What is forecasting?

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CommunityWFM

phone 877-668-6870
web CommunityWFM.com

3400 Waterview Parkway, Suite 101
Richardson, Texas 75080

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About this document

This document accompanies the CommunityWFM College webinar *What is Forecasting?* It includes additional details and step-by-step instructions for completing the tasks discussed during the webinar.

What is forecasting?

Forecasting is a method of predicting and planning for call volume, AHT, shrinkage and staffing needs to best meet your center's service levels.

It's a plan—your roadmap to help you understand the challenges of staffing to meet high/low demand, and plan for shrinkage.

Forecasting uses historical data to plan future schedules. It most often involves looking at call volume and average handle time (AHT) to determine which weeks from the past to use as the basis for creating schedules in the future.

You can also create forecasts based on service targets, shrinkage percentages, and staffing requirements, but call volume/AHT are most used for creating schedules.

What forecasting isn't

- It's not an easy button. Forecasts need to be managed and adjusted intraday.
- It's not set in stone. Forecasts don't always go according to plan.

It takes an analytical mindset to be successful with forecasting.

What should I be aware of before running a forecast?

- Understand your business trends.
    - Is my business seasonal? Do we have higher volumes in the holiday season or lower volume in the summer season?
    - Are Mondays usually busier than Fridays?
    - Do I expect higher volumes the first of the month or the 15th of the month?
- Are there any new situations expected during the forecast period?

Questions to ask before creating the forecast

- Which data should I use?
- Is there a Monday or Friday holiday coming up, or is there one in our historical volume?
- Is there a new product release that might increase our incoming calls?
- Are we expecting higher than usual shrinkage?

How do I do forecasting?

Processing / running forecasts is quick with Community. What takes time is the analytic side of forecasting.

Before doing the actual forecasting, you'll need to create a forecast profile.

Create a Forecast Profile	
A forecast profile is a scenario that you create. It is a set of historical weeks used for forecasting purposes.	**1.** Go to **Forecast >** Forecast profiles > Set up a new one
	2. Select *Click here to create a new forecast profile.*
	3. Give it a descriptive name.
	4. *Use this profile for quick forecasting?* Select *Yes* or *No* to use as the default forecast.
	5. *This profile will contain what type of data?* Select *Contact volume, Service targets, Shrinkage percentage,* or *Staffing requirements.*
	6. Click *Next.*

Types of Forecast Profiles	
Select Data Source Type	
There are six forecast profile types in CommunityWFM. Select the profile that fits the week for which you are creating the forecast. For example, look at last year and the year before for the same time frame then use that data to create your forecast. Or use a rolling 4 week forecast, which is always the last 4 weeks of history.	
Dynamic Profile	A rolling profile that uses a consecutive number of weeks; you tell the system how many weeks to use. When running a dynamic forecast, it will look at today's date and look at the designated number of previous weeks to create a forecast based on that data. **Example:** the week that I'm forecasting should have steady

	normal call volume and really isn't affected by seasonal or holiday factors.
Static Profile	Presents a calendar, and you select the weeks that you want to include for your forecast. You're specifically telling the system which weeks to use, and it will always use the selected dates (unless you manually change it). **Example:** Weeks with a Monday holiday are a good example of when to use a static profile.
Date Range Profile	Is what it sounds like. You put in a start date and an end date and those are the dates it uses. **Example:** Maybe your business has very specific quarterly call volume and AHT Q1 is always slow.
Excel Data and **Manual Data Entry**	Are used when you don't have an ACD for the line of businesses that you are forecasting. With Excel, you can create an Excel spreadsheet (formatted to match the requirements of the system) and upload the data. With Manual data entry you must add data by each interval for each activity for the line of business. **Example:** Email or chat volume that is not captured by your ACD. **Example:** You need to forecast for volume outside of your normal business hours or you're taking on additional volume with new skills.
Static profile from special days	Allows selecting weeks that include special days designated in your center – days when your center is always closed. **Example:** The week that includes New Year's Day of last year.
Follow the steps, which will vary slightly depending on your data source type/forecast profile (*see appendix for step-by-step instructions for each type)*.	

Running a Forecast

After creating profiles, you can run an actual forecast. Typically, you'll run a forecast for one week at a time, two weeks ahead of time.

Creating a Working Forecast

Working forecasts are like a testing lab where you can trial different scenarios. You only need one working forecast that you will use to do your tests. Once everything looks good, you publish the forecast and use the published forecast when creating the schedule.

In this example we'll generate a Contact Volume/AHT and Staffing requirements working forecast that uses the Enterprise Model (EM) defined forecast defaults for Service Targets and Shrinkage.	**1.** Navigate to *Forecast* > *Working forecasts*
	2. Select *Click here to create a new forecast.*
	3. Give the forecast a name then *Save*. • **Basic properties** where you named your working forecast. • **Security** is where you can set who can see your forecast (optional). • **Revision History** tracks how many changes have been made to the forecast and who made them. • **Copy forecast data** is where you can copy this forecast to use for What If scenarios etc
The result will be how many agents are required for that week to meet all these requirements.	**4.** Working down the menu on the left, there are four things you can use to create an accurate forecast: a. **Contact volume:** How many calls you'll receive that week (Required). b. **Service targets:** Service level goal for that week (no need unless you're doing a 'what if' because it's pulling that info from the EM). c. **Shrinkage percentages** (if you want to use a profile instead of the defaults in the EM). d. **Staffing Requirements** How many FTEs will I need for the week, day, interval

Working Forecast Contact Volume

We're forecasting the number of calls and AHT we expect based on the weeks that we used in the profile.

This process generates the expected 15-minute intervals call volume and average handle time for the date range, based on historical data.

1. If not expanded, click the triangle next to *Working Forecast Contact Volume*.

Step 1: Basic properties:

2. The first screen highlights why you only need to have one working forecast: *Generate forecast data* asks you for the activity and date range every time.

   You could choose the Enterprise level but it's better to run it at the actual site level and revise at the folder or activity level. You can also run it at a more granular level.

3. Click *Generate forecast data*
4. Select a site, folder, or activity and then add the dates. Plan on running it for one week at a time, two weeks from now. Click *Next*.

Step 2: Select forecast profile:

5. Click *Select* for the profile you want to use. Pick the one that you think best represents what will happen for that week based on review of history. Click *Next*.

Step 3:

6. Configure profile details will typically be blank. The only time you'll need to do anything here is if you choose to use an Excel spreadsheet for historical data. Click Next.

Step 4:

7. Import forecast data forces you to import the data. Click Import data and when complete click Next. The system just went and grabbed the data you pointed it to

Step 5:

8. Select forecast method: is asking if you want to average that data. You'll have two options:

	Classic Community Forecast – is a simple average. It adds the data and divides by the number of weeks in the profile. **Weekly Weighted Average** – allows you to apply a weight to each of the weeks to tell it which weeks to focus on more heavily.
	Step 6: **9.** Forecast method details: If you chose Classic the next screen is blank and you can click Next. If you chose weekly weighted, select the relative weight for each week.
	Step 7: **10.** Generate forecast: click Generate forecast and when it's complete click Finish.

Working Forecast Staffing Requirements

Staffing requirements is the result of the forecast. It will tell you how many agents you need to schedule to respond to the contact volume at your service level goal, and to allow for shrinkage.

The following steps include generating clusters, generating a forecast, viewing the forecast report, and publishing forecast data.

Generate clusters

A cluster is a group of skills for an agent. If an agent takes more than one type of call, we need to create a cluster. It's a clustering of skillsets, or cross-training.

	1. Click *Generate clusters*, select an activity source: *Agent activity assignments* (uses assignments in the agent's profile) or *Forecast participant list* (use this if you plan to customize the forecast participant list). **2.** Click *Generate clusters* again.
	3. Click *Finish*.

Generate Forecast	
Use the service target and shrinkage from the EM.	**1.** Same as with call volume — it asks you what activity and what date range. Use the same date and level. Click *Next.*
	2. It displays the service targets in use, and we won't change them. Click *Next*.
	3. Same for shrinkage. It shows the default settings from the EM and we won't change them. Click *Next*.
	4. Click *Generate forecast*.
	5. When you see the success confirmation message click *Finish*.

View Forecast Reports (Forecast Staffing Report)	
This report is a little different in that is gives you staffing level requirements and call volumes. With 5.0, you select filter options in the options panel, then use the filters across the top of the report to present the data.	
Review the report.	• If the staff were robots and didn't take breaks or lunches or call out sick, this is how many people you would need (Base Staff). • Discretionary and Non-Discretionary hours. • Total Adjusted Hours – Total hours with shrinkage added. • Staffing FTEs (number of 8-hour shifts needed for the day). • Notice the total adjusted FTEs for Standard Forecasting Methods (Erlang C) compared with Skills-Based Forecasting Methods (Cross-Training). ○ This is the only time you'll see Standard. The rest of the time it uses skills-based. • If you want to see the interval by day, open the options panel, select *Interval Charts Only* and it will show the

	interval by how many people you need to take the call volume with the SLs, etc.
Revise forecast data	Typically, you'd make your revisions in the call volume part of forecasting not here, so it's best to skip this step.
Publish forecast data	This is the last step. When you publish your forecast, it saves it so it can be used when creating schedules.
	1. Click *Publish forecast data*
	2. Select the activity level and date
	3. Click *Publish Forecast*.

Now that you have a final published forecast, you can proceed with creating your schedules.

Appendix – Profile types

Creating a dynamic (rolling) forecast profile

STEP-BY-STEP

Forecast > Forecast profiles

1. Select *Click here to create a new forecast profile.*

Step 1: Basic properties

2. Give it a name. Description is optional.
3. *Use this profile for quick forecasting?* Select *Yes* or *No* to use as the default forecast.
4. *This profile will contain what type of data?* Select *Contact volume, Service targets, Shrinkage percentage,* or *Staffing requirements.*
5. Click *Next.*

Step 2: Select data source type

6. Click *Select* in the *Dynamic Profile* row.

Step 3: Define forecast profile collection parameters

7. Indicate number of past weeks to include (4 is the default).
8. Volume import option: Either *Import all intervals in the dynamic date range,* or *Import only intervals with collected volume in the dynamic date range* (preferred).
9. Click *Finish.*

Creating a static forecast profile

STEP-BY-STEP

Forecast > Forecast profiles

1. Select *Click here to create a new forecast profile.*

Step 1: Basic properties

2. Give it a name. Description is optional.
3. *Use this profile for quick forecasting?* Select *Yes* or *No* to use as the default forecast.
4. *This profile will contain what type of data?* Select *Contact volume, Service targets, Shrinkage percentage,* or *Staffing requirements.*

5. Click *Next*.

Step 2: Select data source type

6. Click *Select* in the Static Profile row.

Step 3: Define forecast profile collection parameters

7. Volume import option: Select whether to import all intervals in the static weeks selected or only those with collected volume.
8. Select from the calendar the week(s), consecutive or not, to use in the forecast. If you click on any date in the calendar and the system will automatically select the entire week. If selecting more than one week, CommunityWFM provides an average of those weeks. Use as many relevant weeks as possible in the profile for smoothing purposes.
   Because forecasting averages the data for a given day down to the activity and interval, you don't want to run a forecast for only one week.
9. Click *Finish*.

Creating a date range profile

STEP-BY-STEP

Forecast > Forecast profiles

1. Select *Click here to create a new forecast profile*.

Step 1: Basic properties

2. Give it a name. Description is optional.
3. *Use this profile for quick forecasting?* Select *Yes* or *No* to use as the default forecast.
4. *This profile will contain what type of data?* Select *Contact volume, Service targets, Shrinkage percentage,* or *Staffing requirements*.
5. Click *Next*.

Step 2: Select data source type

6. Click *Select* in the Date Range Profile row.

Step 3: Define forecast profile collection parameters

7. Enter the *From date* and *Through date* for the profile.
8. Volume import option: Select whether to import all intervals in the static weeks selected or only those with collected volume.

9. Click *Finish*.

Creating an Excel data profile

STEP-BY-STEP

Forecast > Forecast profiles

1. Select *Click here to create a new forecast profile*.

Step 1: Basic properties

2. Give it a name. Description is optional.
3. *Use this profile for quick forecasting?* Select *Yes* or *No* to use as the default forecast.
4. *This profile will contain what type of data?* Select *Contact volume, Service targets, Shrinkage percentage,* or *Staffing requirements*.
5. Click *Next*.

Step 2: Select data source type

6. Click *Select* in the Excel Data Profile row.

Step 3: Define forecast profile collection parameters

7. Click *File specification* to open the window for uploading the Excel file.
8. *Select an Existing File* or *Upload a file*. This is also the area to download a template if needed.
9. Locate and select the Excel profile that you have saved locally and click *Open*.
10. Click *Next*.
11. Click *Create a new Import Template*.
12. Name your file for easy reference.
13. Click OK.
14. Click *Select* to use the newly created template.
15. Review the verification and import screen. Verify that your data has the expected valid rows for import then click *Import all Valid*.
16. Click *Finish*.
17. Click *Finish* again.

Creating a manual data entry profile

STEP-BY-STEP

Forecast > Forecast profiles

1. Select *Click here to create a new forecast profile.*

Step 1: Basic properties

2. Give it a name. Description is optional.
3. *Use this profile for quick forecasting?* Select *Yes* or *No* to use as the default forecast.
4. *This profile will contain what type of data?* Select *Contact volume, Service targets, Shrinkage percentage,* or *Staffing requirements.*
5. Click *Next.*

Step 2: Select data source type

6. Click *Select* in the Manual Data Entry row.

Step 3: Define forecast profile collection parameters

7. Scroll down and click *Input profile data.*
8. In the new window, enter the *First interval start* time and *Last interval start* time and time zone. Click *Next.*
9. Enter interval data for each day and time interval. **Reminder:** Save the intervals for each day before moving on to the next day. Use the *Bulk input* or *Replicate* functions to automate some of the data entry. When finished, close the browser window.
10. Click *Finish.*

Creating a static profile from special days

STEP-BY-STEP

Forecast > Forecast profiles

1. Select *Click here to create a new forecast profile.*

Step 1: Basic properties

2. Give it a name. Description is optional.
3. *Use this profile for quick forecasting?* Select *Yes* or *No* to use as the default forecast.

4. *This profile will contain what type of data?* Select *Contact volume, Service targets, Shrinkage percentage,* or *Staffing requirements.*
5. Click *Next.*

Step 2: Select data source type

6. Click *Select* in the Static Profile from Special Days row.

Step 3: Define forecast profile collection parameters

7. Select from the *Choose your special event* drop-down.
8. Enter the number of past weeks with the special day to include. Default is 4.
9. Volume import option: Select whether to import all intervals in the special event date range selected or only those with collected volume.
10. Click *Finish.*