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—Faith LeGendre, Vice President, Training

1-800-FLOWERS.COM improves employee retention and reduces carbon footprint with WebEx.



INDUSTRY

Retail

WEBEX APPLICATIONS

WebEx Training Center

SUMMARY

1-800-FLOWERS.COM needed to find a more efficient method for training remote agents to provide top-level customer service. WebEx Training Center makes it easy for 1-800-FLOWERS.COM to deliver up-to-the-minute training courses in response to rapid changes in customer demand. In just a few months, WebEx has helped increase the company's retention of new customer service agents and produce stronger course evaluations.

ABOUT 1-800-FLOWERS.COM

- **Line of Business**
Retailing
- **Headquarters**
Carle Place, NY
- **Number of Employees**
4000
- **Target Market**
Consumers and corporate clients
- **WebEx Customer Since 2007**

1-800-FLOWERS.COM is a leading retailer that sells a wide variety of floral products and gifts through a nationwide network of company-owned stores, franchises, third-party florists, and large-scale distribution facilities. The company is an eCommerce pioneer, partnering with AOL in 1994 and establishing an online presence in 1995. 1-800-FLOWERS.COM has since acquired a diverse set of brands offering everything from food and flowers to children's toys and home décor, with a business gift services division specializing in high-volume corporate accounts.

The Challenge

Customer service agents for 1-800-FLOWERS.COM must deliver high-level sales and service for products over a variety of marketing channels. The company attempted to train new hires via conference calls, but that approach did not deliver sufficient hands-on exposure to a complex product offering. "Our challenge has always been that we need to train a large number of seasonal agents for the winter holidays, Valentine's, and Mother's Day," explains Faith LeGendre, Vice President, Training. "It's critical that we maintain a flexible and knowledgeable workforce, and that requires a flexible and effective training tool." 1-800-FLOWERS.COM needed to find a more efficient method for training an optimal number of agents to meet ever-changing customer demand.

The Solution

When LeGendre began considering online training solutions, the IT department at 1-800-FLOWERS.COM suggested WebEx Training Center. "Our company was already using WebEx Meeting Center, so we were familiar with the technology and trusted it," she says. Her team was especially pleased by the desktop-sharing functionality of WebEx. "Now a trainer can look at an agent's screen and immediately see where a problem might be occurring," says LeGendre. "The agent no longer has to describe it over the phone, which saves everyone a lot of confusion." 1-800-FLOWERS.COM now conducts as many as 50 training courses during each of the busiest seasons, with up to 18 students per class. Courses can range from one to 40 hours, with many individual sessions running for four or five hours at a time.

Session facilitators take advantage of the full range of features within WebEx Training Center. Students use the chat feature to submit questions that can be answered for the entire class. Session leaders can opt to break a session into small groups for training exercises, and they can use the polling function for impromptu course evaluations. "I like to push technology to its limits," says LeGendre. "And with WebEx, the possibilities are just huge."

Audio training sessions often resulted in miscommunication and frustration for both trainers and trainees—but with rich interactive features of WebEx Training Center, all attendees can feel as if they share the same computer. In LeGendre's opinion, this form of learning can be even more effective than in-person training. In a physical classroom, students are

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usually unable to talk among themselves without being disruptive. But, in a virtual environment, the chat function enables students to help each other learn. “Chat makes it possible for instructors to take an approach that really appeals to a younger generation of learners,” she says. “Students can collaborate more freely. They can ask their facilitator a question without letting the rest of the class know, and they can answer a poll without their classmates seeing what they’ve said. So, the comfort level increases while the risk of embarrassment almost totally disappears.”

The Benefits

Customer service agents were excited to get onboard with WebEx Training Center. “The best before-and-after example would be the agents who work with us exclusively during the heavy seasons,” says LeGendre. “When they came back to train with us after we’d implemented WebEx, they said, ‘This makes a world of difference!’”

In just a few months, WebEx Training Center has increased the company’s training retention of new trainees from 88 percent to 92 percent, and average evaluation scores have risen from 3.4 to 3.8 on a four-point scale. “That may not seem huge, but those increases have occurred over the course of a few very busy seasons,” notes LeGendre. “Increasing our retention rate from 88

to 92 percent means that we’ve retained well over a hundred agents who would not have necessarily stayed with us otherwise. That’s significant.”

WebEx enables 1-800-FLOWERS.COM to respond with greater agility to rapid changes in customer demand. “Let’s say a popular talk-show host recommends a certain toy,” says LeGendre. “Suddenly, our phones light up with customers asking for it. With WebEx, we can put together a training session on the fly—helping our agents meet customer demand quickly and with high service quality.” In one such case, a particular product unleashed huge customer demand just before the Valentine’s rush, and LeGendre’s team needed to coordinate a quick training session to get agents up to speed. “We got everyone logged into a WebEx session within six minutes,” she says. “There’s no way we could’ve been that responsive before.”

WebEx Training Center also helps 1-800-FLOWERS.COM in the company’s ongoing effort to reduce its carbon footprint. “As a corporation, we’re very concerned about being green,” notes LeGendre. “With WebEx, we can eliminate a lot of the traveling we used to do for training purposes, and we can move closer to a paperless office. That’s good not just for the bottom line, but for the environment as well.”

The Future

As 1-800-FLOWERS.COM uses WebEx to expand its online training capabilities, LeGendre hopes to make recorded sessions available for anytime access. That way, if trainees are unable to fit a class into their schedules, they can access the training materials later without falling behind. “There are just so many practical ways that this technology can help us keep employees and customers satisfied,” says LeGendre. “We couldn’t be happier.”

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HIGHLIGHTS

- WebEx has helped increase the company’s training retention of new trainees from 88 to 92 percent and raise course evaluation scores from 3.4 to 3.8 on a four-point scale.
- WebEx enables 1-800-FLOWERS.COM to reduce its carbon footprint by requiring less travel and producing less paper.
- WebEx makes it easy for 1-800-FLOWERS.COM to provide up-to-the-minute training in response to rapid changes in customer demand.