

Alaska Airlines



Using workforce management and an at-home agent program to make its customer service soar

Products:

- Aspect® eWorkforce Management™ and the Empower Enhancement Package
- Aspect® Spectrum® ACD

Results:

- Increased productivity and revenue
- Improved customer service
- Reduced staffing and operations costs

"Agents love the at-home agent program because they can focus on the needs of the customer without the distractions found in a busy contact center. The contact center staff is our front line, they are in the best position to see the shortcomings of the processes that we use, and that is why it is so important to make sure these agents are properly trained and operating in a positive work environment, and Aspect Software helped us to accomplish this."

Amy Gerfen

Reservations Manager,
Alaska Airlines

The Company

Alaska Airlines is the ninth-largest U.S. airline and is the dominant West Coast air carrier. Headquartered in Seattle, Alaska Airlines manages more than 800 agents located in three contact centers throughout North America, and is innovative in the way it has leveraged technology to deliver a better customer experience. Alaska Airlines was the first airline to sell tickets on its website, allow web check-in and install self check-in kiosks at airports.

The Business Challenge

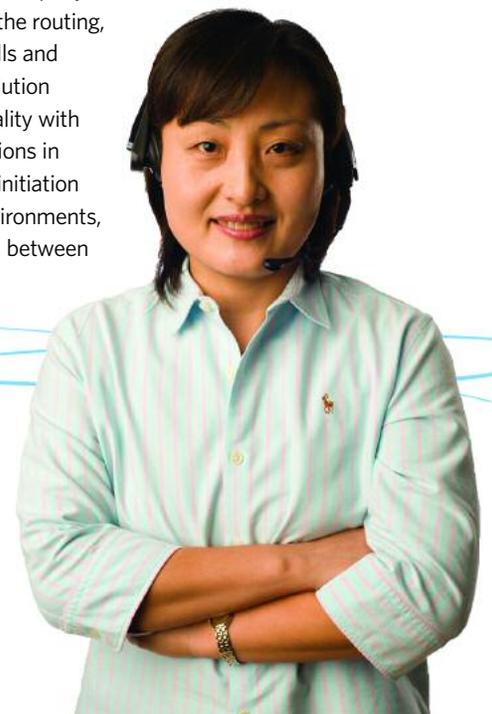
The Alaska Airlines contact centers manage reservations, flight information and notifications, baggage claims and other passenger requests that come from both online and traditional phone interactions. As its call volumes continued to increase and the calls themselves became more complex and lengthy, the airline recognized that it needed to place an emphasis on retaining the contact center's knowledgeable and skilled agents in order to keep service levels high and improve the average speed of answer.

In addition, the supervisors in the contact center were challenged with managing a complex operation and coaching an agent staff. Balancing the schedules for more than 800 agents was time consuming and it was difficult to ensure they had the right agents working at the right times to deliver high service levels while containing costs. The airline recognized that it needed a better process that would allow it to reduce overtime, offer variable scheduling, allocate time for non-phone activities, give agents more control to manage their own work/life equilibrium, and find a balance among cost, service and quality.

The Solution

To address employee morale issues, reduce costs and better retain its highly skilled agents, the airline explored the possibility of allowing agents to work from home, an option that had been specifically requested by the agents. It was expected that an at-home agent set-up would help improve absenteeism and attrition, improve productivity, performance and work/life balance. To test this, the airline needed to do a pilot program first.

A key piece of technology for the at-home initiative was the company's existing Aspect® Spectrum® ACD which is used to manage the routing, reporting and some of the workflow for its contact center calls and supports critical, high-volume customer interactions. The solution tightly integrates automatic call distribution (ACD) functionality with sophisticated computer telephony integration (CTI) applications in both traditional circuit-switched infrastructures and session initiation protocol (SIP)-based Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) environments, while providing 99.999 percent availability. An IP connection between



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Aspect® Spectrum® ACD and the Web Powered Agent desktop application enables the Alaska Airline agents to work from home and have the queued calls routed to them from any application, just as though they were physically in a contact center. Web Powered Agent is a thin client agent desktop application that enables the at-home agents to access customer information through screen pops and view their individual productivity, and provides supervisors with additional capabilities to manage staff.

In addition, as part of the at-home agent program, Alaska Airlines also created requirements for employee eligibility. The company screened its existing agents for the pilot deployment and selected the top 20 individuals for the program. Supervisors then visited each home to test equipment connectivity. During the pilot, contact center agents were required to email daily reports regarding any issues that they encountered. The reports were logged and tracked to categorize and then address frequently occurring problems.

The airline also needed to implement a workforce management solution to improve the scheduling process and free up supervisors for coaching and training the agents. After comparing benchmarking data from various workforce management vendors, Alaska Airlines chose to implement Aspect® eWorkforce Management™ and the Empower enhancement package. Aspect eWorkforce Management enables the airline to accurately plan, manage and optimize performance for their multi-skilled and multisite staffing resources. Empower allows at-home agents to bid for shifts, vacations, and other events and to make changes to their schedules within parameters set by the contact center, giving the agents more control, which is helping improve morale.

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The Results

As a result of the at-home agent initiative and Aspect eWorkforce Management implementation, Alaska Airlines is seeing increased productivity and revenue, improved customer service, reduced staffing and operations costs, as well as a rapid return on investment. Aspect eWorkforce Management and Aspect Spectrum ACD are enabling the company to maximize profits, reduce staffing costs and turnover, deliver superior customer service and improve the contact center's overall performance to better meet the company's business goals. As a result, they made the decision to permanently implement the at-home agent program at Alaska Airlines.

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About Aspect Software

Aspect Software, Inc., founder of the contact center industry, is the world's largest company solely focused on providing proven, innovative solutions to enable customer service, collections, and sales and telemarketing processes for in-house and outsourced contact centers. For more information, visit www.aspect.com.

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