

Airlines Service Case Study



Client



Challenge

- Proactively reach thousands of passengers when flights are cancelled.

Solution

Interactive voice communications that notify passengers well in advance of flight cancellations, providing them with an option to transfer directly to a live service agent.

Results

- Improved service levels
- Passengers on any flight can be contacted within seconds
- Complete integration with SWA's multiple contact centers
- Contact center productivity is lifted and agents are more equipped to maintain inbound service levels

No Delays in Customer Service

With Varolii Communications, Southwest Airlines maintains superior customer service during flight cancellations.

Southwest Airlines knows that customer communication and customer trust go hand-in-hand. When flights are cancelled, customers appreciate knowing right away and having the option to make other arrangements. Southwest also knows that proactively communicating critical information to every affected customer requires more than relying solely on service agents making outbound calls.

Timing is Everything

Prior to implementing automated communications, Southwest broadcasted flight cancellation alerts over the airport PA system, at the Reservations desk, and on their Website. The company had no way of reaching all of their customers in a timely manner using manual outbound dialing. These events usually created a spike in customer service requests, as service representatives at their contact centers scrambled to handle the flood of inbound calls, while agents at the airport struggled to re-schedule passengers, let alone manage passenger check-ins for those unaffected by cancellations.

Meeting (and exceeding) Customer Demand

With the wide prevalence of mobile technology, customers have increased service expectations, especially regarding the availability of instant information. Southwest sought a solution that would provide travelers and their staff with real-time notifications the moment incidents occur.

"The more options we have to proactively reach our customers, over their preferred channel of communications, the better we can serve them and rise above their service level expectations," said Fred Taylor, Southwest's Senior Manager of Proactive Customer Communications.

Southwest augmented their multiple contact centers with interactive automated communications by Varolii. Much like person-to-person dialogue, Varolii communications uses an expansive library of pre-recorded language called Sea-of-Names, delivered by professional voice talent. The natural intonation and voice quality

of the communications are proven to increase response rates, as customers are more engaged with a message that emulates realistic dialogue.

The technology lets Southwest proactively send personalized messages to their customers about a disruption (or potential disruption), briefly explains the accommodations being offered, and provides options to transfer to a service agent, or forward the message to another phone number.

Instant Scalability

Southwest immediately benefited by reaching large numbers of customers at a fraction of the time it takes with live agents. The mere speed of contact enables the carrier to reach every passenger on a fully booked 737 in a matter of seconds.

Further, during the 2008 hurricane season, Southwest proactively contacted 62,950 passengers whose flights were cancelled.

This immediate scalability is strengthened by the solution's guaranteed 99.9% service uptime. This ensured that Southwest experienced zero delivery failures.

Contact Center Efficiency = Quicker, Better Service

Maintaining contact center efficiency is crucial to Southwest's ability to deliver customer service and maintain operations. As the largest domestic carrier in the U.S., they have call centers spread throughout the Southwest and Chicago. At any time, anywhere from 220 to 800 agents are on the phone serving customers.



“Varolii has done a phenomenal job in meeting our requests for customizations with very little hiccups; and with any issues that surfaced, Varolii was really quick to put them to bed.”

Fred Taylor, Southwest Airlines
Senior Manager, Proactive Customer Communications

Seamless Integration

The Varolii solution also integrates seamlessly into Southwest’s CRM and enterprise data systems and can automatically adjust outbound calling volume based on agent availability at any one of their multiple contact centers. Therefore, at no time is any one contact center overburdened with customer calls. As one location reaches capacity, Varolii automatically routes calls to another facility.

In instances where there are no available agents, the automated message can provide customers with the option of calling back at a time that’s more convenient for them.

“Varolii has done a phenomenal job in meeting our requests for customizations, with very little hiccups,” said Taylor.

For example, Varolii understood the value of real-time communications to Southwest and worked collaboratively to develop a unique standard for data processing to occur in real-time, rather than batch (which was the norm), between the airline’s ERP and CRM databases and the Varolii platform.

Keeping Flight Team Connected

Southwest also leveraged Varolii for flight-crew notifications. The Airline Flight Team Management application frees up flight schedulers from having to inform flight teams of changes in schedules, equipment, and crew availability. Automating employee communications lets Southwest dynamically organize flight crews in response to flight cancellations, which improves on-time departures, makes better use of scheduler resources, and improves customer satisfaction.

This also creates better emergency response management, and incident information is now disseminated instantaneously to airline staff, airport management, code share partners, community officials, and the media.

Airline staff appreciate having the tools at hand to effectively respond to situations and minimize disruptions that would otherwise affect customer service.

Going Forward – What’s in the Works

Working with Varolii over the past year, Southwest has come to realize the potential of automated communications in transforming their customer contact strategies, particularly during time-sensitive events. The blueprint for expanding Varolii solutions in their customer and employee communications includes:

- **Gate Changes and Flight Delays** — In the immediate future, Southwest will deliver automated notifications about gate changes and flight delays. This fully automated process will also minimize live agent intervention, allowing travelers to receive the information they need without having to call into the contact center.
- **Cross-Channel Outreach** — Southwest plans to incorporate cross-channel communications (a blend of voice, SMS, MMS and e-mail) to customers.
- **Expanding Across the Enterprise** — The airline is spearheading a strategy to assess how other groups within the organization can use automated communications to meet their respective department’s communication requirements.



About Varolii

Varolii provides on-demand communication software and services that enable organizations to more effectively reach and interact with their customers and employees, getting the best result from every interaction. www.Varolii.com

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