



## Customer Profile:

Education Lending

## Website:

[www.salliemae.com](http://www.salliemae.com)

## Location:

Newark, DE; Indianapolis, IN; Hobart, IN;  
Port St. Lucie, FL

## Business Needs:

- Increase agent satisfaction
- Improve schedule delivery
- Advance forecasting accuracy
- Maximize schedule adherence

## NICE Solutions:

- Workforce Management (WFM)
- Employee Engagement Manager (EEM)
- Value Realization Services (VRS)

## The Impact:

- Workforce analyst FTE savings of 33%
- Agent satisfaction scores improved by up to 30%
- Automated 99% of processing for self-service schedule changes
- Reallocated FTEs for rollout of two new digital interaction channels

*“NICE WFM and EEM automation, customization, centralization and comprehensiveness saved us a tremendous amount of time, and resources, and improved agent satisfaction.”*

– Chuck Johns, Manager of  
Workforce Management

# A Deep Dive into Tailored Automation and Visibility Raises Efficiency and Satisfaction

## About Sallie Mae

Sallie Mae is the nation's leading company for private education loans, education savings, and online planning tools and resources for college students. The company has helped more than two million families since 2014

Sallie Mae employs between 288 and 525 people, based on seasonal fluctuations, at four contact centers. These contact centers – in Delaware, two locations in Indiana, and in Florida – handle a total of around 1.6 million inbound calls every year.

## The Challenge

In order for Sallie Mae to provide the highest quality customer service at its contact centers, staffing had to be able to meet demand at all times. That meant occupancy had to be optimized through appropriate forecasting and scheduling.

Employee scheduling was, however, extremely dependent on manual processes for handling requests and managing absences, time off, and overtime. This included everything from updating break schedule spacing to ensure appropriate staffing and coordinating across multiple systems for overtime inputs.

Supervisors and WFM staff were spending extensive amounts of time on scheduling issues, which lowered their productivity. It also made intraday planning difficult and impacted performance reporting, with no real-time data and incomplete near-term plans. The weaknesses of the WFM solution in use at the time led to dissatisfaction among WFM staff and supervisors, as they were forced to focus on tedious, repetitive tasks that produced less-than-optimal results.

Frustration was also to be found among contact center agents, as they had limited shift flexibility and replies to scheduling requests took a long time to be addressed. In addition, there was no process in place for peer shift trades and self-swaps, nor were agents able to access or manage their schedules remotely. The result was growing employee dissatisfaction and schedule adherence issues, which added to the risk of poor customer experience.

Sallie Mae required a contact center solution that could do more than their contracted vendor was able to provide. The company sought a big picture solution that would give them control and freedom, while simplifying their contact centers for their employees.



## The Solution

Sallie Mae personnel had worked with NICE Ltd. prior to 2014. They noticed the difference between the previous NICE WFM solution and the solution they were using at the time, especially the lack of actionable insight.

Sallie Mae leadership also recognized that NICE WFM, being a market leader for the most complete WFM solution for over ten years, could support their needs and adapt to dynamic daily scheduling. NICE's large portfolio of solutions and subject matter expertise furthermore gave Sallie Mae the power to intelligently develop in the future.

For workforce management at the intraday and near-term level, Sallie Mae incorporated NICE Employee Engagement Manager (EEM) in the WFM solution. EEM's intelligent automation empowers employees with greater scheduling autonomy, while simultaneously improving net staffing. For the greatest intraday scheduling flexibility, EEM dynamically identifies the smallest practical shift increments, made available only when they benefit the contact center, providing agents many more auto-approved schedule-change and peer swap opportunities.

### A Deep Dive for a Tailored Solution

The NICE Value Realization Services team and Sallie Mae partnered for a deep dive into the processes in place, customizing the WFM solution for the best results. This included implementation of automation and self-service capabilities for scheduling meetings, shifts, and breaks.

Sallie Mae implemented scheduling within NICE WFM to meet specific traffic patterns and interaction volumes, and to effectively manage the scheduling of overtime. Also, by giving managers the means and flexibility to input information regarding one-on-one meetings and when employees are tardy or absent, Sallie Mae was able to efficiently manage schedules and save time.

Sallie Mae also addressed forecast accuracy, by combining long term forecasting and personnel planner functionality to maintain a daily forecast variance of 3%. At the recommendation of the VRS team, the company consolidated the queues to ultimately streamline resources.

The implementations were made possible in part by SmartSync, allowing different legacy software to interact and integrate with the WFM solution.

To put the implementations to the test, Sallie Mae and NICE developed a UAT suite of over 700 test cases. The goal was to target planning effectiveness and service efficiency, including adherence, idle time, agent engagement, and real-time transparency.

### Huge Time Savings and Agent Satisfaction Gains

NICE WFM and EEM are making it easier for agents to achieve their desired work-life balance, as reflected in Sallie Mae employee feedback. Agent satisfaction scores in surveys related to engagement, for example, improved by up to 30% in less than 6 months. This is expected to correlate with customer satisfaction and agent retention, saving money for Sallie Mae as well.

NICE WFM and EEM automation, customization and comprehensiveness saved Sallie Mae a tremendous amount of time, including:

- Workforce analyst FTE savings of 33%.
- Automated 99% of processing for self-service schedule changes.

The time savings and technical efficiencies translate into supervisors who are more available to undertake higher value tasks, rather than routine scheduling. In addition, Sallie Mae was able to reallocate workforce analyst resources to support the complete rollout of two new digital communication channels for its customers: chat and in-app messaging. This rollout represents a strategic advancement for how Sallie Mae supports its customers.

### Prepared and Forward Thinking

During implementation of the NICE solutions, Sallie Mae developed a configuration document that provides an "à la carte" approach to onboarding new lines of business into WFM. This will prove to be important immediately, as Sallie Mae is undergoing an expansion that will increase their agent workforce by 12% in early 2020.

For ongoing QA and future developments, Sallie Mae hosts employee roundtables at which they discuss current results and areas of opportunity. Currently, the company is looking into further integration of agent preferences in the EEM scheduling matrix, as well as leave-without-pay, voluntary time off (LWOP/VTO), and performance updates or alerts.

## About NICE

NICE (Nasdaq: NICE) is the world's leading provider of both cloud and on-premises enterprise software solutions that empower organizations to make smarter decisions based on advanced analytics of structured and unstructured data. NICE helps organizations of all sizes deliver better customer service, ensure compliance, combat fraud and safeguard citizens. Over 25,000 organizations in more than 150 countries, including over 85 of the Fortune 100 companies, are using NICE solutions.

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