# SWPP Announces Winners in the
# 2011 Techniques and Turnarounds Contest

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE – March 1, 2012 – The Society of Workforce Planning Professionals (SWPP) has announced the winners in the  Techniques and Turnarounds contest conducted in late 2011, which recognizes the SWPP member organizations that demonstrate the best ideas and results that improve service, increase efficiencies, maximize customer and employee satisfaction and improve profitability.  There are three category winners including Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts for Best Efficiency and Savings Turnaround, LoyaltyOne – Airmiles Reward Program for Best Agent Satisfaction Turnaround, and Computershare for Best All Round Workforce Turnaround.  The grand prize winner selected by the SWPP Board of Advisors is Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts.

"These three workforce management organizations have demonstrated some amazing success stories," said Vicki Herrell, SWPP Executive Director. "They have all made an effective turnaround in their organizations, as well as shown measurable results for their companies. We are pleased to present them as the winners in this year's contest."

**Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts** is the winner in the category for Best Efficiency and Savings Turnaround and the grand prize winner as well.  The application describes the company as a health insurer with three million members.  Their Member Service Call Center has 230 agents in two call center locations handling phone and email queries from 8AM to 9PM daily.  The technology in place includes an Avaya ACD and IEX TotalView workforce management tool.  The workforce management team consists of 6 members.  The challenge faced by this team is one that will sound familiar – do more with less.

BCBS is a business that supports individuals and companies with health insurance and support services.  Some of those clients require that BCBS meet specific speed of answer

goals or pay hefty penalties for failure – up to $4 million dollars annually is at risk.  As with many call centers, BCBS struggled to find a way to meet these service guarantees with a constantly shrinking budget and headcount.  "For years we did not meet these goals and paid these penalties: often after Herculean efforts, missing the goals by just a few seconds."  During the last few years, the operation had found ways to meet the guarantees but it was not efficient.  In an effort to offset inadequate performance during the spikes in workload, they would over-perform in the lower volume periods to compensate, essentially wasting resources – a common problem when metrics are computed over a long period of time.

Last year, the team worked with the Technology Operations group and Business Area Reporting team and took a close look at call routing and reporting.  They discovered that only 20 percent of the calls came from members that belong to accounts that had performance guarantees and yet the operation had set these stringent goals for the entire operation.  The solution was to implement an intelligent call routing strategy and reporting capability that isolated these guaranteed accounts and handled them differently.  With prioritization and routing using Avaya Advocate, these calls are handled within the set goals and they were able to reduce the speed to answer for non-guaranteed calls by 10 seconds with no impact on member satisfaction.  Reporting at the account level provides the information needed to focus on these special requirements.  This technique gained the organization 10 full-time equivalents or a 4.2% reduction in staffing for Member Service, saving $425,000 in budgeted staff plus penalty avoidance of $3,964,825!  "The peace of mind, confidence and reduced stress levels for the workforce planning team and business leaders: priceless."

**LoyaltyOne – Airmiles Reward Program** is the winner for Best Agent Satisfaction Turnaround.  In the application, the operation is described as a shopping rewards program that enables Canadians to earn Air Miles reward miles for making everyday purchases at a variety of participating sponsors.  The operation employs over 450 frontline associates at two sites and uses an Avaya ACD with CMS, Aspect eWFM and eGain.  The workforce management team consists of 12 members. The challenge faced by this team was achieving a better work-life balance for the associates.

Scheduling was an employee dissatisfier, with associates feeling helpless when emergency situations arose in their personal lives, and they felt unappreciated for the value they deliver to the customers of LoyaltyOne. There was only marginal flexibility in the schedules and the associates "didn't hold back in expressing their dissatisfactions through Chat Sessions, Team Meetings and even Town Hall events." To resolve this imbalance, LoyaltyOne implemented a number of shift options including:

- 4 day – 10 hour shifts
- Flexible 5 days – reduce 2 days by up to 2 hours and add these hours to the remaining days (reduction excludes Monday and Saturdays)
- Selected mid-shifts have the option to work an earlier start time on Mondays
- Work a variety of mid-shift and midnight shift combinations
- Work 6 days in one week and 4 in the next
- Work every Saturday and have Monday off ( limited availability)
- Tenured fixed shifts – staff starting in the year 2000 or earlier have the option to have fixed shifts and are not required to work a Saturday
- Shift adjustment to start 15-30 minutes earlier or later during shift selection time (excludes opening and closing shifts)
- 8 variable shifts per month with adjustments up or down by 1 hour 4 times per month without preapproval and up to 4 hours 4 times per month with preapproval
- Take a day off during the week and replace with a Saturday shift
- Buy additional vacation with payroll deduction
- Emergency leave of 10 days per year, 5 paid, accrued throughout the year

The result of increasing focus on employee engagement, the company achieved an 80% score on their Associate Survey in 2010 for work/life balance. That was up eight points since 2008 and 13 points since 2007. The company was named among Hewitt's Best Employers in Canada for 2010 and achieved Gold status with the Customer Care's Contact Centre Employer of Choice.

**Computershare** is the winner for Best All Round Workforce Turnaround. The application describes the company as financial services with over 400 frontline staff working in 3 centers

open 8AM – 9PM Monday through Friday. They handle inbound calls, outbound calls and email using Avaya ACD and InVision iWFM. The workforce management team consists of five members. The challenge for this team was the perception that if service goals were met, the forecast was accurate, but if service goals were missed, the delays were caused by inaccurate forecasting. This made workforce management accountable for calls in queue and extended wait times.

Analysis of the operation revealed that there were 30+ actively forecasted queues but that a significant number of these generated a requirement for three or fewer staff and only about 12 had larger requirements of four to 60 staff. Since the staffing for the smaller workloads required at least three staff to account for sick, vacation, and off-phone activities regardless of fluctuating call volumes, these were essentially ignored in the forecasting improvement project. Digging into the details on the 12 remaining queues showed that the forecasting was within one or two FTE more than 75 percent of the time in a blended environment where the majority of the agents can take the majority of the calls. Digging deeper into the agent adherence to the planned schedules revealed that they were being pulled to and from the phone on an ad-hoc basis depending on real-time availability and wait times. The hopping on and off the phones was causing a constant seesaw of resources.

A technical challenge was also discovered. The ACD was reporting calls in the period they were completed rather than the period when they arrived. With 15-minute reporting and a six-minute AHT, this skewed the statistics and made it look like there were huge swings in resource requirements that really didn't exist. A project to upgrade the ACD system to achieve accurate call arrival data is in progress. The seesawing of resources and the technology gap were explained to senior management to gain support for a new management approach.

Now instead of blaming workforce management when things go wrong, the meetings focus on scheduling, coverage, and utilization. The forecasting variance is presented on a daily basis with interval accuracy normalized to avoid the excessive volatility that the numbers showed by never happened. The goals for the forecast analysts are based on daily FTE

variance and the overall impact on the business.  The business owns the entire intraday execution of the plan while workforce management focuses on driver analysis and future planning.  This has encouraged collaboration rather than accusations and disagreements. Employee morale is improved due to reduced requests for immediate task changing as well. "It's difficult to quantify the benefits of what this overhaul of information management, communication process, roles and responsibility and perception are, but we agree that we are more productive and better aligned to be successful going forward because of it."

The SWPP Board of Advisors selected the winners from Techniques and Turnaround applications submitted on the SWPP website.  Winners have been invited to present at the 2012 SWPP Annual Conference being held in Nashville, TN on March 7-9 and will tell their success stories in upcoming editions of the SWPP newsletter *On Target*.  Category winners received an SWPP site membership and group award for display while the grand prize winner received a team luncheon sponsored by SWPP as well.

**About SWPP**

The Society of Workforce Planning Professionals (SWPP) is an organization devoted to facilitating education and networking opportunities among workforce planners across all industries.  Membership in SWPP is available to all workforce planning professionals and other interested parties from consulting and vendor organizations.  Both individual memberships and corporate membership options are available, with full benefits and costs outlined on the organization's website at [www.swpp.org](http://www.swpp.org).

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