



IS IT ME OR IS THE CHECKOUT QUEUE GETTING LONGER?

Abstract

When our client witnessed unexpected increases in sales volume during the COVID-19 pandemic and was struggling to fulfill demand from customers, we stepped in to streamline the process and handle the volume spike, leading to increase in sales.

The background: The order is on its way

Our client is a US-headquartered CPG major that operates out of multiple locations across the globe. It specialises in delivering goods related to healthcare, home care, personal care, beauty and grooming and personal hygiene products, to name a few. We have a working relationship with the client since the past 12 years, and we have been delivering services to our client from our Costa Rica delivery centre (DC) since the past 5 years, including extensive order management (OM) services, such as:

- **Order processing:** We receive purchase orders for processing in the SAP system by generating sales order.
- **Order maintenance:** This involves any changes in the order as requested by our client or the customers and includes quantity changes, price changes, and so on.
- **Appointment scheduling:** Based on the dates requested by customers, we schedule, reschedule, or book appointments.
- **Track shipment:** We track the delivery of goods and reschedule deliveries against customer appointments and identify potential delivery failures as well as rescue loads.
- **Returns and refusals:** We process returns, rejections, and refusals by customers as well as generate credit or debit notes against invoices.



In the OM process, we receive purchase orders in SAP (EDI form), or through email as PDF/Excel copies, and process them in SAP application and generate the sales order.

The challenges: Pandemic blues

The devastating impact of COVID-19 on world economy needs no further elaboration. Even during the pandemic, despite naysayers, the retail & CPG sector witnessed impressive growth due to the fact that people began queuing up outside retail stores to stock necessary supplies. Prior to the pandemic, we had handled an average 16,766 sales order volume per month for the client between the March and September 2019 time period. However, thanks to frenzied buying from customers,

the average monthly sales order volume rose to 24,890, a whopping 48% increase! Any delays in delivering such volumes would have impacted the monthly sales volumes and affected customer demand. Since we have various channels/markets with specific nuances (10–20% difference in each channel), we adopted a model with dedicated resources for each channel/market. Additionally, we had to face several challenges in demand fulfilment, such as:

- Market-specific resource dependencies

- Limited time to enable resources to work from home (WFH)
- Unavailability of real-time support due to WFH
- Lack of accessibility to bots outside the client's environment

Because of the pandemic, the entire IBPM staff were working from home and this resulted in lack of coordination in planning and execution.

The approach: Success in three steps

To ensure the smooth flow of client orders, we implemented a three-pronged approach: process simplification, technology support, and people management.

Process simplification

- Effective internal and external governance to handle volume surge:
 - Connected with the client's stakeholders — from weekly to daily meetings — to receive heads-up information on expected volume and plan resources efficiently.
 - Increased the internal team connect — from once to twice in a day — to keep tabs on orders received versus processed volumes and raise flags for any support required from business or internal teams.
- Robust knowledge transfer structure:
 - Standardised a handover plan in case of employee attrition.
 - Implemented a tracker for knowledge transfer activities.

- Robust knowledge management (KM) framework:
 - Minimised queries to clients or SMEs (SOPs, job aids, etc.).
 - Updated real-time tracking of job aids rather than tracking in the update tracker.
 - Hosted a centralised location with read-only folder access to all resources.

Technology support

- BCP-ready team:
 - Enabled WFH for the team in less than a week's time.
- Dedicated IT helpdesk:
 - Appointed dedicated SPOCs who were aligned to the client for real-time support.
- Enabled remote access to bots:
 - Invested in a cloud-based solution (Omni Connect), which was deployed to access bots remotely

People management

- All hands-on deck approaches:
 - Cross-trained more resources on order management channels/markets to handle unexpected spikes in sales volume instead of dedicated resources working on specific channels.
- Team building connects for healthy work environment:
 - Initiated a high tea with the centre head for the team members.
 - Implemented an incentive plan for high-performing individuals.
 - Connected with the operations manager to enhance the bottom-level performers as well as provide them with necessary training for performance improvement.
- Training
 - Cross-trained 76% of resources to handle high-volume channels
- Rotational hands-on practice model, with 92% resources well-trained.

The results: Success against all odds

The pandemic and its related affects severely challenged our process capabilities and forced us to implement quick solutions to fulfil customers' demands. However, despite these roadblocks, we were able to deliver several benefits to the client, such as:

- Processed \$0.34 billion worth additional sales with our existing staffing.
- Enabled 5% increase in net sales in FY20

and 29% increase during the March to September 2020 time period.

- Processed 48% more order volumes during the March to September 2020 time period.
- Delivered best-in-class OM services with high CSAT, with expected average quarter-on-quarter scores of 3.8.
- Ensured zero penalties or fines.

In addition, we witnessed 29% increase in sales order value, 48% increase in sales order volume, 24% increase in per FTE sales order volume, and 8% increase in per FTE sales order value!

Conclusion

In legal usage, an act of God is considered as a legal hazard over which humans have no control over and none can be held responsible for. Instances include disasters, such as floods, earthquake, or any other natural phenomenon. However, opinion

is divided over whether the COVID-19 pandemic can be slotted under an act of God. Whatever be the case, in terms of economy, the pandemic has posed tremendous challenges to established business norms and forced businesses of

all shapes and sizes to reinvent the wheel. Our challenge was to ensure that the orders placed by the client's customers were delivered on time and to the right destination.

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