



WEST MARINE: OPTIMIZING WORKFORCE UTILIZATION AND REDUCING COSTS USING THE LIVEOPS ON-DEMAND CONTACT CENTER PLATFORM

West Marine, North America's largest specialty retailer of boating supplies and accessories, has over 350 stores located in 38 states, Puerto Rico, and Canada. Customers can purchase over 50,000 products and conveniently exchange catalog and Internet purchases at store locations. The contact center is an essential lifeline to customers and sales prospects – missed calls or poor customer interaction experiences can have a negative impact on revenue and the company's brand. After 10 years of using an on-premise telephony infrastructure for their call centers, West Marine chose to deploy the LiveOps On-Demand Contact Center platform and have their agents work from home.

Initially, West Marine wasn't looking to establish a remote contact center. Limited by the functionality of their antiquated legacy PBX system, which was deployed within their traditional call center, management wanted a new solution that would give them greater flexibility and access to the latest contact center features. Because they wanted to minimize IT costs, the new call routing system also had to be easily maintained by business users with minimal IT support.

EXPANDING THE VISION

But internal discussions regarding hardware requirements led to broader strategic discussions – for example, about creative ways to better utilize their existing workforce. "We'd been exploring ways to run the business differently and provide a better customer experience," states Matthew Wise, Senior Director of External Customers at West Marine. Management also identified other

business priorities that could be supported through strategic changes in the contact center: improving business sustainability, cutting operational costs, boosting direct response outcomes, and reducing the carbon footprint of the business.

Given this broader set of priorities, West Marine's focus shifted from investing in new hardware to finding a better way to manage and deliver contact center services. "Moving to a remote, on-demand contact center model just made sense from a business perspective," states Wise. "We could gain tremendous business flexibility and innovative contact center functionality – while reducing facility costs and retaining top employees."

FINDING AND DEPLOYING THE RIGHT PLATFORM

West Marine evaluated various solutions and chose the LiveOps On-Demand Contact Center platform.

Business Benefits

LiveOps enabled West Marine to achieve:

- A rapid, successful transition to a virtual contact center
- Flexible workforce utilization across contact center and retail operations
- Visibility and control to manage home-based agents effectively
- Lower costs in areas such as IT, facility, recruiting, and training
- Nearly 100% retention of existing staff
- Increased first-call resolution rates
- Increased employee productivity

"With LiveOps, we had a flexible, full-featured contact center solution up in a week with minimal, up-front capital costs," states Wise. Equally important, the platform gave management in the flexibility to adjust call routing as needed and handle seasonal demand more effectively. "And while moving to a remote contact center model meant less face-to-face contact with agents, LiveOps' tools for monitoring and managing home-based agents gave us the visibility and control needed to be successful," adds Wise. "The reporting and analytics are robust, so we can really see what's happening in the contact center and give agents detailed performance feedback."

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Senior Director of External Customers, West Marine

LiveOps experts worked with West Marine every step of the way to ensure a successful launch. No back-office integrations were necessary because the legacy systems were removed. The implementation only required a few simple telephony routing changes.

While the "In Homing" transition was challenging at times, West Marine only lost one employee out of 76. "Boating is a lifestyle," explains Wise. "We've worked hard to cultivate this by hiring experienced boaters and training them to provide great service. Our top priority was deploying the right system so our staff would stay with us." To ease the transition, West Marine provided employees with essential equipment, such as PCs and phones. And to address concerns about losing the social aspects of on-site employment, West Marine used the LiveOps platform to set up monitored chat rooms, such as a technical sales room.

OPTIMIZING WORKFORCE UTILIZATION WHILE REDUCING COSTS

The benefits of West Marine's new contact center model have been considerable. States Wise: "With LiveOps, we can ensure higher customer service levels and react faster to business changes." For example, business managers can make real-time changes to call routing without IT assistance – flexibility that has increased the company's first-call resolution rates.

Equally important, West Marine can manage its workforce more effectively through faster, more data-driven

performance reviews and by eliminating the traditional barriers between its contact centers and retail stores.

"Rather than laying off experienced retail staff during slow seasons, we can give them the option to work as home-based agents and take customer calls from regions that are busy," explains Wise. This win-win approach enables employees to maintain full-time status – and West Marine to offer customers a superior, differentiating customer experience. "It's a powerful thing for customers to call a contact center and speak with someone they know down at the corner store," comments Wise. In addition, West Marine has:

- Reduced the need for local hiring during seasonal spikes, resulting in lower recruiting and training costs
- Achieved more consistent service quality because they no longer need to hire less experienced seasonal staff
- Increased employee retention, loyalty, and quality of life – for example, by enabling employees to keep working while caring for an elderly parent

"We don't see this as just a cost saving story, but also a vision for the future of how work is getting done today," states Wise. "And the LiveOps On-Demand Contact Center platform plays a vital role in enabling this vision."

