



White Paper:

Cost Effective Work Force Optimization for the Small Call Center

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According to conventional wisdom, the return on investment (ROI) on workforce optimization software makes it unaffordable for call centers of less than 60 seats. Those who fall below that threshold are led to believe that they must soldier on with inefficient manual processes. The ROI on workforce optimization software, they said, just isn't there for the small contact center.

This opinion, however, is based squarely on the economics of dealing with the established workforce optimization vendors. Their products, catering to the mid-sized and large contact centers, are typically well beyond the means of smaller operations. The best these firms can do is to attempt to make a shaky business case for implementing their software in call centers of 60 or more seats.

The Monet Workforce Management System by Left Bank Solutions, on the other hand, matches the features of the major players and is available at a price that makes it affordable for call centers with only a handful of seats. While 20 seats is a safe number to build a sound case for rapid ROI, Monet has been successfully implemented in centers with as few as five seats. And at the other end of the spectrum, it is equally at home in contact centers with 1000 or more seats.

In this white paper, we explain the basics of workforce optimization, detail the faulty conventional wisdom about the 60-seat threshold, and explain how Monet can be rapidly and cost-effectively implemented in the small contact center.

What is Workforce Optimization?

Workforce management is all about making agents as productive as possible. That is done primarily through accurate forecasting and optimization of agent schedules i.e. having enough agents for peak periods and avoiding agents sitting idle by scheduling accordingly. However, this has to be balanced against profitability. You have to get it right so that call wait times are low while agent productivity is kept at a maximum.

Call centers have traditionally tackled this issue using spreadsheets for scheduling. But this manual approach is guesswork at best, based upon the experience of the call center manager. Under those circumstances it is not uncommon for the call center to be caught flat-footed by demand spikes or to have agents loafing around with nothing to do.

That's why workforce optimization software is catching on as a means of automating the process. According to SaddleTree Research of Scottsdale, AZ, the workforce management market will reach \$819 million a year by 2007.

"Several factors are behind this market growth," said SaddleTree analyst Paul Stockford, "including the compelling ROI offered by workforce management, the direct impact that workforce management can have on operational performance, and a highly competitive environment."

The market for workforce optimization software will be further driven by more and more small contact centers adopting the software as a means of eliminating manual processes. Such organizations can now take advantage of the forecasting and scheduling capabilities normally reserved only for larger centers by using an affordable suite such as the Monet Workforce Optimization System.

Conventional Wisdom

Based on the cost of workforce optimization systems designed for the large contact centers, analyst after analyst has calculated that it takes at least 60 agents, and often more than 100, to reap good ROI from the software.

“In most cases, contact centers with less than 60 agents can schedule service reps using spreadsheets and monitor customer service by having a manager walk the floor,” said Lindsey Higgs, an analyst at AMR Research in Boston. “However, once the agent workforce grows beyond 60, these manual processes fall apart, forcing users to turn to technology for help.”

What happens is that managers spend an inordinate amount of time juggling agents’ schedules and trying to monitor their performance. Time spent on these tasks eats up much of the time that should be spent in management actions. According to the AMR study, one manager spent 80% of his time on scheduling. After implementing workforce optimization software, scheduling consumed only 20% of his time.

Workforce management can be a quick win in your contact center with impressive ROI,” said Higgs. “Scheduling applications deliver the fastest, most quantifiable ROI.”

The study further states that deals under \$100,000 are not unheard of, depending on the size of the contact center, the amount of integration between systems, and the modules chosen. Like many similar studies, however, it is built upon a faulty foundation – it uses workforce optimization packages designed for the high end of the market and attempts to make them fit the smaller contact center. Based on the data available to them, these analysts come to the right conclusion: it simply is not viable to deploy such tools in smaller contact centers. Occasionally, a case can be built using a sixty seat contact center. But that is typically in high-end contact centers selling big ticket items. In most cases, it takes 100 or more seats to gain ROI on traditional workforce optimization software.

And that’s where Left Bank Solutions comes in. Small call centers that have implemented the Monet Workforce Management System report easy deployment, greater efficiency and rapid return on investment. Instead of using 60 or 100 agents as the baseline of profitability, Monet has made it possible to experience the full gains of the technology with only a handful of agents.

“Prior to Monet, our admin staff had to manually keep track of agent activity, campaign planning and calls volume trends,” said Maureen Stanton, Managing Director, On Net Communications, a 20 agent call center in England. “In terms of administration, we have

reduced hours spent on campaigns by 75%. Monet has also eliminated the human error and inaccuracies we suffered before.”

As On Net and scores of other small contact centers have discovered, manual processes become unwieldy and inefficient when there are more than 20 agents. With less than 20 agents, spreadsheets can be used to schedule agents, and managers walking the floor can monitor the quality of customer service. However, once the call center is over 20 agents, these manual processes fall apart, forcing users to turn to workforce optimization technology for help.

That is not to say, however, that contact centers of ten or fewer agents cannot reap gains from Monet. One customer of Left Bank Solutions, for example, has only five agents yet swears by the Monet Workforce Management System.

Monet Workforce Management System

Take a look at the websites of the established workforce optimization vendors and they all play a similar tune: forecasting, scheduling, roster management, call volume adjustment, and schedule policing are the core functions. While there are minor differences in functionality, there can be big differences in price. Some offer their products for hundreds of thousands of dollars, while others attempt to price them around \$50,000 to tempt smaller contact centers to purchase.

Monet matches these products feature by feature for less than \$20,000:

Forecasting and Scheduling:

Monet is a sophisticated demand forecasting and scheduling program that leverages technology investments to deliver powerful and intelligent solutions. Developed specifically for the industry’s small and medium sectors, it offers features usually available only in large enterprise-scale systems that cost 10 to 20 times more.

It is a robust, affordable and easy-to-use program that efficiently automates the tedious process of forecasting call volumes and agent scheduling, improves customer service levels and reduces operation costs significantly. This powerful tool adds instant value to a contact center business by delivering better information that allows smarter decisions.

Non-IT trained managers can use Monet to produce forecasts in seconds. They can also adjust head count and other parameters to create detailed scenarios to determine the most efficient and cost effective way of organizing their resources. In addition, managers can use Monet to dynamically align lunches and breaks with organization service objectives.

Agent Occupancy

Monet’s new Agent Occupancy feature 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 now available and displayed next to the current call history and service level

objectives. This allows for even 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.”

Exception Planning

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 3.0 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.

Availability Calendar

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, training meetings and jury duty.

Reporting

Monet’s reporting capabilities far exceed those offered by typical ACD’s. It can produce graphical roster reports in seconds, for example, showing agent schedules along with quarter-hour statistics like agent surplus/shortage

Shift Creation

Monet accurately forecasts agent requirements for each 15-minute period on the basis of service objectives and transactional data. An intuitive user interface allows the contact center manager to create optimum weekly schedules and even forecasts for seasonal volume, and to easily modify them for real-time situations by building separate distinctive day files. A notable feature of the Monet Workforce Management System is that it enables building unlimited splits or agent groups, each with its own set of service objectives and guidelines. It takes only moments to create individualized shifts for agents with special needs.

ACD Integration

Monet Data Collector, an add-on for real-time integration, has added Nortel Symposium Call Center Server and Telephony @ Work to its’ list of supported interfaces. Monet, in fact, integrates smoothly with almost all major phone system ACDs. This enables the collecting and building of historical contact center data for the purpose of demand forecasting and transactional analysis.

User Friendly

Monet's "Quick Data Builder" feature is very user-friendly. All that the call center manager needs to do is answer a few questions and the "Quick Data Builder" will build the center's historical data, thus, enabling the busy manager to begin using all its powerful features within minutes of installing.

Show me the Monet

Monet successfully addresses the typical issues faced by a contact center such as: fluctuating center and seasonal volumes; inappropriate schedules to match changing volumes; labor inefficiencies and skill imbalances; reduced workforce productivity; ineffective deployment of capital equipment and facilities; and high employee turnover and low employee morale coupled with high absenteeism. It is a complete end-to-end solution and offers the most comprehensive features for a workforce management system. These features include: configuration features, data collection features, forecast features, scheduling features, employee database features and center management features.

Monet enables busy managers at small contact centers to adeptly create employee schedules and customized shifts to efficiently handle forecasted volumes, or respond to real-time fluctuating volumes, and even manage seasonal volumes. It can forecast and schedule agents to handle inbound calls, outbound calls, emails, Internet messages, web callbacks and any other back office process.

Most importantly, Monet provides full workforce optimization functionality at a fraction of the price of the leading brands. This makes it affordable for small contact centers and provides ROI within a few months.

"The Monet Workforce Management System reduced our center costs in a matter of days and you can simply use the system to produce center budgets by running a costing of all forecasted agent shifts and agent schedules," said Stanton of On Net Communications. "This has increased our profitability by 20% since the turn of the year."

About Left Bank Solutions:

Left Bank Solutions, a global provider of world-class workforce solutions, is driving the workforce optimization evolution particularly for the contact center industry's small and medium sectors. Left Bank Solutions helps businesses to leverage their workforce investments for efficient deployment of critical resources and effective management of people-processes – significantly impacting customer service levels and business profitability.

Left Bank Solutions' innovative technology products for global businesses unite the extensive, valuable experience gained over the last two decades in three of the hottest industries: technology, telecom and professional services. This powerful combination enables contact centers with resource optimization solutions to concentrate on improving the customer service experience and reducing center costs rather than focusing on labor and time-intensive management activities.

The integrated workforce optimization solutions offered by Left Bank Solutions give customers exactly what they want – intelligent and powerful workforce management systems that are 100 percent flexible, highly reliable, easily scalable and definitely affordable.

As a complete solutions' provider, Left Bank Solutions offers integrated consulting services and training to help contact center companies achieve long-term success. Left Bank Solutions' expert consultants work with customer management teams to create custom implementations from planning and designing to installation and beyond.

For more information about Left Bank Solutions and its products, please visit <http://www.leftbanksolutions.com> or call +1 (310) 207-6800.