

Country Home Products Drives Customer Service and Efficiency with GMT Planet

Overview:

- *Company:* Country Home Products
- *Type of Business:* Outdoor Power Equipment
- *Type of Customer Contact Center:* Call Center
- *Number of Agents:* 40-125, depending on the time of year
- *Corporate Headquarters:* Vergennes, Vermont
- *Company Website:* www.drpower.com

Challenge: Communing with nature comes naturally to native Vermonters, who are surrounded by sprawling hills and lush greenery. This closeness with nature led to the formation of Country Home Products, manufacturers of a variety of hearty outdoor power tools, such as field and brush mowers, power graders, lawn and leaf vacuums, wood splitters, chippers, and lawn mowers. To sustain its business, Country Home Products, home of DR Power, which has been in operations since 1985, has dedicated a significant amount of resources – about 25% of its total labor costs – to a call center, which offers pre-sale and post-sale support to customers.

To maximize efficiency of that asset, the company had been relying on Witness/Blue Pumpkin's workforce management system since 1999, but the product had become antiquated. "The system did not support current features, such as a Web interface that agents could use to check their scheduling data," stated Peter Pembroke, assistant manager of customer service at Country Home Products. The lack of a Web interface meant that only the company's schedulers could access scheduling data.

Gauging scheduling needs was another problem. Country Home Products has about 250 employees, who perform such varied tasks from product design to manufacturing to support. Call center agents field inquiries about the firm's two consumer product lines: the DR Power Equipment brand as well as the Neuton line of battery-powered mowers.

Unlike most manufacturers, Country Home Products' busy season runs from the spring through the fall, and its quiet time occurs during the winter holiday season. The number of call center employees fluctuates from 40 during the quiet times to 125 during the busy season. Because the call center represents such a significant component in the corporation and the personnel requirements change so dramatically, the outdoor power equipment supplier wants to ensure maximum productivity from that group.

As the years passed, it became apparent that the previous workforce management system was ineffective. The company did not have a clear picture of its current workforce requirements. Change is a constant in a call center, and Country Home Products was unable to view what was happening during its work day. Instead, that information was collected and examined days or weeks after each shift. Consequently, there were times when it had more agents than required and other instances when more employees were needed.

Solution: In the summer of 2005, Country Home Products decided it was time to make a change. Initially, the company thought it would simply migrate to the latest version of its existing workforce management system with Witness/Blue Pumpkin. But as part of its due diligence, Country Home Products decided to examine what else was on the market, including offerings from Aspect, IEX and other major vendors. "When we first saw the GMT system, it blew us away," said Pembroke. "The

product design, user interface, and functionality were just so much better and easier to use than anything else on the market.”

In December 2005, the decision was made to switch to GMT’s Planet, a highly-acclaimed workforce optimization system that supports strategic planning and budgeting functions, delivers accurate shift scheduling information, ensures scheduling adherence, and provides employees with many self-service options. A few months later, the system was up and running. “The installation was as smooth as any that I have ever been associated with,” proclaimed Pembroke. “GMT’s product trainers were also very responsive and went the extra mile to get our questions answered.”

With the new system in place, Country Home Products now has much more visibility into its call center personnel requirements. If the call volume was expected to be 1,500 calls per day and the number was closer to 1,100, then the company could let a few agents go home early for the day. This flexibility not only benefited agents, but it also helped the company reduce costs at every opportunity.

Country Home Products is also better able to track its ongoing call center expenses, such as training in order to keep its highly-skilled agents updated on the company’s wide array of product offerings, including tech support for legacy products. So when Country Home Products allocates a specific number of hours to train 20 agents, for instance, one or more agents occasionally may miss the training session. In addition, a training class may run longer or shorter than anticipated, or it could be canceled due to weather for outdoor equipment training. Before, the company had no visibility into such changes, but now it can track any discrepancy and has the real-time flexibility to adjust accordingly and immediately.

Further, the new system has empowered employees. They now can access scheduling information from their desktops. Also, the company currently has an easy-to-understand, equitable way to deal with items such as the scheduling of employee breaks and vacation time. These items are important because Country Home Products focuses on attracting and retaining quality employees. “The turnover rate in our call center is quite low, only about four percent,” stated Pembroke. The tranquil Vermont lifestyle, coupled with Country Home Products’ improved call center efficiency and agent empowerment as enabled by GMT, has made the environment inside the company as attractive as the lush surroundings outside.

Results:

- Cost-savings from more accurate forecasting, scheduling and effective intraday real-time management
- Enhanced schedule adherence for timeliness and consistency of service
- Greater scheduling visibility for management control and flexibility
- More empowered agents for increased employee satisfaction and customer service

About GMT: GMT’s workforce and cash optimizations solutions create competitive advantage by enabling companies to improve customer service and sales, while decreasing their variable expenses. The company’s product line combines precision forecasting and intelligent scheduling with powerful analytics and performance management tools – together delivering a complete solution that is priced to deliver quick return on investment. GMT serves financial services and contact center customers worldwide, including ABN AMRO, Citibank, Nielsen Media, Pizza Hut, SunTrust, UPS, Washington Mutual and Wells Fargo. The company is privately held with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, and offices in the U.K., Australia, and India. For more information, visit www.gmt.com.

