



Reap Better Returns on Your Labor Investment

By Morné P. Swart

One of the biggest challenges for businesses that are comprised largely of shift workers, such as retailers, manufacturers, healthcare facilities, call centers and emergency responders, is the ability to manage the increasing complexities of scheduling employees. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 15 million Americans work evening, night shift or rotating shifts or other employer arranged irregular schedules. As a result, some employers are left with the arduous task of scheduling employees to meet business demands without exposing their workforce to safety risks such as those that result from excessive overtime, which also costs the company money, or insufficient staffing levels.

While many organizations still rely on manual time and attendance and scheduling processes, they are missing out on an opportunity to improve workplace safety, and ensure that the right skills are in the right place at the right time and at the lowest possible cost. Many businesses are opting to automate workforce management and staff scheduling to ensure they're able to effectively match labor supply with business demand. In addition, with the workforce representing between 35 to 70 percent of organizational costs, how employees are scheduled and deployed and how their time is managed directly affects an organization's ability to achieve its goals and maximize profits.

An automated workforce management solution with staff scheduling improves staff deployment and productivity, increases effectiveness of decision-making, and ensures payroll accuracy, while reducing the need for error correction. It also provides real-time visibility into staffing levels and gives organizations the tools they need to effectively and efficiently plan, deploy and manage their workforce in accordance with regulatory and union requirements as well as corporate policies. By replacing manual processes with automated systems, organizations can reap the rewards of gaining a complete and accurate view of workforce movements and metrics, realize higher levels of productivity and get the biggest return on their labor investment.

Staffing Efficiency Empowers Managers

A major benefit of an automated workforce management system with scheduling and optimization capabilities is that it delivers detailed workforce analytics that empower managers to make better decisions. An automated system also assists in aligning staff with the business strategy, ensuring accurate time reporting and regulatory compliance, and streamlining processes such as attendance and absence tracking and extended leave management.

In distributed environments such as retail stores, healthcare facilities, transportation providers and universities with multiple locations or campuses where staffing is critical to operational success, a scheduling and optimization solution allows managers to analyze labor-related expenditures relative to productivity measurements and budget requirements. Having this insight helps ensure that the right amount of staff is in place at the right time (at the lowest possible cost) to effectively service customers. For example, in a retail environment, managers can look at store traffic patterns and make sure the sales floor is staffed with the most knowledgeable and experienced employees during peak shopping hours.

Real-time visibility into worker availability combined with existing knowledge of traffic patterns allows managers to react quickly to unexpected changes and have greater flexibility and responsiveness in planning and scheduling. For emergency responders, this could mean getting additional resources in place as quickly as possible.

Benefits of Intelligent Scheduling

An intelligent scheduler also allows organizations to create master schedules that can be used as templates for other locations, departments or groups of employees and adjust schedules in real time. This capability enables organizations to adhere to regulations and safety standards and minimize overtime work. For example, in a hospital setting, long hours and fatigue can potentially impair a healthcare practitioner's judgment. Preventable errors could be avoided by aligning shift patterns and proactively ensuring workers are not scheduled to spend excessive time on any given shift.

Having insight into worker availability also allows managers to schedule employees based on fluctuations in demand, personal requests, union contracts, laws and corporate policies while taking into consideration an employee's skills, availability and past performance. For instance, in that same hospital scenario, a scheduling optimization solution can strike the balance between the right number of qualified nurses with specific certifications and specialty physicians that are on hand to meet patient needs.

A workforce management solution also provides employees with self-service tools to manage their own schedule to balance work-life needs, which contributes to increased attendance, better employee morale and job satisfaction. Last-minute changes are easy to accommodate without compromising business requirements and when employees are satisfied and feel valued, morale increases and they deliver better customer service.

Conclusion

By replacing manual processes with an automated workforce management solution with staff scheduling, organizations can streamline their scheduling process, reduce labor costs and increase employee and customer satisfaction. When you consider that time is money and the largest variable cost for an organization is labor expenses, ensuring that the right workers with the right skills at the right cost are available at the right time can help achieve performance goals and maximize profits.

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