

US Airways

"Following the merger between the two companies, naturally we have experienced many changes over the past few years. The flexibility and responsiveness of Aspect has helped us greatly adjust along the way and overcome some of the inherent challenges that come whenever you bring together two organizations that have different technology and processes in place."

Kim Doody

Manager, Resource Planning and Analysis
US Airways

Products

- PerformanceEdge™ - Aspect® eWorkforce Management™.
- Empower and Perform enhancement packages.

Results

- Improved scheduling flexibility for agents.
- Lowered operating costs by two full-time equivalents (FTE).
- Increased occupancy rates by 12 percent.
- Saved more than 1,200 hours annually by automating vacation bids.
- Improved forecasting to manage call volumes.

The Company

US Airways is the fifth largest domestic US airline, employing more than 35,000 aviation professionals worldwide. The company currently has five contact centers, which employ approximately 1,600 agents. Most of those agents are in charge of booking flights for customers, handling frequent traveler accounts, and scheduling vacation packages, such as setting up reservations for hotel and car rentals, as well as flights. US Airways, US Airways Shuttle and US Airways Express operate approximately 3,500 flights per day and serve more than 230 communities in the US, Canada, Europe, the Caribbean and Latin America. US Airways is a member of the Star Alliance network which offers customers 18,000 daily flights to 965 destinations in 162 countries worldwide.

The Business Challenge

Over the last several years the airline industry has had to overcome many challenges, including a considerable amount of consolidation. US Airways has seen its fair share of changes as a result. One of the most interesting of these was the merger between the company and America West. While the merger clearly brought numerous benefits to both organizations' customers, it also required some adjustments in contact center processes to maintain service levels while minding that cost control is a key part of the business model.

Post-merger, the contact center consisted of approximately 1,600 agents across five contact centers that were responsible for making flight reservations, handling frequent traveler accounts, and scheduling vacation packages that include reservations for hotels and car rentals, as well as flights. However, the merged contact centers were still operating two different automatic call distributors (ACDs), as well as leveraging different versions of scheduling and forecasting applications. In addition, the US Airways contact center was unionized, which created additional challenges regarding scheduling requirements mandated by the labor union. Because of the disparity between the scheduling systems, it required a team of six contact center managers to manually handle the bid scheduling for agent vacations and time off. This onerous process made it clear that having a single workforce management package across all contact centers would solve many of the scheduling challenges, as well as allow the organization to better forecast when it needed agents to handle peak call volumes, while ensuring it was complying with the union-related requirements.

The Solution

Prior to the merger, America West was already using the workforce management capabilities of PerformanceEdge™ and had been happy with the results. Based on this, the decision was made to standardize all of the US Airways contact centers on the same application. An important point in this decision was that US Airways needed a full-featured tool for managing the contact center workforce - a tool built for large contact center operations and refined over years of use. PerformanceEdge - Aspect eWorkforce Management fit that bill perfectly and would allow US Airways to ensure that the contact center had the appropriate number of agents on hand, at any given moment, to handle traffic and maintain service levels.



“Over the years, Aspect has provided us with not only exceptional solutions, but a level of service we could not find anywhere else. We are looking forward to continue to maximizing the PerformanceEdge™ workforce management capabilities from Aspect to help enhance our customers’ experiences and overall employee satisfaction on an ongoing basis.”

Kim Doody

*Manager, Resource Planning
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Naturally, service levels are a key measurement in the US Airways contact center. The goal is to answer 80 percent of the calls within 20 seconds in the sales group and 70 percent within 45 seconds across the rest of the center. Matching staff to volume is crucial. If the center is understaffed, it doesn’t hit its targets. If too many agents are on duty, costs go up.

Getting a handle on staffing levels was the main objective, but once the software was up and running, US Airways found that it was gaining other benefits from the solution. In addition to the core of software forecasting and scheduling, the company deployed an optional module called Aspect® eWorkforce Management™ - Empower. This automated tool for handling schedule change requests proved to be an excellent way to give agents more flexibility. Another optional module US Airways deployed was Aspect eWorkforce Management - Perform, which provides an at-a-glance view of each agent’s activity in real time and compares it to scheduled activities.

The Results

The core application of Aspect eWorkforce Management provides all of the essential workforce management forecasting, scheduling and tracking functionality. Following implementation, US Airways noticed that it was able to cut down the number of people needed to manage the scheduling process. Because the solution allows for flexible scheduling, the contact center can easily and automatically create optimized agent schedules, based on employee preferences and their individual work and equity rules. In addition, the capabilities of Aspect eWorkforce Management help forecast the appropriate number of agents needed to handle incoming calls based on historical data.

These scheduling capabilities have allowed US Airways to better meet the requirements of the labor union, as well as ensure they are meeting call volumes appropriately. In addition, the solution is allowing them to effectively manage and track intra-day performance so they can react quickly to changing circumstances, such as inclement weather that causes flight cancellations.

The Empower and Perform modules are also helping US Airways improve agent adherence and productivity, empower agents to manage their own schedules, fine-tune workforce performance and simplify the management of their multisite and outsourced staffing resources. This has freed up the contact center managers to concentrate their efforts on coaching the agents and helping manage the customer service process better. Plus, the Empower module has helped reduce administrative costs, increase retention and overall contact center performance.

Having everyone on the same schedule also makes it much easier to forecast more accurately. Ultimately, these capabilities are helping US Airways enhance the overall customer experience and improve employee satisfaction. In particular, US Airways has been able to reduce its average speed of answer (ASA) from the 300 range to less than 100 in the last 2 years and improve overall service levels.

US Airways has seen improved agent productivity and efficiency through schedule adherence and reporting that ensures agents are performing at peak productivity levels. Looking ahead from the benefits they’ve already experienced, US Airways is planning to focus on more detailed forecasting and more analytical work, which is all possible with the capabilities of the workforce management package.

About PerformanceEdge™

PerformanceEdge combines workforce management, recording and quality management, performance management, campaign management, and coaching and eLearning to enable organizations to holistically respond to changing business conditions. The PerformanceEdge applications dynamically interoperate to help contact center managers consider everything and act immediately. Inbound, outbound and blended contact centers can now more easily control costs, enhance service levels, align performance with strategic goals, and extend those benefits into the enterprise. For more information, visit www.performanceedgesuite.com.

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