5 KEY FEATURES
OF A DYNAMIC
SCHEDULING SOLUTION

Maxoptra

In a recent article from Gartner "Gartner Surveys Confirm Customer Experience Is the New Battlefield", Jake Sorofman comments on Laura McLellan's research into marketing spend.

The first clear take away from this keen research is the finding that: *"by 2016, 89% of companies expect to compete mostly on the basis of customer experience"*.

The second we feel is more significant: *"fewer than half of companies see their customer experience capabilities as superior to their peers — but two-thirds expect these capabilities to be industry leading or much more successful than their peers within 5 years"*.

So in short — to beat the competition in the very near future, you will have to be winning on customer experience, and the corner stone to that is meeting customer expectation.

What is customer expectation within the **Field Service, Delivery, Mini Cab and Private Hire** Sectors?

Well, that's quite a simple one really – turning up at the time expected, and if that's not going to happen, then it's the ability to communicate in real time with the client and explain the situation so they can adjust accordingly.

Gone are the days of delivery slots between 9am and 2pm and bewildered dispatch teams having to handle customer complaints provoked by lack of delivery or missed time slots and lack of information.

Now a quality service can be delivered through the technology of "dynamic scheduling", and it is a critical feature in today's Fleet Management and Minicab or Private Hire companies' IT stack.

But what are the critical features of a **Dynamic Scheduling Solution?** Let us walk you through the Top 5 Features that set a **Dynamic Scheduling Solution** apart from a standard Scheduling Solution.

Connectivity via APIs

As we discussed in a previous eBook — the key differentiator between a standard scheduling solution and a dynamic solution is the frequency that the system looks for an opportunity to improve and adjust the plan. Legacy systems tend to reconcile and send out a plan as a daily task, but dynamic solutions, just like a good planner, look to optimise plans every second of every day, constantly reacting to delays, cancellations and emergencies.

To ensure this constant optimisation is possible, it is necessary for the system to be continuously fed with up to the minute information and the best route for this is through cloud based solutions with API connectivity to Service Management Systems, Telematics, mobile worker solutions and indeed the emergent Internet of Things.
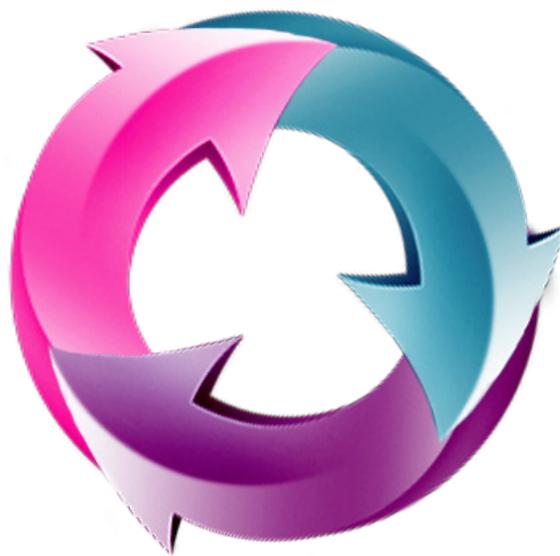
From ETA to ATA

Gone are the days of ETAs – this is the time for ATA – Actual Time of Arrival! Never have your customers' schedules been more busy – it is just not feasible to expect a customer to wait for your arrival within a 3-5hr window. An hour maximum is all the market can tolerate at the moment from a Field Service perspective, whereas it is approximately 5-10 minutes for the Minicab/Private Hire scenario.

According to TomTom in their recent blogs:

1. The most common causes of customer complaint were poor communication (28%), poor response times (23%) and overly long time slots given to customers for jobs (23%).

2. More than 66% of customers needed a solution that provides narrow time windows for delivery.

>66%

3. 78% of UK consumers would be less likely to use a company again if they failed to offer specific times or acceptable timeslots for deliveries or job attendance.

22%   78%
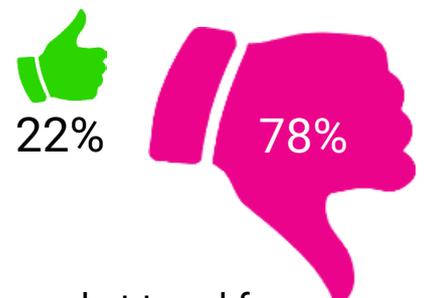
So it is critical that your system can plan and dispatch to the market trend for your given industry otherwise you will simply lose out to your competition.

This is achieved by the ability of the solution to dynamically calculate accurate schedules based on real time information instead of being dependent on arbitrary assumptions such as fixed time slots or territories/zones.

ATTRIBUTE 3
Proactive Real-Time Communication

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Probably more important than accurate ATAs is the capacity to be able to communicate with the end client in the event of a change of circumstances.

In fact, in the service industry the "Moment of Truth", the time you interact with a client and solve the issue at hand, can be more valuable to the positive perception of the company than by the issue itself.

That is not say that we want issues, but let's not fool ourselves, no system is 100% fool proof, and as these systems incorporate a large proportion of environmental factors beyond the human control, there will be occasions when an ATA cannot be met. The critical attribute here is to be able to communicate in real time with the end client with clear, accurate and up to date information, and with all the available alternative solutions to hand:

- Re-arrange delivery

- Dispatch an alternative car or engineer

- Arrange for compensation if a satisfactory alternative can't be met — or even if one is met, it's worth compensating anyway.

The key is to listen to how the customer would like the problem to be resolved and to be able to respond to that expectation accordingly by providing a clear solution.

Manual Scheduling Tools

A further critical factor to success when adopting a Dynamic Scheduling tool is the existence of manual tools within the application. Similar to the concept of having a direct and honest communication window with the customer to handle problems, it is necessary to provide the expert planner with the tools to intervene with the automated system.

While some organisations can achieve up to 97% auto allocation, the dynamic planning solution can deal with the high percentage of routine allocation, leaving planning staff to employ their skills for more complex ad hoc situations. Tools such as:

- Drag and drop jobs,

- Allocation suggestions,

- Intuitive Map display indicating plan and progress,

- Real time KPI calculation identifying impact of manual change.

These manual tools not only allow the call takers and expert planners actual feasible appointment time choices, which is critical, but they also enable them to manually adjust the plan at any time.
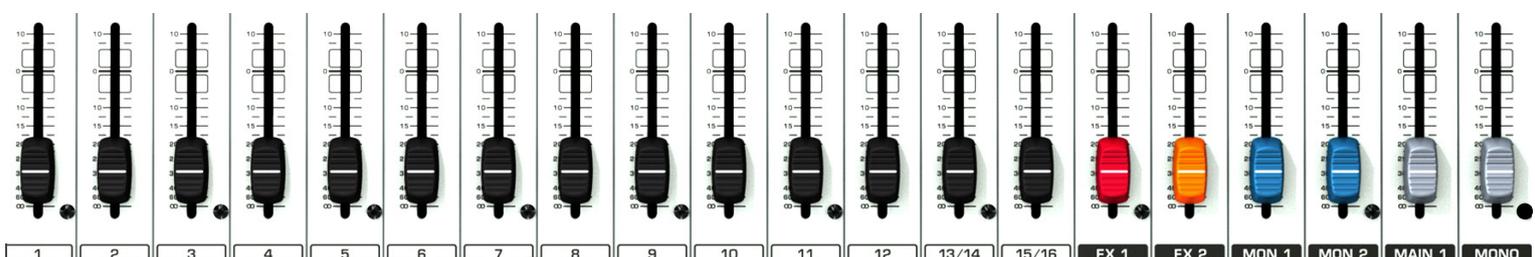
ATTRIBUTE 5
Ease of Implementation and Adoption

As with any new technology or process, change management is a critical factor. Dynamic scheduling is no different, in that it will require a change in working practices within the planning, dispatch and field teams. For example, with a scheduling system, the central dispatch office will retain control of the field engineer's diary, whereas historically, the engineers may have had control of that aspect themselves. The delivery driver may have decided the delivery sequence, but with a planning system it will be decided centrally.

As we've discussed in previous articles, this is a sensitive area, as the trend is to place more emphasis on the value of the field operative as an extended member of the sales, pre sales and post sales teams, with critical time in front of the customers. How is it possible to request them to step up to the additional responsibilities, while taking away their autonomy to plan and schedule their day?

Therefore some of the most critical factors of a Dynamic Scheduling System are:

- Ease of implementation

- Intuitive interfaces and processes to prevent delays
  or frustration in user adoption

- Change management capabilities, attitude and
  approach of the implementation project team

Without these attributes being taken into consideration, the project will face the natural barriers to adoption and the ROI will be significantly reduced, rendering the advanced technology behind the scenes redundant.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one can see that having systems in place that support your company's objective in meeting customer expectations is a critical factor to competitive advantage.

One of the signature systems being adopted by leading companies is Planning and Scheduling and, more specifically, Dynamic Scheduling, with its ability to re-assess the real time situation on a second by second basis, reworking and adapting plans and schedules in line with the up-to-the-minute context.

However, not all Dynamic Scheduling Solutions are created equally, so it is those with the following Top 5 Features that will keep your company ahead of the field in terms of delivering to the customer's needs and expectations:

1. Connectivity via API for real time accuracy.

2. Ability to schedule very narrow actual times of delivery or arrival — ATAs.

3. Proactive real time communication — pre-empting the moment when things are not going according to plan.

4. Manual scheduling tools — to allow the expert planner to intervene in critical circumstances.

5. Ease of implementation and adoption — to avert low user adoption and low ROI from the outset.

With these factors in place, the true competitive advantage of a Dynamic Scheduling Solution can come to be realised.

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Fabulous example of a company taking it's customer's expectations as a critical business factor.

Hamish Phillips
Marketing Maestro
greentomatocars

> "We have a reverse waiting time policy, we pay customers if we arrive late!"

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Mike Tobin,
MD Green Tomato Cars

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