



Philips Dictation Systems  
*User Case*



# Allan, Chapman & James Complete Digital Upgrade with Dictation Devices

During the late 1990s, Allan, Chapman & James Ltd. (ACJ) was transforming its insurance business into a fully automated and integrated digital environment. Filing cabinets full of policies, claims and client records were gradually replaced by file servers in a back room. The UK-based firm, which employs over 50 people and provides insurance and risk management services to the film, television and media industries, deployed a document imaging system in 1996 to digitise and manage its records. Since then, virtually every piece of client information is created, stored and archived electronically. One business process, however, was left out: dictation and transcription.

## BACKGROUND

Mobile insurance clerks and in-house account executives at ACJ were accustomed to dictating their client correspondence onto audio tapes, for transcription by members of the administrative staff. The danger of this process was that tapes holding critical information – central to the firm’s ongoing customer service – could be misplaced, mislabelled or lost altogether. It also was fraught with inefficiencies.

“We had streamlined all the bits and pieces as far as IT was concerned, but we still had the tapes,” says Les Marshall, financial director of ACJ. “So we needed to go to a networked solution that could also help us level out the peaks and troughs in the transcription process, distributing the workload more evenly among the typists.”

## PROBLEM

The trend in the insurance industry has been to eliminate dictation altogether. Clerks are expected to type all of their own letters and documentation. ACJ, however, rejects that approach, maintaining that excellent typists should be employed to type, among other things, and that skilled insurance clerks should focus on selling, writing and supporting policies. Moreover, to ask salespeople to produce their own correspondence means that letters to clients will undeniably go out with errors.

## KEY ISSUES

- How to fully digitise the document creation process including dictation/transcription
- How to level out the workload of transcriptionists
- Ensure that professional insurance agents concentrate on selling
- To ensure security of dictation

# PHILIPS



“For insurance clerks to spend an hour typing three-page letters is a waste of technically qualified people’s time – it’s absolutely crazy,” Marshall says. “We have typists who can bang them out a hundred times quicker than any of our clerks ever could. The accuracy is better, the layout is better, the quality of the letter is better. But most firms have gone the other way.”

## SOLUTION

ACJ turned to Philips Dictation Systems, a division of Royal Philips Electronics, which happened to have offices close to the firm in Essex. At that time, Philips had been offering standalone dictation systems, but had not yet brought a networked system to market. However, soon afterward ACJ became the first commercial enterprise to implement an enterprise dictation system from Philips – about five years ago – and they haven’t looked back since.

The ACJ field staff first used the Philips SpeechMike dictation device, which had to be connected to their laptop when in use. Today they have more freedom with the portable handheld Philips Digital Pocket Memo. ACJ clerks frequently use the device to record customer meetings, as well as to compose letters or take audio notes in between meetings, whilst the information is still fresh in their mind. At any time, they can download the files to their laptop through a USB connection. Account staff in the office dictate documents directly into their computers using SpeechMikes.

A virtual private network (VPN) is in place for remote network connectivity, and if necessary ACJ could migrate their worker’s homes to broadband for faster access to file servers. Currently, clerks wait until they return to the office to transfer their dictation files to the typist pool, which is a more than adequate solution at present. Because the clerks are rarely in the field for more than two or three consecutive days and correspondence is rarely that urgent, ACJ hasn’t yet invested in high-bandwidth capability for each salesperson’s home or remote location. In the odd circumstance where a letter is truly urgent, the clerk has the option to type up the letter or dictate over the phone to an administrative assistant back at the office.

## CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- Greater transcription flexibility with simplified sharing of work
- Error-free, well presented documentation thanks to professional typists
- More level workloads for all typists
- Easy prioritisation of transcription work

## RESULTS

The Philips system offers dramatic benefits to the transcriptionists. Unlike the old system of analogue dictation onto tape, each dictation is a separate file that is assigned a priority level by the author. When the files are uploaded to the network, they go into a “pool” of dictation files to be transcribed, which guides the typists as they determine which file should be next in the queue.

Instead of one transcriptionist having to wade through a continuous tape containing up to 20 dictated documents — possibly whilst other typists have free time on their hands — the administrative assistants can spread the work among themselves and turn the documents around far more quickly. In addition, the office manager can run reports from the system to gauge how the transcription work has been distributed. This is useful for monitoring the team’s productivity and setting up equitable processes among the staff.

“In general, the typing is much, much more efficient,” Marshall says. “So letters are going out when they should be, and not getting stuck on a tape where clerks lose track of what they’ve done and so on. The workload is much easier to control.”

## CONCLUSION

Because of the efficiencies gained from having skilled people do what they do best, the improved responsiveness due to the advantages of a digital, networked dictation system, and the assurance of consistently error-free, grammatical and neat client correspondence, Allan, Chapman & James is highly satisfied with this solution.

“In the media industry, image is everything. Our clients, whether they are producing a television commercial or running an editing facility, have to be polished and professional when working with their clients. Likewise, the way we present ourselves is important, and the documents we produce are a reflection of our service.”

