NOBLE SYSTEMS

Workforce Management Software Delivers Rapid ROI for Outbound, Inbound and Blended Centers

What Can **Workforce Management** Do for Your Contact Center?

- Streamline Tasks & Boost Performance
- Increase Service Levels & Improve Productivity
- Capture & Analyze Critical Call Center Data
- Optimize Your Workforce & Reduce Costs

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Introduction

Why Choose Workforce Management?

One of the greatest challenges of managing contact centers is staffing. Companies need a comprehensive workforce management system that can accurately forecast inbound and outbound call volumes, leverage flexible scheduling processes, integrate with other corporate systems, and produce reports that measure agent and center performance. *Noble® Workforce Management* provides a powerful, robust, and affordable solution that is easy to deploy for outbound, inbound and blended centers of all sizes. Noble delivers a flexible solution with dynamic features and world-class technology that automates every facet of the workforce management experience, giving you the tools you need to succeed in an increasingly complex environment.

Gone are the days when technology is being implemented for technology's sake. These days, management insists on reviewing the financial implications of any proposed software deployment – and rightly so. In addition to the actual cost of the software itself, they want to know how long it takes to deploy, how much it will cost to maintain, and most importantly, how that software will impact the bottom line. This is best measured in terms of Return on Investment (ROI).

In this paper, we take a close look at these issues as they apply to Workforce Management (WFM) software. This document covers the main issues to look for, the hidden costs that must be identified, and the primary factors to consider in any ROI calculation. In addition, we include direct financial feedback from several companies, large and small, that have implemented WFM products.

James K. Noble, Jr.
President & CEO

How

much is a lack of Workforce Management costing you?

How Much Is a Lack of Workforce Management Costing You?

With only a handful of agents, it is possible to get away with manual processes for forecasting and scheduling. This usually means using spreadsheets and word processors to attempt to juggle the multitude of factors involved in agent management, especially for centers that manage oubound and blended contacts, rather than only inbound programs. In many cases, this quickly turns into making decisions on staffing levels and agent schedules with blindfolds on. Typically, forecasts are too high or too low – when understaffed, it means failing to meet service level agreements and angry customers; when overstaffed, profitability is reduced. Even in call centers with as few as 20 agents, it can cost you a fortune if you do not have WFM software in place.

Take the case of **ONC**, a busy call center outsourcer. The workload is currently split 60% outbound and 40% inbound among 20 agents – nine full-time staff and 11 part-timers. Until a few months ago, ONC utilized Excel spreadsheets to manage its internal operations, involving repeated data entry and absorbed staff time. Human error became a fact of life due to the amount of manual keying and re-keying of information, schedules and campaign information.

“Administrative staff had to manually keep track of agent activity, campaign planning and calls volume trends,” said the Managing Director of ONC. “This was time consuming and inefficient – amounting to 20 or more hours every week.”

The pay rate per hour for those 20 hours is only the beginning of the losses associated with a failure to implement WFM. Instead of having the time to walk the floor to ensure that agents are engaged in productive activities, managers were tied up in administration. At ONC, this was having a staggering effect on profitability. It took the implementation of the Workforce Management System for management to realize the impact.

> “ The great thing about the WFM solution is that it is an **affordable way** for us to offer services that rival those of the largest contact centers. ***Workforce management reduced our center costs in a matter of days.*** You can also easily use the system to produce center budgets by running a costing of all forecasted agent shifts and agent schedules. This has ***increased our profitability by 20%*** since the turn of the year. ”
>
> **ONC**

While small contact centers have realized a significant ROI from the implementation of WFM, the gains are even greater for larger contact centers with blended environments. At **ACSP**, for example, its 500-plus seats handle an average of 65,000 inbound calls per month, increasing to over 100,000 calls during the holiday season, in addition to their outbound campaigns. With such a high call volume to address and a wide range of demanding clients to satisfy, forecasting has become a vital aspect of ACSP'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 a Staff Analyst at ACSP. "Failure to effectively schedule our workforce would dramatically reduce the level of service we can provide."

ACSP found it a constant challenge to accurately predict call volumes or agent requirements. As a result, it struggled to balance the estimation of adequate staffing levels with profitability. "Labor costs accounted for as much as 60% of our revenue," stated the Analyst.

> " When we implemented WFM software, we were ***better able to manage our staffing levels versus actual needs***. Labor costs dropped to only 40% of the total – **or over $11,500 per month in reduced payroll**. "
>
> **ACSP**

How much does Workforce Management cost to implement?

How Much Does Workforce Management Cost to Implement?

Until recently, WFM packages cost $100,000+ for small contact centers and anywhere from several hundred thousand to one million dollars for large organizations, with tier-one pricing for tier-one products, focusing mostly on inbound forecasting. These vendors then began stripping features to offer a smaller-market solution at a middle-market price. *Noble WFM* delivers the most cost-effective platform by far, with a workforce management system offering all of the features of a tier-one solution at a price that is affordable for both large enterprises and small businesses, and that encompasses inbound, outbound and blended campaigns.

A not-for-profit community-chartered **Credit Union**, for example, purchased the cost-efficient WFM product. The call center handles over thirty thousand calls each month for 21 full-time employees and 20 part-timers working a variety of schedules. Manually managing agent scheduling via spreadsheets proved to be cumbersome and inefficient. The Credit Union frequently mis-estimated staffing levels: understaffing resulted in failure to meet service level agreements; and overstaffing caused costs to soar. The center it needed to eliminate manual forecasting and scheduling from its operations.

> “ We expect to save, at a minimum, the equivalent of one FTE, ***or $25,000 within the first year*** after implementing WFM. WFM has eliminated the guesswork from our profitability analyses and scheduling, and has helped us ***improve our service levels by at least 5%.*** Although the cost of our software was a fraction of the bigger call center packages, ***it has every key feature that the large packages offer***. ”
>
> **Credit Union**

What

hidden costs have to be considered?

What Hidden Costs Have to be Considered?

Over the past few months, some vendors have attempted to reduce their prices by ‘slimming down’ their offerings. Therefore, anyone considering a WFM purchase should ask probing questions about what they are really buying. Here are some important factors to take into account:

1. Don’t buy a ‘lite’ product, or a solution that the vendor has trimmed down by removing features to try to make the price more attractive in the market. How can you determine if you are looking at a ‘lite’ version? Visit the company’s website. If a full-featured WFM version is also offered, that is the one your call center needs.

2. Find out any additional modules you may have to purchase which are not included in the price quoted. One vendor prices its base software at mid-market price, for instance, then adds on charges for vital management features, such as Adherence, Web-based portals, Multi-media blending and its Vacation Planner. Other vendors also offer additional modules at a higher fee for Real-time Adherence and Agent browse functions.

3. Determine if the system is optimized for inbound-only campaigns. Most centers manage both inbound and outbound programs to maximize efficiencies. For a WFM platform to be truly beneficial to a multi-tasking centers, it should be able to forecast volumes and schedule resources for blended environments.

4. Verify that the price quoted includes everything you need. Ask specifically about ACD connection, Agent browsers, Real-time adherence, installation and at least one year of support and maintenance.

While some vendors charge more for maintenance, additional modules and ACD connections, or limit support for outbound and blended programs, these are all included in the price of *Noble WFM*. Further, it scales from small, single-site centers up to enterprise organizations with multiple locations in multiple countries and thousands of agents, and does so with affordable per-agent costs.

How long a payback period is typical with WFM?

How Long a Payback Period is Typical with WFM?

The payback period on WFM varies based on the capabilities of the software and the price charged by the vendor. Fortunately, there are software packages available that offer and build upon the features of expensive and feature-rich WFM products at a very affordable price.

Choosing the more cost-effective solution, **ACSP** achieved more accurate call volume forecasts, optimization of staffing levels and scheduling of agents, and a labor cost reduction. "Since adopting WFM, we have 'bridged 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 the Analyst.

He gives a specific example of how the change to WFM has made an immediate impact on efficiency and productivity. In the past when the company estimated labor costs, it was several weeks before management could determine if the right decision had been made. ACSP would 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 its WFM platform, ACSP can now rapidly enter a series of potential changes and create models to measure their project outcome on revenue and service levels. The results have been spectacular.

At **ACSP**, labor costs have been reduced from 60% of revenue to 40% with the use of WFM for forecasting and scheduling, for a monthly savings of over $11,500 and a payback period of only 7 weeks.

Based on a projected improvement of no less than 5%, the **Credit Union** expects to achieve a return on investment within less than a year.

The **Credit Union** experienced similar results. By implementing workforce management software in its call center, the Credit Union has significantly increased the efficiency level of its call center. The institution saved $25,000 in the first year, or the cost of one FTE, and improved service levels by eliminating the guesswork from its profitability analyses and scheduling.

What other ROI factors should be considered?

What Other ROI Factors Should be Considered?

In addition to reduced labor costs and improved profitability, there are other factors to be taken into account in the ROI equation. By having access to a wide array of forecasting capabilities, it is possible to maintain unrelenting accuracy when forecasting inbound and outbound call volumes. As a result, organizations can optimize the staffing and scheduling of their agents.

At the **Credit Union**, for instance, the organization forecasts, modifies and monitors agent occupancy rates by displaying that data next to the current call history and service level objectives. This allows the call center to be more flexible when it comes to the agent scheduling and adherence process. Call center managers can use the software to determine the consequences of various scenarios and forecasts, such as the exact cost of existing schedules, as well as the cost of planned schedule changes.

One of the early benefits brought about a change in policy at the Credit Union. A forecast showed that more experienced agents worked the early shift, while the center's peak inbound and outbound traffic came later in the day. To fill the gap, the Credit Union was employing less-experienced part-timers for the later slots. The result was that call times were much longer at night, as the part-timers were not handling customer calls as efficiently as their full-time counterparts. Full-timers who were working the late shift were shown preference for any positions that became available in the early shift. Thus, the company was continually losing veteran performers from the late shift. Through accurate forecasting, management realized that it had to change this practice and keep its more experienced agents working later hours.

"We noticed that handle times at night went up dramatically as the part timers would have to put people on hold while figuring out how to handle their issues," said the Analyst. "Essentially, we were cutting our own throats by putting new people on at night."

> " WFM helps us decide if we have set the right goals and if we need to make staffing adjustments. We can use it to explore factors such as improved service levels and reduced customer wait times and the cost to provide them. ***We can find the right balance of efficiency and profitability*** without having to hire people and hope it will work out to be cost-effective. **I know in real time what every change in schedule will cost**. "
>
> **Credit Union**

What Other ROI Factors Should be Considered?

Another benefit of WFM comes when a call center is trying to plan and manage multiple campaigns at once. Typically, such planning is done on a haphazard basis. It is mainly driven by rough estimates and guesswork.

As an outsourcer, **ONC** recognized the need for a program to help plan and monitor numerous campaigns at the same time for inbound, outbound and blended agents. It selected WFM to resolve this issue. "In terms of administration, WFM has helped us reduce the amount of time we spend planning and scheduling for multiple campaigns," said the Managing Director.

> “ We have **reduced hours spent on campaigns by 75%**, slim-lining from 20 hours per week down to 5. WFM has also dramatically eliminated the chances of human error and inaccuracies we suffered before. ”
>
> **ONC**

Ensuring

call center

profitability

Ensuring Call Center Profitability

Contact center profitability hinges on making agents as productive as possible for all types of communication – inbound, outbound, or blended, via voice, email, or web. It is all about having enough agents for peak periods and avoiding long periods where agents sit idle. You have to achieve the right balance so that call wait times are low, while agent productivity is kept at a maximum.

Traditionally, contact centers have used spreadsheets for this function. But this approach can be guesswork at best, based upon the experience of the call center manager, and it becomes even more difficult to multi-channel programs. Under those circumstances, it is not uncommon for the call center to be caught flat-footed by demand spikes, or to have agents sitting around for hours with nothing to do.

Enter the *Noble Workforce Management* system. *Noble WFM* offers accurate forecasting and optimization of agent schedules. It eliminates the many hours consumed in manual scheduling by automating the entire scheduling process. At the same time, it greatly increases the precision of forecasting so that schedules can be adjusted as often as needed to satisfy demand. *Noble WFM* provides *Blended Agent Forecasting* based upon records to call and historical performance, as well as *Calling List Forecasts* to determine the number of Agents required to exhaust a list as quickly as possible in a specified period of time or based on spreading a list out evenly over a given time period, and *Valley Forecasts* to fill in slow periods of inbound traffic with outbound calls.

Noble WFM was developed with three key goals in mind:

- To offer all the features and tools including in larger, more expensive WFM products. For example, *Noble AnyWhere* is a Web-based workforce management interface that provides agents and supervisors convenient, easy access to scheduling, tracking and exception planning management functions. We also offer Skill-based Scheduling and Routing and the ability to set individual service levels to each call type.

- To make workforce management accessible for campaigns of all types, with a total solution for multi-tasking, multi-channel environments. *Noble WFM* offers forecasting and scheduling for voice, email and web contacts in outbound, inbound and blended contact centers.

- To make it available at a price that is affordable by small and mid-sized contact centers. *Noble WFM* can be implemented profitably in centers with only a handful of agents. Yet at the same time, it meets the needs of enterprise organizations with multiple locations and thousands of agents.

In conclusion, *Noble WFM* enables the contact center manager to take charge of the agent scheduling and forecasting functions. This integrated workforce optimization system reduces contact center costs while allowing for immediate and measurable gains in customer service levels.

About

Noble Systems

Corporation

About Noble Systems Corporation

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Noble Systems Corporation (NSC) is a global leader in unified contact center technology solutions, providing innovative products since 1989. Tens of thousands of agents at 2,000+ client installations worldwide conduct business using the award-winning Noble platform to manage customer communications. The scalable, integrated *Noble® Solution* offers a unified platform for your total customer experience.

Our solutions allow companies to more effectively communicate with their customers via multiple channels, including inbound/outbound/blended voice, email, fax and web. This unified system includes the key software technologies that contact centers need most: Predictive dialing, Inbound contact management and ACD, IP-PBX, Self Service IVR software, CTI for intelligent screen pops, Digital Recording, Workforce Management and Reporting, and VoIP Support. Noble also provides seamless integration to existing corporate environments, reducing your learning curve and protecting your technology investments.

The integrated workforce management solutions offered by Noble Systems provide customers with powerful systems that allow for immediate, measurable, gains in customer service levels and reduction of contact center costs. WFM enables businesses to leverage their workforce investments by providing efficient deployment of critical resources and effective management of personnel, resulting in significant increases in customer service levels and business profitability.

For over 20 years, Noble Systems has been delivering solutions that build performance and productivity, improve the quality of customer contacts, and reduce costs. Contact us to learn more.

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Get to Know Noble Systems

Are you ready to automate your scheduling and forecasting processes and to start saving money with **Workforce Management**?

Contact us for your
FREE Business Assessment
and let Noble Systems help
you ***grow your business!***

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