Bell

Bell Canada Simplifies Complex Workforce Operations with NICE WFM SmartSync and SMS

Bell Canada's contact center provides multichannel support for a variety of telecommunications products. The large, complex operation encounters frequent staff shortages and needs efficient processes to deal with overtime, paid time off, and absence requests. Bell Canada used NICE SmartSync to internally develop a virtual manager software layer which streamlines these transactions through SMS text messaging with agents.

NICE

6% IMPROVEMENT ↑
In service level (year-over-year)

4% REDUCTION ↓
In shrinkage (year-over-year)

90+%
Adoption of SMS self-service option in 90 days of rollout

90+%

SMS
MILLIONS
OF SELF-SERVICE SMS TRANSACTIONS ANNUALLY

CUSTOMER PROFILE

ABOUT
Founded in 1880, Bell Canada is the nation's broadband leader providing advanced wireless, internet, TV, smart home and business services over world-class LTE and fiber networks to residential, business, and wholesale customers.

INDUSTRY
Telecommunications

WEBSITE
www.bell.ca

LOCATION
Headquartered in Montreal, QC, Canada

AGENTS
15,000+

GOALS
- Improve employee engagement
- Increase agent status visibility
- Improve service levels
- Assign overtime and VTO opportunities according to merit and cost, when allowed
- Find a self-service option resilient to common internet outages

PRODUCTS
- NICE IEX Workforce Management

FEATURES
- SMS gateway connects all agents worldwide to core systems including NICE
- Managerial, forecasting, budgeting, and performance applications linked to gateway via NICE WFM's SmartSync
- Self-service execution of schedule requests and special purpose status via text message
- Real-time adjustment of agent activity status and schedules

01 THE BEFORE

Wading through complexity

Managing Bell Canada's large frontline workforce means dealing with frequent staff supply shortages caused by agent absences or tardiness, volume spikes, and other unanticipated events. Schedule changes were traditionally processed manually through direct managers, who would cover the immediate gap and then go back later to update impacted schedules. This lack of real-time visibility could lead to further issues. The real-time workforce management team struggled frequently to meet caller demand and maintain service levels.

Similarly, offers for overtime and voluntary time off (VTO) were processed manually via email, chat, phone call, or word of mouth. Bell Canada had no way to target these requests, which would either be sent to the entire pool without regard to agent cost or performance, or be subjectively targeted by supervisors.

02 DESIRE TO CHANGE

Nice-to-have becomes a 2020 must-have

Work on the virtual manager toolset at Bell Canada started in 2019 as a way to improve the workforce environment, tying together various internal contact center operational tools including NICE Workforce Management for greater clarity and control. This exercise identified several limitations and shortfalls, including the inefficient overtime/VTO approach and the time-consuming process to recruit volunteers. "It was a dialing-for-dollars exercise and in some instances a high index of lower-performing agents were taking overtime," said Fabio Abate, Bell Canada senior manager of software development. "We wanted to target the high performers, the top quartile, before opening up overtime to the next layers."

Bell Canada wanted to identify more ways to use virtual manager to provide targeted employee engagement, reduce shrinkage, and improve service levels. NICE WFM's SmartSync connectivity was already in use for a number of internal integrations with managerial, forecasting, budgeting, and performance applications which rolled up into virtual manager, used to monitor agent performance and activities and provide convenient access to features. Development of an SMS gateway had been considered and then paused, but was quickly restarted and prioritized when COVID response began in early 2020. "Within a week of us being in the pandemic, it became a hot button item: we needed to transform the way we interacted with our customer service agents," Abate said. "That's when we went into full development of the SMS platform with our automated manager."

03 THE SOLUTION

Universal technology unlocks convenience and efficiency

Bell Canada raced into action to complete the SMS gateway for virtual manager and improve the automated insights for each employee, including geographical location, business segment, and typical performance. The solution now facilitates millions of self-service scheduling transactions annually, and works from anywhere thanks to the universal nature and high reliability of SMS. A typical transaction can be completed in less than one minute and includes security challenge questions when appropriate.

The virtual manager's capabilities include:

Smart SMS reporting: Bell now allows agents to quickly report late arrivals, absences, connectivity issues, and shift trades, and to obtain data on performance and current service level conditions.

Schedule updates: Changes texted to virtual manager are immediately reflected in NICE Workforce Management via API.

Prescriptive Analytics: Within the boundaries of Bell's labor agreements, Workforce specialists can now target overtime and VTO requests at specific employees based on need and performance, and send via SMS for immediate consideration.

The program reached 90% agent adoption within 3 months of rollout.

04 THE RESULTS

Strong business results with room to evolve

The use of the virtual manager and the cascading positive impacts of improved visibility and better agent coverage produced a 6% year-over-year improvement in service levels. Bell Canada also measured a 4% year-over-year reduction in shrinkage, largely attributed to better tracking and automatic application of activity codes.

The virtual manager provides a lower-cost method of

NICE

dealing with daily schedule updates, compared to dedicated staff and auditors fielding sick calls. The virtual manager also alerts supervisors when certain trends require additional action, such as an agent who has called in enough sick days that a medical note is now required.

Since initial design, Bell Canada has found other ways to adapt the platform to assist with new issues, such as work-from-home interruptions in availability common during pandemic controls. "We needed to reinvent how people were working, and part of that was ensuring that agents had appropriate technologies that worked efficiently. Unfortunately, system issues still happened," said Jawwad Qadri, Bell Canada senior business process advisor.

Connectivity issues can now be reported through SMS. Schedules and activity status are automatically updated, without need for the agent to make additional schedule changes or spread the word. Another SMS restores the agent to active status when the issue is resolved. "Agents don't have to worry about advising their team leader. The virtual manager and NICE Workforce Management take care of it," Qadri said.

05 THE FUTURE

Beyond the screen to automated managerial decisions

Bell Canada expects the total volume of transactions in virtual manager to continue to grow. Each SMS transaction represents a convenience benefit and cost savings over an attended process. The company is constantly in search of new analyses and features to add to the platform.

The next frontier for the program is to make virtual manager more active in proposing courses of action to leadership. Instead of providing a dashboard and implementing changes, Bell Canada is working to add recommendations for targeted intraday changes based on AI analysis of current conditions. These recommendations could then be accepted or rejected by contact center leadership.

"Working with NICE, we've been able to create a wonderful virtual manager build that helps with activity planning, that interacts directly with agents over SMS for overtime and voluntary time off based on conditions the virtual manager is seeing, and that continues to grow and offer us more agility."

FABIO ABATE
SENIOR MANAGER OF SOFTWARE
DEVELOPMENT
BELL CANADA

About NICE

With NICE (Nasdaq: NICE), it's never been easier for organizations of all sizes around the globe to create extraordinary customer experiences while meeting key business metrics. Featuring the world's #1 cloud native customer experience platform, CXone, NICE is a worldwide leader in AI-powered self-service and agent-assisted CX software for the contact center—and beyond. Over 25,000 organizations in more than 150 countries, including over 85 of the Fortune 100 companies, partner with NICE to transform—and elevate—every customer interaction.

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