



CASE STUDY

MEET VOLATILE DEMAND, LOWER COSTS, AND IMPROVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WITH BLENDED SERVICE WORKFORCE

June 2021

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# MEET VOLATILE DEMAND, LOWER COSTS, AND IMPROVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WITH BLENDED SERVICE WORKFORCE

Field service is, by its very nature, a volatile business. Sure, companies plan and schedule installations, inspections, preventive maintenance, upgrades, and the like in advance. But that's where the predictability ends. Dispatchers, managers, parts specialists, technicians, and everyone working in a field service capacity know that volatile project demand and unanticipated customer service needs are likely to disrupt the best-laid plans.

Field service organizations typically have finite scheduling flexibility due to numerous constraints, including the number of available technicians, the skill sets of those technicians, the geographic disparity between customer and technician locations, the time differences between customer needs and technician schedules, and so on. Companies can significantly reduce these flexibility constraints by using a blended workforce comprised of both direct employees and independent contractors. A blended service workforce allows companies to make optimal use of their highly trained and skilled direct service staff. When companies offload less specialized, lower impact work, or work that requires travel to professional on-demand workers, they are enabling their direct employees to focus on higher-value activities.

## CASE IN POINT

Service Council interviewed two executives at Pomeroy ([www.pomeroy.com](http://www.pomeroy.com)), Stephen Vandegriff, VP of Digital Strategy, and Dennis Hinkel, VP of Operations, about Pomeroy's use of a blended service workforce.

Pomeroy provides IT implementation and support services that help its clients innovate, automate and optimize their IT infrastructures and speed digital transformation across their workplace. Pomeroy's stated objective is to provide end-users with tools and solutions that enhance their satisfaction and increase their flexibility and productivity, regardless of their location or device.

The Pomeroy executives acknowledged that they are not the best-known name-brand provider of such services. Still, both execs emphasize that Pomeroy has a very happy and loyal customer base. The reason? The quality of service Pomeroy provides.

Pomeroy's value proposition is multi-faceted. Consistently fulfilling that value proposition has earned Pomeroy a reputation for unswervingly high-quality service delivery. Pomeroy prides itself on:

- Rapid response and resolution times
- Expertise of the field service staff
- Readily accessible, relevant information for service technicians
- Availability of tools and technologies to speed diagnostics and repairs
- Reliability of initial repairs / high first-time fix rate
- And more . . .

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Pomeroy passionately believes that “quality of service” is the best differentiator between companies offering similar products or services.

Service Council certainly agrees with this sentiment.

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Stephen and Dennis also stress that “just delivering a fix” is not enough. A vital part of the service value proposition is the ability to measure the customers’ experience. Pomeroy employs multiple methods to track that all-important data:

- “Voice of the Client” surveys twice yearly, using the Net Promoter Score (NPS) method
- “Micro-surveys” with every service interaction
- Digital Experience Monitoring (DEM scoring) to measure the efficacy of Pomeroy’s service

To underscore the importance of the customer experience at Pomeroy, Stephen conveyed that the theme for Pomeroy’s 2021 annual kick-off meeting was “Customer Obsessed.” It’s one more way Pomeroy reinforces a service excellence ideology.

# THE ROLE OF AN ON-DEMAND WORKFORCE AT POMEROY

Service Council interviewed Dennis Hinkel to explore the role on-demand workers play in protecting and enriching Pomeroy's service excellence tradition. As the VP in charge of field service, Dennis oversees all service operations, including break/fix work, scheduled maintenance, projects, staging and configurations, repair depot, and advance/exchange operations.

Pomeroy does employ a direct staff of highly qualified, well-trained W2 service employees, of course. But as we alluded to in the opening paragraphs of this paper, direct service staffs often need to be augmented with external support to stay on top of varying demand, to help with project work, to fill in for illnesses and vacations, to cover geographic gaps, and more. Such is the case at Pomeroy

Dennis highlighted areas where Pomeroy engages on-demand workers to assist with field service work. Pomeroy works exclusively with Field Nation to provide that on-demand support for such things as:

- **Situations where Pomeroy does not have the needed skills available to meet a demand.** That may be because a technician with the requisite skill is not available in a certain geography. It may also happen that the W2 staff is fully scheduled and a qualified technician is not available for an immediate need, necessitating the need to pull in an on-demand resource.
- **To support projects that involve many efforts spread over multiple or dispersed sites, or over long periods of time.** For example, Dennis cited an upgrade project requiring multiple short-term tasks spread over many different customer locations. Depending on the nature and length of the project, Pomeroy either employs a combination of direct and on-demand workers from Field Nation, or engages Field Nation to provide on-demand support for the entire project.

Dennis stresses that flexibility and scalability are key reasons why customers choose Pomeroy. On-demand workers provide that flexibility and scalability. When unanticipated circumstances, such as a spike in demand, obligations in uncovered geographies, new engineering or safety change requirements, unforeseen absences, or other unexpected events occur, on-demand workers can fill the gaps and maintain consistent service levels.

Pomeroy now works directly with Field Nation to provide all the on-demand worker support it needs. Dennis explains that the Field Nation platform works extremely well for Pomeroy. It gives Pomeroy visibility into the skills and qualifications of the Field Nation on-demand technicians. Pomeroy can see technicians' ratings and know what they're good at. Dennis shared that the "self-governing" nature of the platform arms his team with the information they need to find technicians they can trust to complete the job successfully. The Field Nation platform provides Pomeroy a unified view of on-demand service resources that they wouldn't have without Field Nation. Pomeroy does of course continue to use its own W2 service workforce, but being able also to leverage the Field Nation platform and on-demand workforce results in a tightly integrated service operation.

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# THE VIEW FROM FIELD NATION

Service Council also spoke with Steve Salmon, VP of Business Development, at Field Nation, to obtain his insights and observations. Field Nation contracts with thousands of professional service workers to provide supplemental service delivery support to its customers. More than 7,000 companies engage Field Nation's services to fulfill more than one million work orders per year. Field Nation provides high-quality supplemental service support to its customers, such as Pomeroy, resulting in a higher return on assets, increased win rate, and a positive customer experience.

Steve noted that a wide range of industries are reporting

- high volatility in service demand
- staffing capacity problems
- specific skills availability issues
- supply chain disruptions

These observations are consistent with data gathered in Service Council's 2021 Service Leaders' Agenda Survey, where nearly 50% of executive respondents report a workforce and talent shortage, and 42% cite an overall lack of resources.

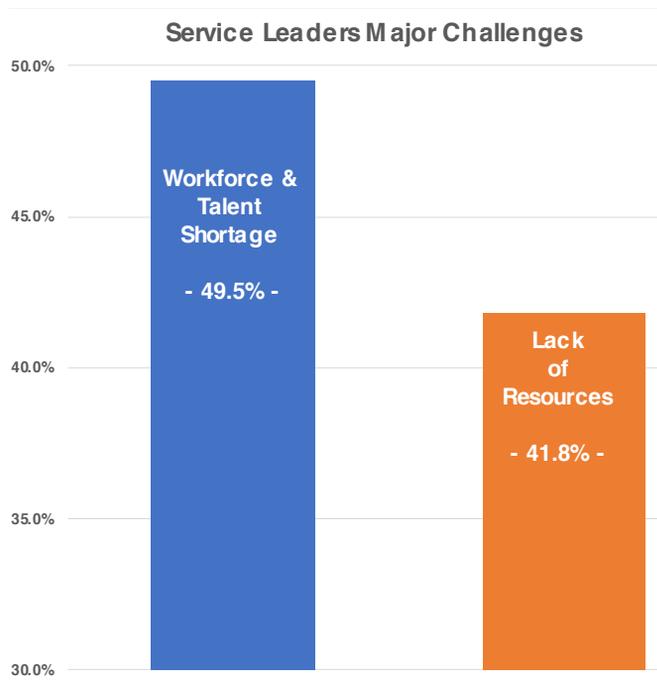


Figure 1

A well-trained on-demand workforce will alleviate the difficulties imposed by these issues.

- **On-demand workers can be deployed to handle volatile demand**, resulting from installation and/or upgrade work, seasonal fluctuations, weather-related issues, off-hours support, disaster recovery work, or a variety of other temporary demand fluctuations.
- **On-demand workers can augment service staff when existing staff levels are insufficient or overburdened**; they can also ease the strain created by lost labor due to vacations, retirements, unexpected terminations, and more.
- **On-demand workers can satisfy service obligations in geographies where no direct employees are positioned** within a reasonable distance to the location requiring service.
- **On-demand workers with unique or specific skills can complete service orders requiring that specific skill when no direct employees with the requisite skill are available.** Indeed, nearly 90% of field service technicians responding to Service Council's 2021 Voice of the Field Service Engineer Survey report that products are much more complex today and that greater knowledge is required to service those products (See Figure 2). Knowledgeable on-demand workers may be able to ease this worry.
- **On-demand workers may also aid in minimizing supply chain disruptions.** For example, when a direct technician cannot finish a work order because a required part had to be ordered, an on-demand worker can often complete the work once the part is available, thus freeing the direct employee to focus on other important work.

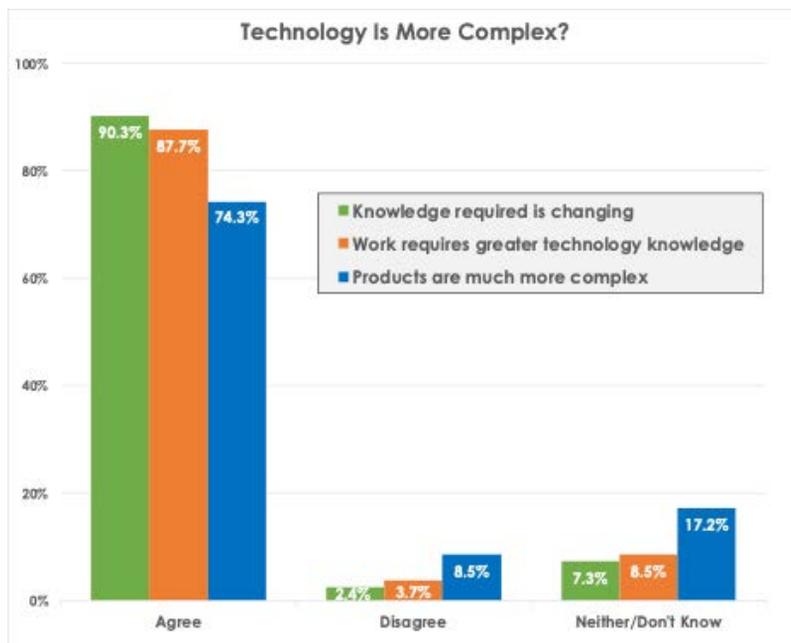


Figure 2

Companies are also focusing on revising and reaffirming internal service operational processes. This focus intensified due to Covid-19 because companies need to make sure that both their employees and their customers remained safe during service delivery. Well defined service processes are intended to ensure that service is always delivered consistently, correctly, and completely, whether the person providing that service is a direct employee or by an independent contractor. Indeed, nearly 40% of executives responding to the Service Leaders' Agenda Survey say service operations and processes are important focus areas in 2021.

# SUMMARY

The Service Council continues to track major trends in Field Service. Among them is the propensity to deploy on-demand workers as an integral part of service operations. In other words, to operate a blended service workforce comprised of both direct W2 employees and qualified on-demand workers. The benefits of doing so are many, some of which we discussed in this paper. Others may include:

- **Engaging on-demand workers to do more routine work**, like installations, upgrades, etc., frees the direct employees to focus on work they enjoy and find most rewarding.
- **Service cost reduction and revenue enhancement**, by diverting less costly service events to on-demand workers, allowing direct employees to focus on high revenue service activities.
- **The ability to supplement multi-technician service activities and/or long-term projects with on-demand workers**, releasing direct employees who would otherwise be occupied with these activities to work on other important service events.

These and other benefits may be obvious to many service executives already. For example, nearly four in ten service executives who have participated in the 2021 Service Leaders' Agenda Survey say they either currently use or are seriously considering employing a blended field service workforce to provide service to their customers.

Service Council endorses this effort, with these cautions

- **On-demand workers must have** appropriate experience, expertise and technical skills.
- **They must be thoroughly vetted** to ensure their compatibility and suitability for both the company engaging them and the customers they will serve.

On-demand workers who are professional, carefully vetted, and adequately trained also enable a "Technician Agnostic" ecosystem. That is, a service environment where service professionalism, quality, and reliability are always consistent, no matter which technician delivers the service.

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### *About the author*

Michael Israel is Service Council's COO. Michael has worked in customer and field service for more than 40 years. He spent 17 years in his early career managing both domestic and international field service operations, including 12 years with IBM's Field Engineering organization. Over the past three decades he has held management and executive roles with major providers of CRM and Field Service software applications, including tenures with IFS, Oracle, and SAP.

His broad experience includes marketing, selling, supporting, and implementing CRM and Field Service software applications. Michael also served as a Field Service analyst for both Aberdeen Group and Technology Services Industry Association (TSIA).

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