

Carlson Hotels Worldwide®

Rapidly Answering Strategic Contact Center Questions Helps Carlson Stay at the Top of the Hospitality Industry and Reduce Staffing Expense

Carlson Hotels Worldwide is one of the world's major hotel companies, encompassing five brands operating in more than 935 locations in 70 countries. Brands include Regent International Hotels, Radisson Hotels & Resorts, Park Plaza Hotels & Resorts, Country Inns & Suites by Carlson, and Park Inn. Carlson Companies is on Working Mother magazine's 2001-2004 lists of "The 100 Best Companies for Working Mothers," and Fortune magazine's 2002 list of "The 100 Best Companies to Work For."

Carlson Hotels Worldwide

Carlson Hotels has contact centers in Omaha, NE; Dublin, Ireland; Sydney, Australia; and Mexico City, Mexico with over 300 Sales Representatives speaking 29 languages. With this network, Carlson Hotels books over five million reservations annually. Its voice channel contributes 25 percent of the reservations and revenue made globally through central reservations. "Even with the dramatic changes brought on as a result of on-line reservations and travel sites, voice channels are needed as much today as ever," said Krissy Brand, Director of Resource Planning, Carlson Hotels Worldwide. "Customers continue to become savvier and have heightened expectations when calling an 800 number."

The balance of gaining efficiencies while meeting demanding customer expectations continues to be a challenge in all contact centers. There is a constant need to look for process improvements that will result in cost savings and increased revenues through the voice channel. At the same time, contact centers need to listen to and understand their customers in order to meet their rising expectations.

Strategic Business Challenge

The Omaha Resource Planning team was recognized by the COPC (Customer Operations Performance Center) as best in class for its workforce management department. "We knew we had a very efficient scheduling model and very accurate forecasts and we were excited that an independent third party could validate our beliefs," said Brand. "However, we realized that in order to reach the next level, we needed more than the traditional workforce management tools could provide."

Carlson Hotels wanted to quickly and accurately determine best practices that would drive its key strategic initiatives. The Resource Planning Team found that CenterBridge was a powerful tool that would enable them to answer questions such as:

- How do hours of operation affect service level and profitability?
- What is the best staffing option to meet season volume peaks?
- How does a change in call volume or average handle time affect costs?
- How accurate does each team's forecast need to be?

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Christine Brosnahan, Vice President of Distribution and Reservation Services

Carlson was relying on internally developed Erlang-based spreadsheets and traditional workforce management software in an attempt to analyze these issues. However, these kinds of analysis were complex, extremely labor intensive, and virtually impossible to perform accurately. Additionally, when changes occur, such as a new line of business or a change in customer behavior, previous analysis was frequently of no use.

To remain a leader in such a competitive market, Carlson needed the capability to quickly evaluate changes to their operation in order to achieve maximum profitability at lowest cost - all while still maintaining its high customer service standards.

Business Solution

After evaluating the alternatives of building a new planning system in-house, engaging consultants for custom development, or using a commercially available contact center strategic planning application, Carlson chose Bay Bridge Decision Technologies' CenterBridge™ solution.

"CenterBridge was the only enterprise-class system we found that focused on contact center strategic planning," said Christine Brosnahan, Vice President of Distribution and Reservation Services, Carlson Hotels Worldwide. "The speed in which CenterBridge does analysis is exceptional. We are able to quickly and accurately generate several comparable new plans, enabling us to find the best means for reaching both our service goals and maximum profit levels."

Carlson found that CenterBridge was the only application available that could solve its analysis needs by providing comprehensive and highly accurate real-world analysis. For example, CenterBridge enables users at Carlson to quickly create multiple planning scenarios, taking into consideration all of the contact center network's complexity. It also enables comparison of multiple scenarios to find the optimal solution to most forecasting, staffing requirements, or hiring planning problem.

Carlson's' Omaha Resource Planning Team now uses CenterBridge to rapidly answer the never-ending series of "what-if" questions that comes their way. CenterBridge empowers the team to confidently recommend solutions based on the analysis supplied through CenterBridge.

Business Case (ROI)

Carlson has realized benefits from CenterBridge in two key areas: improved decision-making and reduced agent staffing cost.

First, CenterBridge brought new levels of responsiveness and accuracy to Carlson's contact center planning and decision-making processes. CenterBridge enables the planning team to create multiple scenarios to find the best way to support meeting the company's strategic initiatives. The team is able to accurately and confidently answer its steady stream of "what-if" questions. "Before CenterBridge, answering what-if questions would take days or weeks," Brand said. "Now we can answer them within minutes. Our Resource Planning Team now quickly provides fact-based analysis on any number of different scenarios and options. They can truly be consultants for the business."

Second, Carlson saw a three percent reduction in agent staffing as a result of CenterBridge's more accurate staffing requirements estimation and hiring planning methods. CenterBridge's customized contact center models and optimization approaches create hiring, overtime, and leave plans for Carlson that provide precisely timed, least-cost hiring plans that have resulted in significant agent headcount savings.

