GMT Customer Case Study

Eurostar Results

- Achieved better visibility into call arrival patterns and created improved schedules as a result
- Created accurate, workable forecasts in as little as 2 weeks after implementation
- Facilitated greater teamwork between team managers
- Improved ability to react to and schedule for unexpected workload

Background

Eurostar operates a high-speed rail service linking St. Pancras International, Ebbsfleet International and Ashford International to Paris, Brussels, Lille, Calais, Disneyland Resort Paris, Avignon and the French Alps with services via the Channel Tunnel. With the completion of High Speed 1, the first UK high-speed line from the Channel Tunnel to London St. Pancras International, travel times have been dramatically reduced with most journeys to Brussels being less than two hours and the fastest direct London to Paris trains running at 2hrs 15 minutes.

A record 9.1 million travelers used Eurostar in 2008, despite a Eurotunnel shuttle fire in the Channel Tunnel in September 2008 which severely disrupted travel between England and continental Europe. Ticket sales were up nearly 11% from 2007 to £664 million.

Eurostar is a well-respected brand having won many customer service awards, including the title of "World's Leading Rail Service" in eight successive years at the World Travel Awards. Eurostar was the first international rail operator to provide carbon neutral journeys, at no extra cost to its travelers, since the launch of services from St Pancras International in November 2007. Eurostar is also committed to reducing its own environmenalt impact and to this end launched its "Tread Lightly" plan for the business which aims to consume less, source responsibly and to re-use or recycle more. In April 2009, Eurostar announced that it had achieved a remarkable 31% reduction in carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions per passenger journey (compared to 2007), far exceeding its original goal of 25% by 2012. Eurostar has therefore increased its goal to 35% reduction in CO_2 emissions per passenger journey by 2012 (compared with 2007).

Challenge

Eurostar's UK-based contact centre operation is headquartered in Ashford, Kent and has a full-time workforce of over 195 agents, handling over 1.3 million calls per year. These agents are responsible for answering a wide variety of calls including those from consumer and travel agent telephone bookings, support of online reservations, and administration of Eurostar's Frequent Traveller programme. In addition, call durations could vary widely between types of calls as could the volume of each call type from day to day making workload forecasting quite a challenge.

Furthermore, Eurostar's incumbent system provided very limited means to forecast call volumes based on call types and duration. The Operations teams resorted to using large numbers of complex spreadsheets to work around these limitations. This manual, time-consuming process effectively prevented contact centre management from having real-time visibility into its operation and therefore accurately reacting to changes throughout the day.

"Our incumbent system left much to be desired," said Paul I'anson, Eurostar's Head of Contact Centre. "In addition to the cumbersome method we adapted to create forecasts, we lacked good intra-day management capabilities which, at times, resulted in wildly fluctuating customer service levels."

Eurostar's incumbent system was also extremely limited in providing agent self-service support. Agents had no ability to specify their schedule availability, request time off, or request shifts. The system was unable to produce vital management information, such as schedule adherence, that was necessary to effectively serve Eurostar's customers. Eurostar consulted with its incumbent vendor to upgrade its existing system and was presented with a large price tag to bring the system up to contemporary standards.

"We knew that we needed to make some significant technology changes if we were to improve our ability to serve our customers," added Paul. "Based on the price of the upgrade from our existing vendor, we decided to examine other solutions in the market. We're glad we did."

Solution

Armed with a long list of requirements it needed from a workforce management solution partner, Eurostar embarked on its analysis of leading solutions in the market. It knew it was of paramount importance to find a technology solution with solid capabilities in accurate forecasting, intelligent scheduling, robust intra-day management, flexible agent self-service and powerful management analytics. Eurostar also knew that it needed to find a partner that could deploy its solution into Eurostar's telephony environment quickly and be willing to work shoulder-to-shoulder with Eurostar throughout the process.

"Selecting the right technology was only one part of the equation. We already knew the impact of an inferior system," explained Paul. "Equally important to us was finding a vendor that would partner with us throughout the implementation process, educate us on workforce management best practices, and provide us with ongoing consulting support to ensure we were operating at peak effectiveness at all times."

Eurostar conducted a thorough evaluation of solutions available in the market, with specific emphasis on overcoming their current solution's limitations, as well as the ability of the vendor to assist Eurostar in implementing world-class operational practices. In keeping with its reputation to conduct thorough value discovery, GMT worked to completely understand Eurostar's functional and technical requirements, especially to the extent to which their existing system failed to satisfy their business needs. GMT also helped Eurostar create a set of operational and business objectives to help clearly define how the project's success would be measured. The decision to select GMT was based not only on how closely GMT Planet satisfied Eurostar's technical and functional requirements, but also because of GMT's pledge to deliver on the promise.

"We were certainly delighted to find that GMT Planet was such a close fit against our functional requirements," said Paul. "But what really tipped the scales in GMT's favour was how they worked with us in creating a set of critical success factors by which Eurostar and GMT could measure success. This indicated to us that they were interested in more than just selling some software. They were clearly vested in our success and demonstrated the processes, services and references to prove their abilities."

The implementation of GMT Planet has more than lived up to expectations. Key success factors of the project included more accurately matching workload with the available resources, therefore creating more precise schedules; providing greater intraday visibility to fluctuations in workload; and extending agent self-service. Offered Paul, "We were very impressed with GMT from the onset of the project. They worked tirelessly to ensure our objectives were met. Within two weeks of implementation, we were able to produce more accurate forecasts than our multitude of spreadsheets ever could. Agents have become proactive.in using the software to improve their work-life balance, which has improved morale and retention. For the first time, our team leaders had realtime visibility into the contact centre operation enabling them to make adjustments to help ensure our service level goals were met. GMT truly delivered on the promise."

Concluded Aaron Gourlay, Resource Planning Manager, "The Tunnel fire in September, 2008 really tested our mettle. Call volumes rose dramatically as travellers called for information and to make alternate travel arrangements. Our contact centre operations staff was able to effectively handle the influx of traffic largely due to how easy GMT Planet is to use. I can safely say that our ability to effectively manage our resources during those difficult days was due in large part to our investment in GMT."