



Building a Winning On-Call Schedule for Your Team

INTRODUCTION

On-call scheduling enables 24/7/365 availability of service providers for critical issues like system downtime, technician response for critical systems, and patient care. In this eBook, learn about the importance of on-call schedules for your organization and its customers, how to design an on-call schedule, and multiple ways you can build an on-call scheduling program that will improve customer response and make staff happier.



What Is On-Call Scheduling?

On-call scheduling is helpful for teams, such as healthcare providers, IT professionals responsible for maintaining business uptime, gas and utility field engineers, who serve customers, internal users or patients 24/7/365.

With on-call scheduling, you can create a rotating schedule, assigning staff to after-hours response, ensuring round-the-clock availability.

One of the ways to ensure on-call scheduling works smoothly is with software that lets you define schedules, automate the delivery of incidents directly to the person/team on call, or provide contact information for manual delivery, and ensure that staff are contacted through a range of preferred devices or methods.



The Importance of Effective On-Call Schedules

In North America alone, system downtime costs businesses up to [\\$700 billion](#) per year. This represents high stakes for the IT industry. For other industries, costs may include personal and property harm, and regulations necessitate timely response.

In the healthcare industry, a slow response can mean the difference between life and death.

Without effective on-call scheduling, your risks, and those of your customers, increase. Your workforce is also affected by ineffective scheduling.



Types of On-Call Rotation Schedules

Primary and secondary on-call schedules

This type involves creating a backup schedule in case your primary responder misses a notification. It enables you to define progressive tiers of response that can be used to effectively escalate unanswered notifications.

Follow-the-sun schedules

Useful when teams include members in different time zones. This schedule enables you to match on-call with team locations to ensure 24/7 coverage during the employee's natural workday.

Inverse schedules on an escalation policy

This style alternates which team members are on a primary or secondary schedule. It enables you to swap schedules as needed with the current primary escalating to the secondary.

Bi-weekly schedules

These schedules put team members on call every other week. This schedule can be designed with layers to accommodate different tasks or responsibilities. For example, scheduling one set of responders for weekdays and another for weekends.

Expert that is always on call

This style is useful for high-level incidents that always need to be routed to specific experts. Having an on-call expert should generally be implemented in addition to scheduling with lower-level responders.

5 Factors to Consider When Designing On-Call Schedules



Team size

A team of two demands a very different schedule than a team of 100, even if the general pattern is the same. You should design schedules to maximize off time without sacrificing coverage.



Backups

Scheduling backups becomes easier as your team grows, although you should still be careful not to assign staff too frequently. Working an on-call backup shift is not the same as being off work.



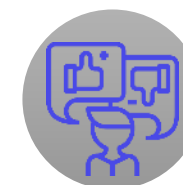
Team locations

If your team is distributed across multiple locations and time zones, you may gain flexibility in scheduling. Leverage this and schedule employees for on-call during their preferred (likely daytime) shifts.



Employee capabilities and service ownership

It's critical to ensure that employees assigned to on-call work have the knowledge and skills to deal with an incident. One solution is to ensure your backup for an on-call shift has complementary abilities.



Employee preferences

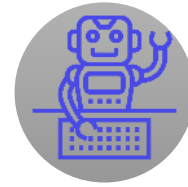
Simple adaptations like scheduling “morning people” or “night owls” to respective on-call shifts can make a big difference. If your staff prefers to do on-call in runs rather than alternating days and there is no functional reason to work otherwise, you should.

4 Important Features When Selecting On-Call Software



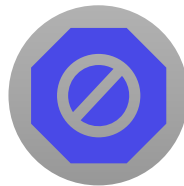
Online access

The software should be accessible online, so everyone is looking at the same, most updated, schedule.



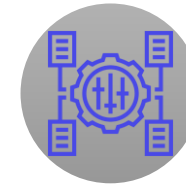
Automation

The software should allow for automated delivery and escalation of incidents to the appropriate on-call team.



Built-in safeguards

The scheduler should come with built-in safeguards to avoid human error, such as empty time slots in the schedule.



Flexibility

The scheduler should be flexible, allowing for changes in shifts and alternate coverage.

Avoiding 8 Common Mistakes of On-Call Scheduling

- 1. Relying too heavily on specific staff:** To prevent burdening your staff, you need to make sure to rotate responsibilities and distribute work as evenly as possible.
- 2. Failing to set up teams:** When determining schedules for on-call shifts, it is important to assign shifts according to teams. Defining teams helps you ensure that on-call staff are correctly notified if an incident occurs.
- 3. Poorly defining escalation policies:** Your escalation policies should clearly define who is responsible for what actions during a response. Clear policies help you prevent responsibility from being avoided and ensure that incidents are not lost during handoff.
- 4. Not establishing time limits:** Make sure that you are defining time limits on notification acknowledgement and, if possible, response actions. If notifications aren't addressed in the given time, you need to ensure that the incident is automatically escalated. **CONT...**

Avoiding 8 Common Mistakes of On-Call Scheduling

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5. Not allowing for flexibility in the schedule: It is important to be able to plan on-call scheduling, however, you also need to be flexible. Last minute emergencies and schedule changes come up and staff sometimes need to swap shifts or ask others for coverage.

6. Ignoring work-life balance: When setting up your scheduling, make sure to talk with your staff about expectations and how to best find balance. If you ignore this need, your staff will be less happy, less productive, and more likely to leave.

7. Lack of transparency or communication: You should ensure that all staff are aware of your on-call schedules, including any relevant changes. Likewise, it needs to be clear how staff can request changes to schedules and under what conditions changes can be accepted.

8. Not leveraging automation: There are on-call scheduling software solutions available that can reduce overhead and ensure your schedules are consistent. Failing to adopt these solutions often results in more manual work and is more likely to lead to scheduling mistakes.

On-Call Scheduling With OnPage

OnPage provides on-call scheduling solutions, including an award-winning **incident alert management platform**.

OnPage's alerting solution provides **persistent, intrusive** audible notifications until addressed on mobile by the assigned on-call recipient.

OnPage eliminates alert fatigue through **high-priority alerting**, easily distinguishable from every other mobile notification. This way, the tasked recipient will always **know the severity** of an alert and the need for an incident's immediate resolution. Further, on-call schedules help distribute the workload evenly among incident teams.



OnPage's Intelligent Alerting Process

Here's how the OnPage process works:

- The system recognizes a predefined event
- The system routes the alert with an intrusive, Alert-Until-Read notification that overrides the silent switch on mobile. There's a low chance of missing this type of alert
- If you miss an Alert-Until-Read notification, it will automatically escalate to another team member
- As a method of redundancy, alerts can be sent via SMS, email and/or phone call





FREE TRIAL



OnPage's award-winning incident alert management system for IT, MSP and healthcare professionals provides the industry's only ALERT-UNTIL-READ notification capabilities, ensuring that critical messages are never missed. OnPage enables organizations to get the most out of their digital investments, so that sensors, monitoring systems, and people have a reliable way to escalate urgent notifications to the right person immediately.

OnPage's escalation, redundancy, and scheduling features make the system infinitely more reliable and secure than emails, text messages, and phone calls. OnPage shrinks resolution time by automating the notification process, reducing human errors and prioritizing critical messages to ensure fast response times.

Whether to minimize IT infrastructure downtime or to reduce the response time of healthcare providers in life and death situations, organizations trust OnPage for all their secure, HIPAA-compliant, critical notifications needs.

For more information, visit www.onpage.com or contact the company at Sales@onpagecorp.com or at (781) 916-0040.