

Structuring Ticket Process Outsourcing



Introduction

This document presents an approach towards outsourcing in the areas of back office processing of Ticketing Helpdesk and Fulfillment Services for the flight and/or holiday businesses of Travel Agencies. Travel Agencies today can avail of outsourcing options that provide enhanced efficiency, better quality of service and superior value.

The document provides information on why outsourcing of ticketing operations is becoming a practical, viable and efficient option for Travel Agencies to cut down on operating costs. The document also details some typical processes that can be evaluated by mid-to-large sized Travel Agencies for outsourcing. Finally, it lists the essential steps towards structuring a commercial engagement for outsourcing.

The Case for Outsourcing Ticketing Processes

For Travel Agencies, ticketing is a function that entails high process time, while being low as a value generating function. It is a function that adds to the agency's costs in terms of the time spent on query handling and ticket distribution, while the agency does not create additional value by handling this process on its own. Nor is there a significant Knowledge protection issue that necessitates this process being handled directly by the agency.

Reducing Costs: On the contrary, agencies can drastically reduce distribution costs and improve the customer travel experience, by outsourcing the ticketing function. Outsourcing enables the agency to redirect staff to handling the real-time needs of its customers, whether those customers are calling from office, home or from an airport. Call center staff are thus freed up to deal with customer enquiries, rather than processing tickets. This enables the Travel agency to streamline its business processes and cut overheads through outsourcing, and thus drive customer service and concentrate on core areas of its business.

Relevant Experience: The ticketing processes outlined in this paper are predominantly fares related. Fares is an area where an Outsourcing partner with the relevant experience can bring superior value in terms of its fares expertise and trained and qualified fares experts. An

outsourcing partner with fares experts having experience in fare loading, quality check of fares and rules, rules coding for both published as well as private fares, as well as working experience on GDS-based fares systems can provide the right resource base to take on a outsourced Ticketing operation.

Such a partner can not only manage the processes efficiently, but also improve productivity levels once processes are stabilized after migration. Added to this, the cost advantages by virtue of off-shore location and a flexible pricing model, make outsourcing an ideal option for most mid-to-large Travel Agencies.

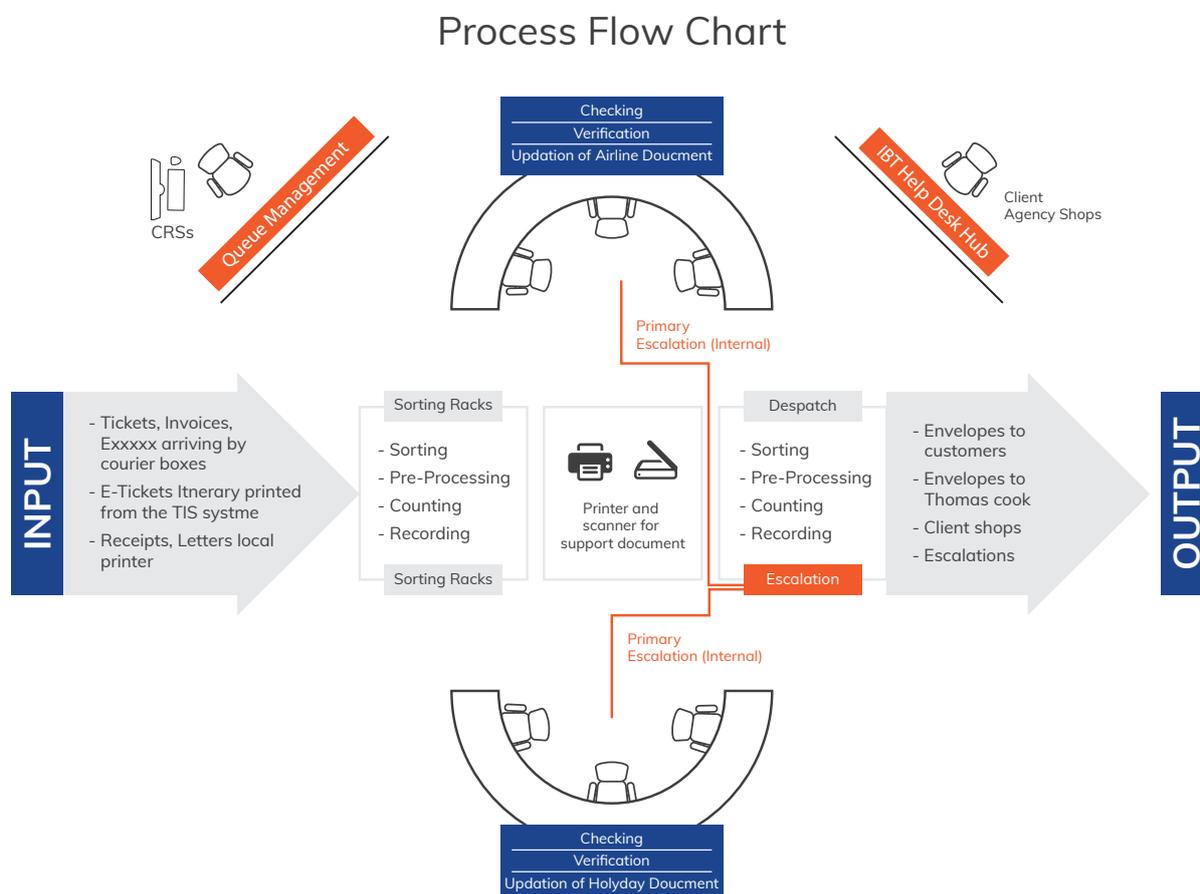
Listed below some key differentiating factors that a Travel Agency should look for, while outsourcing its Ticketing operation:

- Travel domain knowledge, with in-depth knowledge of airline & tour operator processes
- Domain expertise in fares and ticketing
- Trained and experienced travel industry professionals especially fares & ticketing experts
- State-of-the-art BPO delivery centre well equipped with systems, links and security measures as required for any world-class operations



Typical Ticketing Processes

The flowchart below depicts the typical Ticketing Processes that can potentially be handled by a service provider in an outsourced operation. These processes are described in detail in the next section.



Benefits

An outsourcing partner with the right expertise with fares and ticketing, coupled with strong

process frameworks, can ensure that a client looking to outsource its ticketing functions stands to benefit in the following ways:

- Outsourced services with defined Service Level Agreements and often exceeding them.
- Client Agency's core business requirements met without undue risk.
- Painless Transition of the service delivery from the current provider using a realistic, phased, low-risk approach.
- Guaranteed bi-directional delivery through SLA driven tie-ups with globally reputed courier companies.
- Services delivered with price-predictability and scalability.
- Break-even point for migration of services achieved within an agreed, specific time-frame.
- Innovation in reducing cost of services and improving operational efficiencies.
- Allowance for market load and price flexibility without compromising quality.
- Practical, working mechanisms for management, communication, escalation, risk mitigation and service improvement



Outsourced Ticketing Operations Processes

Outsourcing of the Ticketing function to an Outsourcing Partner (referred to hereon as "Partner") can cover the following Operations Processes:

Help Desk Support Process - for Inter-branch Ticketing (IBT)

This process entails handling inbound calls only from Client Agency shops. Agents from the Client Agency shops would call up for queries related to Published fares (e.g. unable to obtain a fare quote of the itinerary or inability to attain the right fare etc).

To address these, the Partner accesses the Fares database to resolve agent issues:

- The query shall mostly be resolved and thereafter updated in 1P
- If unresolved, the query shall be escalated to Client Agency through email/ phone and the caller shall be informed for the possible time of resolution
- Essentials to ensure Quality for the Help Desk Process

- Call monitoring to take place for calls handled by different agents by the supervisor of the team according to an assessment sheet with clear parameters. The supervisor shares the strengths & weaknesses of the agent coach and puts back the agent on refresher trainings if required
- MIS of calls handled is tracked by the supervisor to check the average handling time of each agent. To ensure if a particular agent AHT is much higher than the prescribed time, the supervisor ascertains the reasons and addresses it

Queue Management & Resolution Process

This process entails processing rejected PNR's to enable printing of tickets through an automated system. The unresolved ticketing requests (PNRs) rejected from the system land on specific 1P queues, which are attended (manually intervened) to sort the discrepancy.

- The PNR's are assessed in order of their priority and allocated to associates. Agent have access to 1P, Fares database and intranet to investigate/ resolve the reason for reject



- The discrepancy is then rectified and the PNR forwarded for Ticketing through the ticketing system
- In case the discrepancy is out of scope the PNR is addressed to the originating agent for further clarification or escalated to product/ ticketing team
- The Queues Processing & Dispatch process can be operational on a 24 x 7 pattern

Essentials to ensure Quality for the Queue Management Process

Quality is ensured for this process through remote monitoring i.e. Viewing the monitor of the agent from a remote location without his knowledge. A supervisor does the monitoring to ensure the accuracy of action and quantity of messages transacted and the quantum of calls escalated.

Dispatch Process for tickets & other documents to the Client Agency The process entails processing two separate types of documents:

- Scheduled air ticket/ e-ticketing quality check & dispatch- issued for a journey at least 21 days ahead.) This process covers:
 - Inter-branch ticketing and flight-savers (Client Agency shop published)
 - Flight direct receipt letters (Client Agency shop nets)
 - Flight direct ticket dispatch (Sales center bookings nets / pubs)

In this process, the Partner's operation would receive scheduled airline tickets / E-tickets (access from TIS) / invoices from the Client Agency's location for journeys commencing over

20 days ahead from the date of dispatch. There can be a combination of receipt letters received either through courier or printed by the Partner's local printers

The documents namely, airline tickets, E-tickets, invoices and receipts are counted, sorted and recorded in a particular order and segregated according to specifications.

The documents go through a Quality Check to verify the details are correct and in accordance with the information available in the system. If found in order, the system is accordingly updated.

In case the ticket does not pass the Quality Check, it is accordingly rectified or escalated. The escalated documents are packed separately.

The supporting documents / labels required are printed from the system. The invoices are then scanned and stored.

The documents passing the set specifications are collated with other support documents and put in envelopes and packed for dispatch after appropriately labeling them to the Client Agency's shops or customers.

All transactions are counted, recorded and sealed for dispatch to the Client Agency. This process can be operational on a 24 x 7 pattern.

Package holiday/ charter flight ticket/ invoice/ errata/ receipts dispatch issued for a journey at least 15 days ahead.

- This process covers:
 - Tour operator tickets
 - Tour operator errata
 - TravelCat receipt letters
 - Tour operator invoices

The transaction can include receiving documents / carrying out primary & secondary verification and quality checks followed by dispatching the documents to the Client Agency. The Objective of the process, thus, is not only to deliver well within prescribed SLA's but also offer value to the Client Agency to widen the scope of work. The Outsourcing Partner can receive chartered airline tickets / errata's/ invoices from the Client Agency for journeys commencing over 15 days ahead from the date of dispatch.

- Receipts and insurance letters from the Client Agency get printed by the Partner's local printer.

- The documents are counted, sorted and recorded in a particular order and segregated according to specifications.
- The documents shall go through a Quality Check to verify the details are correct and in accordance with the information available in the system. (Travel CAT). If found in order, the system is updated.
- Supporting documents are printed from Travel Cat & invoices are scanned.
- In case the ticket does not pass the quality check it is accordingly rectified or escalated. The escalated documents are separately packed.
- Documents passing the set specifications are collated with other support documents; put in envelopes and packed for dispatch after appropriately labeling them to Client Agency shops/customers.
- All transactions are counted, recorded & sealed for dispatch to the Client Agency.

In both the above cases, the dispatch process is completed through a tie-up with a global courier organization operating out of India as well as the Client Agency's location(s). The specifics of the courier process deliverables can be finalized with the Client Agency separately.

- Essentials to ensure Quality for the Dispatch Process
- A complete checklist is made for all the different jobs to be handled.

- The person handling the each job ensures the job once completed is checked against the checklist to complete the Quality Check.
- The supervisor on duty again does a random check to ensure all procedures are being followed.
- Each staff handles only one document at a time to ensure no mixing of documents occurs at any level.

Identifying a Partner

The Client Agency should identify a suitable Partner for outsourcing of Ticketing Process by opting for an evaluation process that ensures the following aspects are covered:

- Scope of Work
- Description of Processes (customized as per requirements)
- Recruitment and Training Plan
- Infrastructure Ramp Up Plan
- Transition Plan for Knowledge Transfer
- Timelines
- SLAs
- Commercial Terms



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