



Philips Dictation Systems
User Case



Steel & Shamash Ease Transcription Workloads with Digital Dictation

Steel & Shamash is a firm of solicitors specializing in a wide variety of legal advice, from criminal law, legal aid, and mental health, to housing, and children and family law. Each solicitor in the practice advises only in their field of expertise. The company's central London office is just a stone's throw from Waterloo train station. Steel & Shamash employs 20 authors, who are supported by a team of 10 secretaries.

BACKGROUND

Most of the authors work away from the office – often from home or from police stations. As such, portable dictation devices have long been an integral part of the way Steel & Shamash authors go about their daily business. The company is a long-term Philips Dictation Systems customer and, until recently, was using the Philips 500, 700 series plus 381 398 Philips analogue Pocket Memos.

OPPORTUNITY

Practice manager Melissa Butler is responsible for the supervision and management of the solicitors' office.

Part of her role is to monitor the secretarial team's workflow. As any practice manager worth his or her salt knows, the workflow for secretarial teams can ebb and flow – especially when large amounts of transcription are involved.

“When key staff were taken ill, the number of tapes earmarked for urgent transcription quickly began to build up,” she says. “At other times there wasn't quite enough work to go round and workload needed to be re-distributed.”

In addition to workflow issues, the company faced an important logistical challenge. The spacious Steel & Shamash office is arranged over four floors, with the secretarial team situated at the top. Visiting authors were situated on the remaining three floors. Because of the need to physically hand over analogue tapes, secretaries had to run up and down the company staircase in pursuit of their allocated author. In the course of a working week, tapes containing vital client information were sometimes lost or damaged.

Melissa knew a digital solution was the way forward, but kept putting the decision off. “If you're a busy legal practice it's easy to keep using the old technology. You know you want to make the workflow more efficient, but day-to-day problems and the pressing needs of running a business make it easy to put off important technology upgrades,” says Melissa.

KEY ISSUES

- How to seamlessly upgrade from tape-based analogue system to digital dictation solution
- How to improve transcription workflow for secretarial teams and increase office efficiency
- How to enable dictation files to be transferred remotely in a flexible and reliable way





However, a combination of time-wasting, variable productivity from the secretarial team and missed deadlines was beginning to affect the way Steel & Shamash did business. By October 2005 Melissa knew something had to be done. She approached local Philips dealership, Mini-Dicta Machines.

SOLUTION

Disruption is always a fear when changing any business-related technology. Mini-Dicta Machines allayed these concerns by carrying out full product training (dictation and transcription) with both the authors and the secretarial team. The training sessions lasted just one day. "The training was quick and efficient. Ease of use was of particular importance – the new technology has similar functionality to the traditional analogue units so everyone got up-to-speed fairly quickly," Melissa says.

Steel & Shamash decided to move all authors and secretaries from analogue to digital in one go. 21 Digital Pocket Memos (9360 series) complete with docking cradles were dispatched to the authors, while each secretary was equipped with PC-based Philips SpeechExec Pro Transcription Set 7277 software.

Melissa was particularly interested in the workflow and workload management benefits offered by the SpeechExec Pro software, especially the ability to prioritize documents for transcription in order of preference and the prospect of secretaries being able to visualize dictation data, such as length, author name and key words. The SpeechExec Pro Transcription Set 7277 software also offered better value for money, when compared with rival offerings.

BENEFITS

Philips dictation and transcription tools have given Melissa the ability to monitor workloads much more effectively. The job status indication offered by the 7277 transcription software, shows if a dictation is pending, in progress or finished. The practice now churns through more transcription work, without increasing its secretarial headcount.

The secretarial team quickly acclimatized to the 7277 transcription software, with its familiar Windows Outlook-style folder view. And it's not just ease of use and productivity gains that have brought happiness to the top floor of Steel & Shamash's office. "The secretaries are much happier as they no longer have to run up and down four flights of stairs!" says Melissa.

Feedback from the authors includes praise for the Digital Pocket Memo's 4-Position Switch, enabling them to record dictations using just one hand. Support for exchangeable Multimedia/SD cards also guarantees efficient data transfer and unlimited voice recording while on the move, meaning no running out of storage space during important client meetings.

FUTURE

Steel & Shamash intends to build on the teleworking advantages offered by Philips' digital dictation technology. The Digital Pocket Memos have given the authors the freedom to work when and where it suits them best, so that location is no longer an issue. Dictations are emailed to the secretarial team from home, police stations and courtrooms.

"Our authors are always on the move so don't often have time to go to the office," says Melissa. "In the old analogue days, they had no alternative – they had to come in to hand over their tapes for transcription. Now they use email instead and the work gets turned around much quicker."

Authors aren't the only beneficiaries of teleworking. Melissa is weighing up the possibility of outsourcing transcription secretarial work when cover is required owing to illness or excessive workloads. "In the past we had to employ temps to physically come into the office. Outsourcing the work looks like being quicker and cheaper," Melissa says.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- Fast and seamless upgrade from tape-based analogue system to digital dictation solution
- Improved transcription workflow of secretarial teams through better monitoring and management of dictation workloads
- Increased overall office efficiency with authors and secretaries able to work remotely
- Greater reliability and flexibility of dictation files

