



## Customer Profile:

Retail

## Website:

[www.llbean.com](http://www.llbean.com)

## Location:

3 sites in Maine

## NICE Product(s):

NICE Workforce Management

Mail order, online and in-store retailer L.L.Bean is an industry leader in brand management, customer loyalty and marketing database systems. The company has developed a multi-channel approach to maintaining the same high levels of service for customers across all contact channels. The company was founded almost 100 years ago as a mail order company, adding phone sales and service in the 1970's, and the current e-commerce business has seen tremendous growth more recently, with online sales surpassing phone orders for the first time in 2009. The company's Web site, [www.llbean.com](http://www.llbean.com), offers interactive shopping guides, 24-hour live customer service and features such as order tracking, up-to-date product availability, customer order history as well as ratings and reviews.

If there were a Nobel Prize for contact center operations, L.L.Bean would no doubt have a wall of them. The company has been ranked as the number one provider of customer service by the National Retail Federation Foundation/ American Express Customer Service Survey for the past three years, and was named #1 in customer service by Bloomberg Business Week in 2010. To maintain its consistently high-quality service, L.L.Bean practices the best and most innovative of contact center processes, and its cutting-edge operations have paid off handsomely.

Agent flexibility in schedules and the use of home agents are ideas often written about in the trade press, but practiced much less than one would imagine, given how often the concepts are discussed. L.L.Bean operates three contact centers in Maine: Portland, Lewiston/Auburn and Bangor. Though the centers employ approximately 875 agents year round, only 20 percent of those agents work full-time. The remaining 80 percent work on flexible, part-time schedules, and at present 150 of them work from their homes. Agent turnover is nearly non-existent – the company hasn't had to hire a full-time agent in nearly three years.

L.L.Bean is unique, not only in its flexible workforce, but in the fact that it does not use an IVR. "It's a commitment to our customers and part of the culture of L.L.Bean," explained Anne Healy, Senior Scheduler at L.L.Bean. "We want everyone who calls to speak with a live person right away." Even answering live calls, the company has a goal of answering 80 percent of calls within 20 seconds with agent adherence averaging above 90 percent.

In a similar environment as other retailers, L.L.Bean experiences an enormous spike in call volumes in December prior to the winter holidays and following larger catalog mailings throughout the year. The contact centers collectively handle 90,000 calls per week in non-peak season, which translates to about 15,000 calls per day. During peak season, the contact centers can field up to 100,000 calls per day. As a result, the company needs to be able to ramp up very quickly to meet high volumes, and accomplishes this with the flexibility of part-time and seasonal agents. In addition to calls, some agents handle customer e-mails and Web chats, which are scheduled based on forecasts in conjunction with the agents' phone time.

## On The NICE Solution

"We produce our schedules three weeks in advance and then make them available so agents can trade their entire schedule if they want. Also, people can access WebStation to view their own schedules, and will get alerts as reminders for breaks and lunches. That's a huge component to keeping our agents happy."

Anne Healy, Senior Scheduler  
L.L.Bean



To keep up with such a progressive, flexible agent scheduling practice, L.L.Bean requires a scheduling and forecasting solution that can handle every complex workforce management angle with ease, tying the disparate elements into a cohesive whole.

L.L.Bean chose NICE Workforce Management in 1996, and their use of the solution has evolved with their growing and changing needs. Hours for the part-time staff of approximately 700 agents fall in the following categories: A, who work 30 to 37.4 hours per week; B, who work 20 to 29 hours per week; and category C, who work occasionally and as-needed from 500 to 1,000 hours per year. Up to 2000 agents are also hired seasonally. All staff receive a schedule within the range of hours for their status and are then able to trade, swap and manipulate their schedules with other representatives from all locations to meet their personal needs while ensuring the necessary shifts are covered for the customers' contacts. As a result L.L.Bean requires a workforce management solution that can accommodate extraordinary scheduling flexibility while allowing the contact centers to keep quality of service extremely high, the world-class service L.L.Bean's customers expect.

## Centralized Administration of a Distributed Workforce

Though the contact center entity as a whole is located in three separate sites and 150 homes, NICE Workforce Management allows for scheduling, forecasting and management of the entire enterprise from a single location, tying the disparate elements into one large virtual contact center. Though each physical center might have agents with special skills, those skills are always available to the larger contact center organization as a whole. Said Healy, "We have agents with basic order-taking skills, but we also have agents more skilled in back-office processes that might do special inquiries, agents who are skilled with more complex shipping scenarios, and even agents skilled with international calls. Though one skill may live in one contact center but not in another, they are tied into the whole organization's schedule via NICE Workforce Management, and we can have a pulse on whether we're under or over-staffed in certain areas, and can make real-time adjustments. We know at any given time, for example, that we may have a need for more staff to take international calls later that day or in the week, and can make adjustments."

## SmartSync: An Important Component for Flexibility

During the peak season at the end of the year, L.L.Bean must prepare to ramp-up quickly to meet volumes that can exceed 100,000 calls per day. This may require the contact centers to double or even triple the workforce with seasonal employees who are hired to handle the spikes in demand such as the winter holiday season or times following a major

catalog drop. Because these seasonal employees must be up and running quickly, L.L.Bean requires a solution that can help them achieve that need.

"It's easy," explained Healy. "We do an import via NICE Workforce Management's SmartSync feature from our staffing department. We have an internal system that HR uses to input employee names, availability and other employee information, and then when we need those employees to begin assignments, we do an automatic transfer into the NICE Workforce Management solution that brings all that information in quickly, so we're up and running fast. We also use the SmartSync feature to export historical adherence data, which is very important to our operations."

## Boosting Job Satisfaction with Webstation Plus

L.L.Bean began using NICE Workforce Management's WebStation Plus as a response to changing customer demand and the desire for employee flexibility.

"Because we expect agents to respond to flexibility in customer demand by coming in if they are not scheduled or staying later if needed, we wanted to ensure they also had the ability to trade and swap entire or partial shifts if desired," Healy explains. Prior to the installation of the NICE solution, the paperwork for accomplishing this manually was overwhelming and time-consuming. Management would post schedules on the walls in the contact centers, and agents spent a lot of time adjusting their schedules manually. In addition, since the schedules were physically posted on walls, trading could only happen among agents within each physical contact center. With the debut of WebStation Plus, agents can now trade schedules virtually with their peers. Essentially, every agent has visibility into every shift another agent wants to trade.

"The WebStation Plus feature is huge for us," said Healy. "We produce our schedules three weeks in advance and then make them available so agents can trade their entire schedule if they want. Also, people can access WebStation to view their own schedules, and will get alerts as reminders for breaks and lunches. That's a huge component to keeping our agents happy."

While true multi-channel customer service may invoke numerous elements that cut across all contact center operations, it begins with making sure the right people are available to respond to customer calls at the right time. The first step to achieving true customer dynamics – making the most out of the intricate relationship a company has with its customers – is finding a solution that can optimize contact center performance by creating, implementing and maintaining the precise workforce needed to meet the demanding needs of customers.

## About NICE

NICE (Nasdaq: NICE) is the worldwide leading provider of both cloud and on-premise enterprise software solutions that empower organizations to make smarter decisions based on advanced analytics of structured and unstructured data. NICE helps organizations of all sizes deliver better customer service, ensure compliance, combat fraud and safeguard citizens. Over 22,000 organizations in more than 150 countries, including over 80 of the Fortune 100 companies, are using NICE solutions. [www.nice.com](http://www.nice.com)