

CLIENT INFO AT A GLANCE

Alert Communications Company

Website: www.alertcom.com

Industry: Call Center Outsourcing

Headquarters: South Pasadena, CA

Company Overview: Alert

Communications provides call center services in the U.S. and offshore.

Challenge Summary: Maintaining an optimal workforce while staying profitable proved to be a constant challenge. Specifically, the company struggled to accurately predict call volumes or agent requirements.

Business Value: By implementing the Monet Workforce Optimization Suite, Alert Communications can now accurately forecast call volume. This had led to optimization of staffing levels and scheduling of agents. As a result, labor costs have been reduced from 60 percent of total revenue to only 40 percent.

“What drove us to try out Monet was the array of forecasting capabilities with a degree of accuracy that greatly exceeded our expectations,” said Steve Covarrubias, a staff analyst at Alert Communications. “We’ve been able to target and maintain unrelenting accuracy when forecasting call volumes. As a result, we’ve better optimized the staffing and scheduling of our agents.”

Switch from Pipkins to Monet Increases Forecasting Accuracy

Call Center increases profitability by 20% using Monet Workforce Optimization Suite

Alert Communications is no Johnny Come Lately to the call center industry. It opened its first call center in Los Angeles as far back as 1949. By the 1950's, it had expanded to 19 facilities across California. Today, Alert Communications is an integrated eCRM and direct marketing outsourcing company with a total capacity of over 500 seats. It offers call center services both in the U.S. and offshore, and has been ranked in the Top 50 Outsourced Call Centers for the last several years. Its headquarters are in South Pasadena, California.

Until recently, Alert provided only inbound services. However, the company continues to evolve and is transitioning away from traditional ACD based call facilities into IP based technology. As a result, about 5 percent of its services consist of outbound and email-based services.

Alert Communications handles about 65,000 calls per month, rising to over 100,000 per month during the holiday season. Its client list includes SBC Directory Sales, Lego, USA Inc., and Disney American Teachers Award. With such a high call volume to address and a wide range of demanding clients to satisfy, forecasting has become a vital aspect of Alert's operations.

“It is vital for us to maintain an optimal workforce so we can fully service the many clients that look to us to address their outsourcing needs,” said Steve Covarrubias, a staff analyst at Alert Communications. “Failure to effectively schedule our workforce would dramatically reduce the level of service we can provide.”

Initially, the company adopted a Windows-based workforce management solution from Pipkins. Covarrubias liked the way the software integrated the important aspects of forecasting and scheduling in one program. He felt that, overall, it introduced tools and capabilities that changed the company's standards in terms of workforce management.

“Pipkins multi-skill set staffing/scheduling technology helped us to become more effective,” said Covarrubias. “However, we never were fully satisfied with how Pipkins predicted call volumes or agent requirements.”

He explains that Alert never managed to successfully configure the various forecasting metrics. Consistent failures in analysis after analysis drove the company to rely on its own determinations on call volumes and the corresponding staffing levels.

But even the most veteran call center managers and analysts can be caught flat footed by surges in call volume or unsuspected seasonal variations. It takes sophisticated forecasting and scheduling software to remote the guesswork. Alert Communications, therefore, decided to evaluate the Monet Workforce Management System by Left Bank Solutions Inc.

Monet includes a wealth of such features as the capability to forecast and monitor Agent Occupancy, a fully integrated Agent Exception Planner, a company wide Agent Availability Calendar, and Multimedia Blending. Monet’s Agent Occupancy feature, for example, is the measure of how busy agents are and is expressed as a percentage of logged-in time that an agent is actually busy in talk or wrap up time. The capability to forecast, modify and monitor a center’s agent occupancy rates is displayed next to the current call history and service level objectives. This allows for greater contact center flexibility during the agent scheduling and adherence process.

“The ability for contact center managers to incorporate, track and adjust agent occupancy rates within the normal scheduling activities is an important consideration.” notes Penny Reynolds a founding partner of The Call Center School. “Creating and monitoring the proper relationship between agent occupancy and service levels is the key to increasing both customer service levels and agent retention rates.”

Monet’s Exception Planner has strong support for the scheduling of recurring exceptions as well as mid-day exceptions. It takes countless exceptions into account when choosing shifts, and scheduling breaks. For example, a manager can utilize Monet 3.5 to schedule an agent to attend a training meeting from 11:00 - 1:00 on the second Friday of every month, or set up a rotating schedule where agents have different days off on alternate weeks.

Monet’s Availability Calendar permits call center managers to see how existing exceptions affect staff availability. Managers can select any set of dates from the entire year and view agent requirements and availability, along with the number of exception hours, broken down both by agent and exception type. This tool is particularly useful when deciding upon and granting agent vacation requests.

In addition, Monet’s Multimedia Blending capability allows blended contact centers the ability to schedule non-call related activity. This capability, also known as “banding,” permits call center managers to schedule email, fax and other non-call traffic during off-peak periods. Additional functionality allows for Agents to have blended schedules based by day of the week, skills sets available and max/min time slot objectives.

Other features include: a graphical chart of agent schedules along with quarter-hour statistics like agent surplus/shortage; individualized shift creation for agents with special needs; sophisticated employee-level configuration options for non-call work assignment; integration with Nortel Symposium Call Center Server (versions 3.0 and above), with data collected from switches by Nortel Symposium available to Monet users in real time.

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Due to the small amount of set-up and configuration time required, Alert Communications experienced a fast transition from Pipkins to Monet. Prior to the change, it was difficult to precisely quantify the needs of the various Alert call centers or the needs of each client. Without such vital metrics, it wasn’t always possible to make the right decisions.

“Since adopting Monet, we have been able to ‘bridge the gap’ by being able to output no-nonsense, highly accurate information that all aspects of our call center operations can use to make better, sound decisions,” said Covarrubias.

He gives a specific example of how the change to Monet has made an immediate impact on efficiency and productivity. In the past when the company estimated labor costs, it would take several weeks before management could determine if the right decision had been made i.e. it could view its labor costs in terms of their overall percentage of revenues to see if the schedules and staffing levels implemented were correct or incorrect.

Through utilization of the ‘what-if’ scenarios built into Monet, Alert Communications can now rapidly model a series of potential changes to measure their project outcome on revenue and service levels. The results have been spectacular.

“Previously, labor costs accounted for as much as 60 percent of our revenue,” said Covarrubias. “Since we adopted Monet for forecasting and scheduling, we’ve been able to reduce this percentage to as little as 40 percent of our revenue totals. This represents monthly savings of over \$11,500. As a result, the software paid for itself within 7 weeks.”