested agents can respond immediately via the mobile app, thus alleviating a potential SLA problem.

Aspect EQ Workforce Mobile give supervisors the ability to remotely monitor important metrics and KPIs via icon and widget-based WFO dashboards that provide information at a glance from their laptops, tablets and smartphones. It also enables staff to easily view, change and respond to requests for scheduled changes virtually in real-time.
By the end of the next eighteen months, 76% of organizations will be actively investing in cloud contact center solutions. More than 50% are already doing so. For one in five organizations, the notion of situating infrastructural technology on-site is a completely obsolete one.

(2015 CCIQ Study)
In addition to the obvious benefit of shifting from a Capex to Opex model, the ability to take advantage of robust workforce optimization delivered from the cloud enables faster adoption of new capabilities, painless upgrades, better support for disparate infrastructures, improved scalability and reduced total cost of ownership.

WFO in the cloud will dramatically shorten the innovation speed of WFO software and enable levels of customer and agent engagement that were previously not possible.

Aspect EQ Workforce Optimization Cloud gives every size business access to advanced functionality without having to license and manage a solution on your premises. It supports geographically diverse centers with multiple sites and remote users, including at-home agents. The solution is pre-integrated with Aspect’s Cloud Contact Center, Zipwire.
Companies with integrated back office activities enjoy a **97%** greater annual improvement in customer satisfaction rates, compared to those with poor back office activities. 

(Aberdeen Group, 2014)

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**Innovation #5: Bridging the Gap from the Front Office to the Back Office**

**For many years,** enterprises have been developing workforce optimization tools to improve the quality and speed of customer interactions in the front office. It’s only in the past several years that enterprises have come to realize the huge labor savings and improved customer experience possible with back office optimization tools.

DMG Consulting estimates that operational costs can be reduced by 20 – 40% when introducing workforce tools into back office operations. Research by European Business Review shows that about 60% of the knowledge needed for a good customer experience resides in the back office. It’s clear that the customer experience delivered by the front office is largely dependent upon the quality of work and speed delivered by the back office.
Eliminate *silos.*

Historically, the front office has been separated from the back office, but WFO tools combined with work allocation systems in the back office permit a much more encompassing enterprise approach. For example, workforce management software can forecast and schedule appropriately skilled back and front office labor and even blend the labor forces. Front office employees can perform back office work in times of low volume and skilled back office employees can do front office work in times of high call volumes. Performance management software can give management excellent visibility into the status of work tasks and employee productivity to ensure that SLAs are met as planned.

Aspect EQ Back Office integrated with Aspect EQ Workforce Optimization gives you the ability to manage people and tasks across the entire enterprise from the front office to the back office and even out into your branch offices.
The Future of Workforce Optimization

The traditional contact center operating model is being massively disrupted by economic, technological, social and lifestyle changes. Tech-dependent consumers have heightened expectations for service, the ability to share their stories with the swipe of a finger, and many options to take their business elsewhere if dissatisfied.

Companies are reacting by introducing technologies and methodologies that improve experiences at every stage in the customer journey. They are also realizing the opportunity to take advantage of the self-reliant consumer, to elevate the role of their agents from order-taker to true problem-solver and subject matter expert. Of course, with these shifts comes the need for sophisticated tools, including tools to optimize your workforce, empower employees to provide great service, and deliver a more complete view of performance and quality across channels.

If you are ready to talk about innovations in workforce optimization that can help transform your business, connect with Aspect today:

Contact us to learn more or to request a demo.
1-888-547-2481

Visit us at aspect.com