

Flexible Scheduling Improves Contact Center Retention



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Delivering Better Outcomes In A Challenging Environment

Did you know that attrition in the contact center averages 42%? One of the ways organizations can improve their retention is by giving agents more control over their own scheduling. This is especially critical today, when it's difficult to hire talent and employees expect flexibility in the workplace. By letting agents participate in the process before, during, and after the work schedule is published, companies can ensure their staff has a schedule that meets their needs. This includes giving agents the ability to request changes knowing that they will be approved.

Companies are often fearful of embracing flexibility due to concerns about fairness and meeting service goals. Frost & Sullivan research shows that the right workforce management (WFM) software offers flexibility to ensure agents get the shifts they need, helping companies staff appropriately while retaining talent. We recently convened a group of industry leaders for a conversation about these and other pressing concerns.



Agent Retention Is Priority One

In every discussion of workforce management, one issue comes up again and again: agent retention. Salaries matter—but everyone agrees, scheduling has a significant impact, too.

“We are doing a ton of work around retention—it’s a very hot topic in our organization,” said Fayth Bushman, a scheduler at AAA. “And scheduling plays a major role in that. How can we accommodate a hybrid work environment, working from home, and the challenge of work-life balance?”

Jeff Li, director of workforce management at EmblemHealth, agrees that flexibility is key to retaining employees. “Agents have very specific needs. For example, childcare, or, really, care for anybody,” he said. His company does everything it can to support its agents’ scheduling priorities to avoid attrition.

“Attrition is a huge cost. When you lose people, you’ve got to go through the hiring process, and then train them, and that takes months and months, and lots of dollars.”

—Andrew Gilmer,
Senior Manager, Comcast



Work-From-Home Is Non-Negotiable...

Frost & Sullivan research shows that the hybrid workplace is here to stay—and the contact center is no exception. The move can help attract top talent and keep employees happy.

“We have expanded the areas in which we’re recruiting,” said Gilmer. “Formerly, it would be regional to the call center. Now you could be completely out of Comcast’s footprint and be an employee for us. And we strive to make our organization a great environment to work in.”

But working from home brings certain challenges. “Quiet quitting is real,” said Li. One way to combat it is through agent training and support. “You need to be able to provide support to the work-from-home agents. For example, it’s not as easy [for remote workers] to ask questions. In an onsite environment you could just walk in, bump into someone, have a quick chat. So, we need a creative way to provide that for the whole team.”



...Except When It Isn't

In some cases, contact managers are hedging their bets in case they need to support a full return to the office.

“We bring in a more regional talent pool,” said Li. “Although they are working from home, we kept the talent within an hour to two, in case that we need to bring everyone back to the office and provide the talent access to the training and IT support.”

What's more, while the work-from-anywhere model offers clear benefits to organizations, it also poses a threat—since employees can now change jobs without having to actually move themselves and uproot their lives.

“There are a lot more opportunities for teammates to apply for jobs where historically you had to be in the exact location of where you needed to work. And now you don't,” said a workforce management analyst at a digital bank. “So, they have more opportunities, and we're having to be more competitive.”



Scheduling Can Be A Game Changer

Scheduling is a constant challenge in the contact center—managers are always weighing the needs of the company against those of its agents. Pre-scheduling can be an effective tool, for example, when it comes to ensuring agents have time for training and other non-customer-focused activities.

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“The biggest thing for us is automation. Any automation we can do of the flexes, swaps, all of that, is so, so helpful,” said Bushman. “We try very hard to take a proactive approach. We anticipate that there are going to be days where we're doing ad-hoc activities in people's schedules, but we do really try to pre-give them that time by scheduling it where volume permits, which has worked out very, very well for the business and the agents.”

Automation plays a key role here, but it must be paired with clear business rules. Listen to Andrea Matsuda, from NICE:

When you're planning schedules, it's great if you are open with availability to let agents know and give them a say. Like, “Hey, these are the open shifts that we want covered.” And you allow them to pick. Of course, you have to set the business rules. You obviously can't just open the floodgates without setting the parameters around the options they have. And then they can select from that.

If You Leverage BPO, It Must Be In The Scheduling Mix

Most WFM leaders acknowledge that one benefit of business process outsourcing (BPO) is that it allows them to better accommodate the needs of their in-house agents.

“Over half of our agent population is represented by our business partners. And we can leverage that relationship to flex up or flex down where needed,” said Gilmer.

“That gives us the freedom to create the schedules for our internal employees that they have been asking for.”

“We utilize our partners as much as possible to try to help with our internal scheduling needs and try to give the best shifts to our internal agents, and then use our partners [for the less popular shifts].”

—WFM manager at a digital bank

Frost & Sullivan recommends finding a WFM solution that offers best-in-class data capture and analytics, giving managers and employees a one-stop shop for all their planning and scheduling needs.

To learn more about improving workforce management, visit [NICE](#).



This article is based on a Virtual Think Tank Discussion hosted by Frost & Sullivan, The Growth Pipeline Company™.

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