Optimizing workforce demand:

A seasonal staffing guide

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01. What is seasonal staffing?

Not all times of the year are created equal regarding staffing for certain industries. While any industry can have season-specific staff needs, hospitality, and retail sectors historically thrive during specific timeframes of the year and hire additional staff best to serve the anticipated influx of guests and customers.

Seasonal employees are essential for keeping retail stores running smoothly during their busiest months, filling schedules, and providing extra hands. Most seasonal retail jobs are created to bridge staffing gaps during peak shopping months, preventing the overworking of current employees. These jobs typically become available around October and November to prepare for the holiday shopping season. In the hospitality sector, seasonal job demand peaks around March for Spring Break, during the summer months, and from November to January for the holiday season.

It's important to schedule appropriately and effectively

With the right processes and technology solutions in place, your organization can identify your seasonal workforce needs early to recruit and hire best-fit talent, deliver an engaging employee experience that inspires workers, boosts productivity, offers a higher quality guest experience, and enhances your reputation as an employer of choice while maintaining compliance regulations.

02. Impacts of seasonal staff fluctuations on workforce demand

Seasonal fluctuations can affect organizations in multiple ways, such as increased demand during peak seasons or reduced demand during slower periods. For example, retail stores may experience a surge in customer traffic during holiday seasons, while tourism and hospitality industries often face high demand during vacation periods. On the other hand, some industries, like landscaping or construction, may experience reduced demand during winter months.

How often is seasonal staff needed?

Seasonal staffing is needed when organizations experience increased demand due to holidays, special events, or seasonal trends. Searches for seasonal jobs are up 19% in 2023 to their highest level in several years. The frequency and timing of these needs vary by industry:

- **Retail:** Seasonal staffing is commonly required during the holiday shopping season (October to January), back-to-school season (August to September), and other major sales events like Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

- **Hospitality:** This sector sees increased staffing needs during holiday travel periods (November to January), Spring Break (March to April), and the summer vacation months (June to August). 450,000 hospitality-related jobs were posted in January and February of this year, with nearly 200,000 jobs posted in the last 30 days alone. Of these job postings, 37% are advertised as part-time or flexible work.

- **Agriculture:** Seasonal workers are often needed during planting and harvest periods, which vary depending on the crops and region.

- **Tourism:** Locations with seasonal attractions (e.g., ski resorts in winter, beach resorts in summer) require additional staff during their peak tourist seasons.

Overall, the need for seasonal staffing can occur multiple times a year, aligning with industry-specific peak periods and customer demand cycles.

03. Challenges of forecasting seasonal staff

Anticipating the exact demand for products or services during peak seasons can be difficult and lead to several questions about how to hire, when to hire, and who exactly to hire. Several factors come into consideration to prevent overstaffing or increased costs while maintaining quality customer service and reaching sales goals.

Availability and inaccuracy of historical data

Reliable historical data is crucial for accurate forecasting. Inconsistent or incomplete data can hinder the ability to predict staffing requirements effectively. Many schedulers must rely on guesswork as they try to match coverage to demand and avoid over/under staffing and unnecessary overtime, especially during any seasonal fluctuations.

Schedule accuracy

Schedules are also inherently subject to ongoing changes—such as call-offs, leave requests, and shift swaps—which can devour time and productivity when handled manually and can easily get lost in emails or sticky notes. Many schedules are posted on the office wall or continually sent via email, which can be frustrating to employees and cause avoidable scheduling mix-ups. Retail and food service workers' schedules are also often changed at the last minute, with 14% reporting at least one canceled shift in the last month and 70% reporting at least one change to the timing of one of their shifts in the past month.

Inefficient, manual business processes and communication

Manual processes and unspecialized software cannot meet the demands of highly fluid schedules, time collection across diverse and spread-out workforces, or complex payroll and compliance rules. Whereas many schedules are posted on the office wall or continually sent via email, employees expect 24/7 access to schedules and real-time shift updates. Other business processes, such as managing exceptions (like tardies and missed punches) and time off requests can be bogged down in handwritten sticky notes or texts and emails. All together, these processes increase the risk of errors and attrition while devouring time and productivity.

Employee retention and satisfaction

Retailers and hospitality experience high rates of turnover, exacerbating struggles to keep shifts reliably and properly staffed. 76% of retail workers who quit their job from April 2020 to April 2022 did not return to the consumer/retail industry or the workforce. Retail and food service workers have a six-month turnover rate of 28 percent. Employee satisfaction directly impacts how staff treat and serve customers. Common attrition drivers include extremely short (1-2 week max) visibility into schedules (Workers who had more than two weeks' notice of their schedule had a nearly 75% likelihood of experiencing happiness. But workers who had two days' notice of their schedule or less had a 65% probability of being happy); being scheduled while unavailable; not having continual access to schedules and time off requests, particularly via mobile; perceptions of favoritism in shift scheduling and pickup opportunities; inflexibility in schedules or bottlenecked shift swap processes; incorrect pay; and improperly staffed shifts that cause overwhelm, burnout, and upset customers due to poor service.

Maintaining compliance

Organizations need to continually monitor and stay compliant with labor laws such as meal breaks, minimum wage, and overtime, and this can be tricky when bringing in employees just for the season. Temporary and part-time employment follow FLSA guidelines similar to non-exempt employees.

- **Retail**— hours worked and deductions per FLSA, retail is in the top 5 for the highest number of Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) violations by industry. The total cost of violations in this industry since 1984 is $202 million—equivalent to $10,113 for each employer prosecuted harvest periods, which vary depending on the crops and region.

- **Hotel**–specific non-compliance problems to industry

Compliance regulations don't just apply to year-round employees. Seasonal workers are subject to many of the same rules, although there are some exceptions. For example, employees who work 120 days or fewer in a year are not counted as employees when determining whether a company is a large (50 or more employees on average) employer. This classification has significant consequences for regulations such as the Family and Medical Leave Act.

04. Demand forecasting for seasonal staffing needs

Planning the workforce effectively to align with anticipated demand and helping to avoid overstaffing or understaffing during peak and off-peak periods is critical for organizations to make informed decisions about staffing, production, and other operational aspects.

What is demand forecasting?

Demand forecasting predicts how busy an organization will be at any future moment. In addition to calculating seasonal changes, supplier forecasts, and historical sales trends, managers can use demand estimates to schedule the optimal number of employees to avoid understaffing during peak periods or overstaffing slow ones. Depending on industry needs, the more data you can apply to the problem, the better your demand forecasts will be.

Leveraging demanding forecasting to plan for seasonal staff needs

Although not limited to, here are a few considerations when utilizing demanding forecasting for your organization's seasonal staffing needs:

- **Use technology solutions to take the guesswork out of staffing**
  Implement automated time and attendance tracking solutions with digital employee scheduling solutions to provide real-time visibility into staffing levels, enable efficient shift planning, and ensure compliance with labor regulations.

- **Use data-driven decision making**
  Analyze workforce analytics and historical data to make informed decisions about what to expect for the demand of seasonal staff.

- **Offer employee self-service options**
  Offer standout flexibility and empowerment with self-service, configured shift trading, and 24/7 access to schedules and leave requests. This improves communication, increases employee engagement, and provides greater flexibility in managing workforce preferences during peak seasons.

05. Automate employee scheduling with TCP Software

When using manual processes or unspecialized software, the process of translating anticipated demand into viable schedules is also inefficient, time-consuming, and error-prone. That's why TCP offers configurable **employee scheduling software** that maximizes an organization's bottom line by improving accuracy, efficiency, compliance, and the employee experience. With powerful tools that take the guesswork out of seasonal demand scheduling, TCP's solutions help organizations avoid costly scheduling errors, mitigate risk through automation and conflict management, and automate schedule creation and communication while offering standout flexibility, transparency, and longer-range visibility into shifts.

AI-powered forecasting

TCP's employee scheduling solution, **Humanity**, offers a **Demand Scheduler** that uses AI-powered forecasting based on your business metrics to take the guesswork out of just-right staffing coverage, so you can control costs, maximize profit, improve employee experiences, and save time. Powered by AI, Humanity's Demand Scheduler uses a company's specific business metrics—such as sales per hour for retail or hourly foot traffic in hospitality—to predict anticipated demand. By applying these metrics and defining staffing rules, Humanity calculates the staffing requirement based on the forecast, so schedulers know exactly how to staff across roles and locations. Then, schedulers can use Demand Scheduler's Auto-Build tool to generate schedules aligned to forecasted demand with a few clicks.

Let Humanity analyze the data to predict future demand and determine the right staffing mix during seasonal time frames. Know exactly how to staff by creating or loading your forecast or letting Humanity forecast for you, based on your staffing rules and historic demand data. Set scheduling rules and load past demand data to inform the forecast and prepare for future seasonal demand.

Shift planning

[Humanity's ShiftPlanning tool](#) turns cumbersome spreadsheets and manual processes into living schedules, so organizations can focus on their team and provide the utmost customer service and experience.

- **Automated communications**
  Automated employee notifications for published schedules, shift reminders, shift updates, open shifts for pickup

- **Open shifts and self-scheduling**
  Create open shifts and enable employees to choose the dates that they want to work, or use open shifts to quickly fill call-offs with available and qualified staff

By creating interactive schedules matched to unique shifts and rotations and automating shift updates and reminders, organizations can simplify administrative tasks, enhance collaboration, and provide real-time visibility into workforce data.

Mobile app

TCP's [top-rated employee scheduling app](#) ensures staff have visibility into their schedule and offers retention-boosting options for shift trading and pickups. It supports better work–life balance for employees, plus major efficiencies for managers as they fill open shifts.

- **24/7 access**
  Enable employees to request time off, release shifts, adjust their availability, and view the latest schedule with access across devices

- **Shift trading**
  Set predefined rules and enable shift trading for employees and enable employees to pick up full or partial shifts with a simple tap, a retention-boosting self-service option critical for seasonal staff to potentially come back

Maintain compliance

Humanity's automated scheduling rules simplify adherence across labor laws (including those that apply to temporary staff and minors), internal policies, regulations, and collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) to improve compliance and bring peace of mind to schedulers. Recall that temporary and part-time employment follow specific FLSA guidelines, but with Humanity, these rules and regulations can be automated into the scheduling process and pre-determined for schedulers.
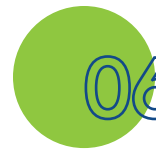
06. Drive success with seasonal demand forecasting

Not only is it difficult to guess the right coverage to meet seasonal needs, but it's also difficult to translate that into a schedule matched to the forecast—while still adhering to compliance and availability constraints. Seasonal shifts can dramatically change your bottom line—but not if you aren't staffed for it.

By understanding the impact of seasonal fluctuations, projecting staffing needs, and leveraging technology and data analytics, organizations can optimize their workforce, maintain productivity, and ensure exceptional customer service during both peak seasons and slower periods.

Embrace the opportunities presented by seasonal changes to take proactive steps to navigate these fluctuations successfully.
With the right strategies and tools in place, you can maximize the potential of your workforce and drive sustainable growth and success for your organization. With solutions for scheduling (including forecasting), and time and attendance you can increase the productivity of your seasonal workforce while simplifying routine tasks for employees and managers alike. With instant visibility into the workforce, managers can respond proactively to seasonal staffing issues and identify performance trends that require immediate action. Modern, unified solutions give your organization a distinct edge in building and optimizing a strong seasonal workforce for upcoming seasonal cycles—this year and in the future.

tcp™

Want to learn more? Let's talk.

866.783.9890 | www.tcpsoftware.com | **Get time right, every time**