



Harris Paley Streamline Case Documents with Digital Dictation

BACKGROUND

Providing publicly funded Legal Aid to clients across Brighton and East Sussex requires one of the Harris Paley team to be on call 24 hours a day, and all work must be closely documented. Each visit to the police station, how long they have to wait before being allowed to meet with a client, next steps etc all need to be recorded in order to ensure that every defendant is treated fairly and receives adequate legal representation.

OPPORTUNITY

Harris Paley solicitors supplement their hand-written notes with extensive recordings, such as client interviews and dictation, which are then handed over to a secretary for transcription.

For years, the firm relied on analogue tapes for this process. Because its solicitors spend most of their time at court appearances, meeting with clients or gathering information in various other places outside of the office, their recordings sometimes sat in a briefcase for several days until the solicitor had time to physically hand the tapes to a secretary. This not only caused delays in preparing clients' defences but also exposed Harris Paley to the risk of stiff fines by the court if a solicitor failed to provide the required documentation or missed a filing deadline. As the profit margins on legal aid cases are low, such fines can quickly result in a net monetary loss for the firm.

Other frustrations included running out of space on the tape in the middle of a dictation, having tapes break or get lost, and secretaries having to manually search through the full contents of a tape to find the most important or time-sensitive passages. Passing individual analogue cassettes between employees also made the transcription workload - which averages 20 hours or more per week - difficult to balance efficiently among the three secretaries, especially during busy periods or when a certain transcription project became urgent.

Based in Brighton, the UK law firm of Harris Paley is now the third-largest criminal defence practice in the county of Sussex. The practice employs six solicitors and one trainee who are supported by three secretaries.

KEY ISSUES

- How to replace tape-based analogue system
- How to improve productivity and enable solicitors to work remotely with secretaries
- How to increase capacity of dictation files
- How to improve dictation device reliability and robustness
- How to lower costs and increase overall office efficiency



SOLUTION

In 2005, Harris Paley revolutionised these processes by adopting a digital dictation and transcription technology platform from Philips Dictation Systems. Newmans Business Solutions, a Philips implementation partner, helped Harris Paley implement the technology and align it with the firm's specific working practices.

All of the solicitors now have Philips SpeechExec Pro Dictate 7255 software deployed on their desktop computers, and the secretarial staff is using Philips SpeechExec Pro Transcribe 7257 software. Solicitors can either dictate directly into their PC using the Philips SpeechMike equipment or save their recordings on a handheld Philips Digital Pocket Memo device, which uses exchangeable Multi media cards with 10Hrs of recording capacity in standard play or 15hr in long play and a USB cable for downloading data to the SpeechExec Pro software. They can then organise the recorded content, add indexing to denote which passages need to be transcribed urgently, and securely upload the sound files to Harris Paley's network server or send them via e-mail.

As files enter the system, SpeechExec Pro automatically notifies the secretaries so they can start transcribing immediately. They can also freely exchange the files electronically to spread out the workload efficiently. Data encryption ensures that only authorised employees can listen to the recordings, and SpeechExec Pro tracks the progress of each transcription job so that solicitors can tell at a glance when their transcripts are likely to be finished.

RESULTS

Rolling out Philips dictation and transcription tools has enabled Harris Paley to handle a higher volume of cases without increasing its staff. Whereas the firm's secretaries each used to do transcriptions for only one or two specific solicitors, their ability to share the pool of incoming jobs in Philips SpeechExec Pro allows for a more streamlined approach.

Also, when the contents of a certain file requires someone with specific background knowledge or expertise to transcribe it, the Philips system enables a solicitor to route it directly to a particular secretary along with detailed instructions or guidance.

Realigning the transcription workflow has freed more time for secretaries to complete additional projects, including some fee-earning assignments.

CONCLUSION

Harris Paley has gradually expanded its use of Philips SpeechExec Pro as solicitors and secretaries became more familiar with the software's functions and capabilities. The firm credits its Philips system with helping staff members plan their work more intelligently, represent clients more skilfully and increase profit margins on Legal Aid cases.

"In addition to its exceptional flexibility and ease of use, the Philips software has proved absolutely reliable for us," said Mr Harris, Senior Partner at Harris Paley. "Our solicitors can dictate in a hallway or a cab, transmit the file from anywhere there's an Internet connection, and have a transcript in their e-mail inbox by the time they finish their last appointment for the day."

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- Superior sound quality providing quick and accurate transcription
- Document organisation greatly improved
- Better productivity with solicitors having the ability to work remotely with secretaries
- Greater reliability with robust dictation devices and secure digital voice files
- Improved overall efficiency leading to lower costs and greater workflow management

