



Stringer Saul Relies on Philips for the Latest Digital Technology

Established just prior to the IT boom of the eighties Stringer Saul is a commercial practice with a bright future as they keep abreast of today's market needs in terms of developing new expertise in diverse fields such as Intellectual Property, IT, the internet, Pharmaceuticals and Biotechnology to handle briefs from the worlds leading innovators.

Driven by staff concerns about equipment reliability and quality they looked to emulate their clients' innovation and move to digital dictation.

PROBLEM

Established dictation users, Stringer Saul set out to look for a solution to growing concerns to the reliability of ageing analogue dictation equipment. One main concern stemmed from regular instances of buttons falling off machines making them inoperable. This meant hiring in machines if spares were not available which added to running costs. A second and increasing concern amongst the secretarial staff was the quality of dictation on tapes, the lack of ability to pool work and deliver a prompt same-day service for a number of established remote workers.

OBJECTIVE

Not one for implementing technology for technology's sake Stringer Saul wanted to consider marrying key elements of the dictation process with the PCs already on employee's desks to maximise any savings in deploying a new digital system. They wanted the solution to take advantage of the latest technology, while capitalising on existing systems. The final solution would also help highlight to the firm's clients its grasp on new trends and working practices. However, it also needed to be acceptable to existing users.

APPROACH

Working with a Philips professional dictation systems supplier, Stringer Saul set about a consultation process through a number of focus groups of key users to determine requirements.

KEY ISSUES

- How to reduce running costs of dictation equipment and improve reliability?
- How to improve information flow to further improve case management quality?
- How to keep pace with industry developments and link dictation to the PCs on everyone's desk?
- How to future proof dictation services?



One critical factor was to preserve existing author and secretary relationships when deciding where dictation would be stored on the company's computer network. Each fee earner's dictation must be automatically saved to their secretary's individual dictation folder, meaning the secretary can see immediately how many "tapes" they have to transcribe and from which of their fee earners. The fee earners can access the same folder to see the status of the work they have dictated. Lastly, the other secretarial staff should easily be able to pick up an absent secretary's work.

From this, Berrys were able to recommend for each of the 28 authors, the Philips SpeechMike Executive Dictation kit and for the 13 secretaries the Philips SpeechMike Executive Transcription kit. The Dictation kit includes a SpeechMike 6274 (USB), an all-in-one trackball, microphone and speaker as the input device and dictation software for recording and editing the dictation. For secretarial staff, their PCs were fitted with Philips foot controls for moving through a dictation recording. Secretaries select work from their dedicated repository prioritising and scheduling the work alongside their other duties. Because dictation is now stored digitally the secretaries no longer have to wait for tapes to arrive on the desk making them more efficient and able to balance their workloads better.

Stringer Saul also has a small population of remote home workers who have also switched to digital dictation submitting recordings via email and now get real benefit from being able to get work done in the same working day rather than the next having sent the tape in via the post. To provide a portable solution to match the old analogue handheld machines Stringer Saul has fitted all laptops with the SpeechMike Executive and is evaluating the Philips Digital Pocket Memo (9300), which uses industry standard SmartMedia cards to record on.

Installation and company wide rollout took place over a two-week period outside normal office hours, which prevented any loss of productivity. User training was carried over the same period with Berrys staff on hand to provide one to one advice in the early days with many users starting to use the system prior to hand over.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- Reduced repair costs to zero
- Efficiency gains: flexible prioritising and work balance.
- Increased productivity: work throughput increased freeing staff to take on additional tasks
- Rapid implementation and usability
- User-friendliness and high acceptance.
- Easy to administer and support.

RESULTS

Stringer Saul now has a state-of-the-art digital dictation system. Its 41 users find the system easy to use and helpful in managing their workloads efficiently. Secretaries no longer have to wait for an author's tape to arrive at 4 o'clock with letters that need to get into the post that night.

CONCLUSION

Choosing Philips has allowed Stringer Saul to implement the new system without serious interruption to business. The new equipment has immediately delivered positive results and has led to a direct improvement in productivity and efficiency.

From an internal review of staff, Stringer Saul has found the secretarial staff are much happier, they have more control over their workload, easier sharing of work and superior sound quality. The remote users are also extremely pleased with the fast response from the new system.

"As a law firm that acts for clients working at the leading edge of health sciences and IT, we have to keep pace with their working practices. E-mail has reduced the response times that our clients expect and so we need a dictation system that enables us to meet these expectations. Digital dictation gives our solicitors ease of editing and changing work, work sharing by secretaries and facilitates dictation from remote locations," commented Allistair Booth, Partner at Stringer Saul.

