



Philips Dictation Systems User Case



Sandwell Council Discovers the Cost Savings of Going Digital

Created as a Metropolitan borough in 1974, Sandwell lies at the heart of England and at the centre of the West Midlands conurbation. It is one of seven metropolitan boroughs in the West Midlands and has a population of around 288,000 people. It is the most densely populated area in the West Midlands region, covering a relatively small area, 8600 hectares, and incorporating six existing towns. These are: Rowley Regis, Oldbury, Wednesbury, Smethwick, West Bromwich and Tipton.

Working within one of five thematic areas; policy and corporate governance has the remit to provide legal services via corporate services to a number of departments and is modelled on a traditional legal practice. It contains a staff consisting of 35 solicitors and fee-earners working in three teams with a central pool of 15 support staff. The practice looks after the legal work for the council in the areas of land development, community services, housing and the environment. Life long local government worker and solicitor, Stewart Snape is the man responsible for making the whole thing work.

PROBLEM

“It all started because we were having trouble with our old hand held analogue dictation machines. We were receiving complaints from users ranging from fee earners who received letters back with gaps in because of poor sound quality to the poor reliability of the machines either through tapes breaking and stretching or just simply breaking.” The situation was being compounded by the lack of spares for the aging units with many broken machines beyond viable repair, which resulted in the department having to replace on average six machines a year that at market pricing meant about £1,200 per year.

APPROACH

Stewart along with a senior partner began the search for a solution. Initial research across the office equipment industry led to a pilot of Philips digital dictation using the Philips SpeechMike™ for input devices for three fee-earners and one support person. Once the staff had become familiar with the equipment a demonstration for the whole department workforce was held. An employee survey followed with the objective to discover the staff's opinions of the new system. The results showed a resounding ‘yes’ in favour of the new system.

KEY ISSUES

- To improve sound quality and reliability of dictation devices
- To implement a system, flexible to the working practices of individuals
- To increase productivity and efficiency of support staff
- To implement a scalable solution, able to grow with the department's workload

PHILIPS



The installation was planned and carried out in just one day, with additional support visits to provide 1:1 training. “Some of the older PCs needed some small upgrades but in general the whole installation went without a hitch”, commented Stewart.

The system is now so central to the operation of the department that training on how to use the Philips dictation equipment is part of the induction process and any user can ask for additional training if required.

RESULTS

The flexibility to cope with different working preferences is a key benefit of the system with some people preferring to use the system like a conventional dictation device, authoring a number of documents in one session to other users who submit dictations more regularly from single pieces of correspondence or statements.

Fee earners who are working on high priority work can author correspondence individually and send it immediately to the support staff for typing. All work is routed to the administrative pool where it is prioritised and distributed. The three departmental teams are supported by two dedicated transcriptionists.

Administrative staff using the transcription management software can see what each recording contains. Apart from seeing how many documents need transcribing they can also see the length of each recording and therefore individuals can manage their time more effectively. The support department has become so efficient that when one person transferred to another department there was no need to replace them. This staff cost saving has saved the council about £14,000 per annum.

CONCLUSION

Increases in the workload are on the cards soon as the department is about to increase the number of fee earners to cope with the growing workload of the department.

“It's not a problem for us,” said Stewart Snape, “The system is very flexible and it can grow with us as we expand. All we need to do is add a PC with the right level of dictation equipment”

Working outside office hours is addressed with Philips Digital Pocket Memos®, which users can request from Stewart. The pool started with two and is set to be doubled as people find it easy to use and work with returning them to the central administrative pool to download into the office system. Like all large corporate networks, there are times when the systems fail, but fee earners can still carry on working by using the portables.

The last word goes to Stewart, “Once people got used to not shouting when recording the biggest benefit has been the reliability and ability to send work more often which has meant most jobs now take a maximum of a day to complete. In the past it was up to two or three days”.

The changes at Sandwell District Council Legal Department are easy to see - happy authors and transcriptionists who no longer have to worry about losing work through poor sound quality and broken machines.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- Digital dictation provides superior sound quality
- Staff costs reduced through natural wastage
- Document turnaround reduced from 3 days to a maximum of 24 hours
- Ability for staff to work outside office hours with portable Digital Pocket Memos

