



A Timely Matter

Plug-and-play SaaS platform takes the wrinkles out of scheduling for Anna's Linens

With fewer than 20 employees per location, Anna's Linens didn't need the same trappings in a time and attendance system as a big box or department store. That doesn't mean visibility was any less important, however.

The home fashions retailer has more than 250 stores in 18 states; each store averages 9,000 to 10,000 sq. ft. Several systems the company investigated were not only "extremely robust," says Linda Wendt, vice president of human resources. They were overwhelming.

CyberShift's Workforce Management 3G solution proved a Goldilocks opportunity: a just-right interface for the 2,000-employee company, with tracking that gets managers out of the bad-guy role and provides greater accountability across the board.

"They've listened to people like me," Wendt says. "We want almost plug-and-play. People are so used to computer systems, video games, ATMs and graphics that are easy to use and understand. And from what we've seen of this next version, they've really taken that to heart."

'Grossly underserved' market

When Robert Farina became CEO of CyberShift eight years ago, time and attendance was a different landscape. Now, "even the terminology is different," he says. "It's 'absence management' or 'scheduling optimization.' It's clearly understood that behind merchandise, payroll is a company's second-largest expense."

Challenges like the Sarbanes-Oxley Act and its effect on auditability and data controls and the fresh importance of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) are added considerations. And then there's the increase in mobile and "untethered" workers. Though time and attendance still applies in the hourly world, Farina says, it's a much larger picture. A lot of what CyberShift does applies to the white collar exempt workforce, especially when it comes to absence and leave management, correct accruals for vacation time and other such issues.

Though CyberShift initially found success in providing workforce management systems for manufacturing and the public sector, it soon became apparent that specialty retail was "grossly underserved," Farina says.

"If you look at the overall retail marketplace, most of the vendors have focused heavily on big boxes, the Global 500, and for obvious reasons: They spend a lot of money," he says. "But there are about 2,200 [retailers] in that midmarket definition. We thought this was a great solution."



CyberShift's Workforce Management Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) platform not only helps employers schedule how many people are needed at particular places and times; it also provides tools that let store managers reconcile "ideal" schedules with reality. The systems manage staffing relative to budget; ensure adequate coverage for peak demand load; take the availability of part-time workers into account; and consider such legal requirements as work limits for minors and unique state requirements, all while providing complete visibility into labor costs and variable spend.

In the case of Anna's Linens, Wendt says, it was the previous system's lack of visibility that had to be improved.

"We had a homegrown, home-developed time punch system," she says. "We didn't have the flexibility to make rapid changes or align the payroll with business trends."

Anna's Linens first implemented the CyberShift solution in 2006, and the result was more than some bargained for. While it was an "effective tool," with visibility came increased accountability, and that means "examining every rule and business process you have," Wendt says.

"It's definitely been a learning process," she explains. "A couple of people I knew had implemented time systems before, and they were huge assets. But it was an arduous process ... We had an internal project team that helped us select the system we went with. But we also included district managers, the ones who would be using it in the field."

Anna's Linens' custom report allows easy comparison between scheduled and actual hours and access for users at all levels. That access means employees can log in and check leave balances for themselves.

"They can ask for time off while in the system, instead of that request being noted on a piece of paper," Wendt says. "If they request vacation and they don't have that time accrued, it's a faceless system that turns them down. The manager doesn't have to be the bad guy. Employees can see how many times they've been late [and] how many times they left before their shift was over."

The system tracks when an employee clocks in and out, "and if that's more than five minutes from the scheduled time, a comment shows up," she says. "That helps the manager when doing performance evaluations, too. When the manager is saying, 'You're always late,' that manager can now be very specific and say, 'In the last 30 days, you've been late seven times.' That can go the other way, too. It may be my perception that someone is late a lot, but the system will tell me they've actually only been late twice."