



ThamesNet improves call handling for 8 London NHS Trusts

The Telephonetics VIP ContactPortal[®] has been implemented by ThamesNet for 8 London NHS Trusts in order to streamline call handling and improve efficiency. ThamesNet, based at Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust, is the network service provider for a number of NHS Trusts and associated research and teaching establishments in Central and West London with a number of sites in Surrey.

Although each trust has its own telecoms department, all strategic telecoms decisions are made at ThamesNet which hosts a centralised switchboard service for all trusts. This network serves over 14,000 extensions covering 65 different locations. The switchboard answers up to 16,000 calls a day of which about 46% originate from within the network.



The Issues

One of the key responsibilities of ThamesNet is to ensure the efficient running of the trusts' switchboard services. ThamesNet was facing a number of telecommunications issues due to the organisational complexity of each trust and the high call volumes received by the central switchboard.

It was becoming increasingly expensive to staff the centralised switchboard, with additional funding needed for hiring and training new staff, providing cover for absent staff and paying remaining staff overtime for extra shifts. These issues needed to be addressed as it was hoped that telecommunications would continue to be a major contributor to cost improvement programmes at the trusts.

There was also a demand for overall service improvements. Previously if a person called the trust they would

automatically be put in a queue regardless of whether they knew the name of the person or department they wished to speak to. This was time consuming for both the callers and the operators. There was also concern that

The system is so chatty that the caller may easily be tempted to ask irrelevant questions!



the level of service received by callers varied greatly depending on the skill and knowledge of the individual operator.

The flow of incoming calls to the centralised switchboard at Charing Cross can vary during a month from 9,663 to 13,646 a day. Historically, this meant it was often difficult to accurately forecast the operator cover required for a shift, especially as the operators have to undertake other administrative duties as well as answering calls. The switchboard serves 2 major incident-receiving hospitals, so not having adequate operator coverage could mean that the switchboard would have found it hard to cope in the event of an emergency.

Internal calls contributed to the high volumes received by the switchboard. Staff often resorted to calling an operator for telephone and pager connections instead of relying on the paper based internal directories which were difficult and expensive to maintain with up to date information.

The Solution

ThamesNet wanted to improve the quality of service provided by the

switchboard while simultaneously reducing expenditure. ThamesNet was impressed by the ContactPortal[®] system installed at Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust by Telephonetics VIP in 2002. The ContactPortal[®] is a virtual operator that connects a caller to their required destination simply by saying the name of the person, department or ward they wish to speak to.

Any application employed to improve the switchboard had to be able to cope with the large-scale requirements of the numerous trusts. Unrivalled experience from Telephonetics VIP in deploying public facing systems for companies including the BBC and Odeon, ensured any deployment would be as smooth as possible, which is essential in a hospital environment where quality of communication can be a matter of life or death.



Telephonetics VIP is a leading provider of hosted and customer premises speech recognition and voice automation solutions. From voice diallers that automate the operator function and deliver hands-free mobility, to MovieLINE[®], our cinema information and booking system, we have consistently demonstrated our ability to deploy market tailored speech solutions into very demanding environments,

delivering real business benefits to our customers. Our solutions for self-service, call steering, mobility, outbound messaging and business continuity deliver all the potential that speech has to offer.

Telephonetics VIP – making sound business sense for over 13 years for public sector and corporate clients including Global 1,000 customers.

For further information,
contact us today on
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and say "sales"

▶ Also key to ThamesNet choosing the ContactPortal[®] was the fact that it enables paging by voice. The solution handles all internal calls for the trusts and in addition answers external callers at the Hammersmith, Chelsea & Westminster and Charing Cross hospitals. The ContactPortal[®] has multiple interfaces which means external calls are always answered with a site specific greeting for each trust.

The Benefits

The ContactPortal[®] is now taking 50% of calls to the switchboard thus significantly reducing the required number of operators. It also frees up the operators to concentrate on other administrative duties and deal with more complex queries where their knowledge of the hospitals and procedures is invaluable.

Communication within the multiple trusts has improved as staff can now contact each other easily, by simply picking up the phone and saying the name of the person or department they wish to speak to. This is especially useful for DECT users and users on wards where telephone directories may not be easily accessible.

Paging by voice enables internal staff to page other users simply by saying their name. This is not only much more efficient for the individual, reducing the time taken to page, but greatly reduces the call load on the switchboard operators.

Telephonetics VIP has also developed a MeetMe paging facility that will enable external callers to directly page hospital employees without the need for switchboard operator assistance.



We also project a significant saving by reducing cover for staff absences and from a reduction in overtime costs.



The paged party will be able to screen the page, enabling them to prioritise important calls. The solution will enable a bridge between external and internal pager systems when the page is accepted.

Telephonetics VIP strive to facilitate ongoing savings in operational costs for customers through the implementation of its speech solutions. Through deploying the ContactPortal[®] solution, ThamesNet will save £200,000 per annum.

Conclusion

Telephonetics VIP are continuing to work with ThamesNet to improve the trusts' communications through new developments that will not only be beneficial to ThamesNet but replicable across all NHS Trusts.

Derek Hodgson, Head of Telecommunications, ThamesNet enthused:

"As a result of the implementation of the ContactPortal[®] we have been able to reduce the number of telephone operators we employ by 43%. This provides an annual saving of £164k, but of course, excludes the additional benefits that the implementation of speech recognition has brought to the network. Most staff don't look at the online directory anymore which says a lot!"

He continues, 'We also project a significant saving by reducing cover for staff absences and from a reduction in overtime costs. Patient and staff response to the solution has on the whole been very positive, with one caller even stating,

"The system is so chatty that the caller may easily be tempted to ask irrelevant questions!".'

