

CASE STUDY : Norwegian Cruise Lines

Communicating for Quality Customer Service

Employees on the “front line” who interact with customers on a regular basis play a powerful role in shaping a company’s reputation in the minds of its customers. An employee’s ability to effectively and appropriately communicate with customers is a critical element that makes one company’s customer service best-in-class and another’s second-rate. For Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL), operated by NCL Corporation Ltd., providing an excellent customer experience is a priority.

To ensure a positive customer experience, recruiting top-notch staff with the right language skills is crucial. Accurately judging language skills – particularly speaking – is hard for recruiters, especially when applicant volumes are high. NCL implemented the Versant English Test to screen spoken language skills and enable them to support their goals for superior customer satisfaction.

Need: Norwegian Cruise Line Discovers New Recruitment Requirement

As a leading and innovative global cruise company, excellent customer service is paramount for NCL. To achieve this goal, it is important for employees to have the ability to communicate clearly and effectively with passengers. Since the majority of NCL’s customers are American, they expect to communicate in English. However, fifteen percent of customer complaints were related to employees who did not understand the needs of guests because of a language barrier.

NCL recognized that the level of English proficiency of its staff was a key factor impacting the overall quality of their customer service. The HR team realized the employees they recruit must have an appropriate level of English proficiency to manage guests’ needs and provide superior service.



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– Miriam Torres, Director of Recruiting
for Norwegian Cruise Lines

Challenge: Quickly and Accurately Test Applicant English Language Skills

NCL recruits worldwide on an ongoing basis, often through 40 job fairs throughout the year. With the introduction of new ships to the fleet, thousands of positions need to be filled quickly, in addition to managing new hires to maintain service on existing ships. In a given week, NCL interviews approximately 300 candidates – in person, over the telephone, and online – requiring efficient hiring tools to identify talent who have the proper skill set for the available positions and personality to fit into the company culture.

In light of the new English speaking skills requirement, NCL recruiters had to make sure applicants could be screened for English fluency during the hiring process. This presented a unique challenge for NCL – to find a state-of-the-art English proficiency assessment tool that complemented but did not interfere with the current recruiting process. The added step of evaluating applicants' spoken English skills needed to be easy for recruiting staff to administer. The tool also needed to provide fast, automated results, while consistently and accurately processing applicants from many countries in person, over the phone or online.

Solution: Integrate Leading Language Assessment Tool into Recruiting Process

NCL recruiting found a solution in the Versant™ English Test – a quick, objective and accurate assessment of English speaking skills – powered by the patented Ordinate® testing system. The tool is based on years of research in speech processing, statistical modeling, linguistics, and testing theory. Versant evaluates an individual's ability to understand spoken language on everyday topics and to respond appropriately at a native-like conversational pace. The test score is based on the content used in the spoken responses, as well as the pace, fluency, and pronunciation of those

words in phrases and sentences.

The Versant test fit NCL's business needs because it can be conducted over the telephone in 10-15 minutes with results provided directly to the recruiter online within minutes after an applicant completes the test. The results enabled NCL recruiters to objectively evaluate the critical success factors for customer service satisfaction that depend on language, namely:

- the applicant's ability to accurately understand customers.
- the applicant's ability to respond and communicate effectively with customers.

By using Versant, the recruiting team was also able to apply spoken language standards consistently across all recruiting locations and roles.

Results: Increased Customer Satisfaction and Retention Rates

With Versant, NCL recruiters have been able to administer the tests to their geographically dispersed applicants efficiently and have improved customer service across the board. Versant has been used for hiring and screening more than 1,300 applicants since its implementation, and employee retention has increased 20 percent due to hiring staff with the right language skills.

One year after implementing the Versant test as part of their recruiting process, NCL no longer receives complaints from guests about the staff's ability to communicate in English. "We received complaints in the past, but since implementing the English assessment test, we haven't received any," said Miriam Torres, Director of Recruiting at NCL. "Versant was the right solution for us to ensure we hire high-quality applicants, especially as we introduce new cruise ships and continue to hire new staff."



Contact Us

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