



# Automation improves patient access, telephone communications and increases productivity for Northern Devon Healthcare Trust.

**The Telephonetics VIP ContactPortal was implemented by Northern Devon Healthcare Trust to improve the speed and patient service of call answering from the switchboard and avoid the difficulties of recruiting good switchboard staff. The main hospital site is North Devon District Hospital in Barnstaple, plus six other hospitals and resource centres located across Northern Devon. The Trust provides acute hospital services to a population of 165,000 people in North Devon and North East Cornwall.**

## The Issues

Northern Devon Healthcare Trust switchboard answers up to 2,000 calls per day and callers often had to wait up to four minutes for their call to be answered. The Trust was facing problems with recruiting the right people and providing the right number of switchboard staff due to the increased call volumes cover was required 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The central switchboard was becoming increasingly expensive to staff, plus the costs involved with hiring and training new staff, providing absence cover and paying overtime for extra shifts.

The Trust also needed an efficient, flexible voicemail service for their 2,500 staff as they were unable to pick up messages when they were located at another site in the Trust which delayed their response and therefore had a knock on effect on patient treatment.

Internal communications were not aided by the telephone system, it was slow and frustrating to contact another member of staff. The paper directory became out of date very quickly so staff often called the switchboard to transfer to another internal extension. Around 30% of the switchboard calls were from staff within the Trust. This additional use of the switchboard meant both staff and patients were often waiting in a queue for four minutes waiting for a switchboard operator to make a simple transfer or answer a basic enquiry.

North Devon District Hospital's Telephony Service Manager, Gill Buckler, was assigned to address these issues. Ideally, any solutions

implemented would provide management information to enable continued development and improvement. Gill undertook research into the solutions that were available and was attracted to Telephonetics VIP's ContactPortal solution due to the company's specialist experience within the NHS; over 60% of the UK's Acute Trusts use Telephonetics VIP solutions for improved telephone communications. ContactPortal was a neat fit with the Trust's business strategy regarding telephone communications

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to improve the call handling of an increased number of calls and provide a productive and efficient switchboard to patients and staff.

A crucial element to the purchase decision was the overall cost of the solution, encompassing software, hardware, installation, maintenance and training. ContactPortal was seen to be the most cost effective solution available to meet their needs and increase productivity.

## The Solution

### Speech recognition call management

ContactPortal is an advanced call management solution controlled using speech recognition technology. In basic terms, callers simply say the name of the person or department they wish to speak to and a virtual operator connects them.

ContactPortal's sophisticated software would provide Northern Devon Healthcare Trust staff with a high quality, courteous and personalised operator service which is available around the clock.

### Intelligent voicemail messaging

Telephonetics VIP's Messenger+ works alongside ContactPortal to provide a sophisticated voicemail solution, offering instant access and response to messages at any time. Messenger+ enabled Northern Devon Healthcare Trust staff to access and respond quickly to messages at any time, even when they are travelling or working at another site. This would be crucial to Trust-wide communication because users would have constant access to important information in a variety of forms including email, text message and voice recordings.

## Integration

Northern Devon Healthcare Trust decided that the preferred approach would be to initially use ContactPortal to handle internal calls before extending the use to calls from patients and the public, as they felt they would receive a better reaction and acceptance from the public if they tested and fine tuned the prompts prior to a public launch.

Furthermore, the Trust agreed with Telephonetics VIP that it would be wise to roll out the system for a trial in one large department first, so the Facilities Department was chosen. 1,400 extensions were installed for staff to access the ContactPortal. The installation and trial went very smoothly. There were no integration issues with any of



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<sup>®</sup>, 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 has built a large customer base, including 80% of the major UK multiplex cinemas, over 60% of the NHS acute health trusts, more

than 50 local councils and emergency service operations, along with significant financial and legal company representation. Telephonetics VIP – making sound business sense for over 16 years.

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▶ the Trust's existing software or systems and they found the Telephonetics VIP Account Management and Technical Support Teams very helpful during the process. Gill Buckler commented "We were very happy with the support and the knowledge of their staff was invaluable in assisting us to set up our system. We were pleasantly surprised at how user-friendly the ContactPortal solution is which also helped to achieve a straightforward installation and fast adoption of the system by our staff."

#### The Benefits

The introduction saw an immediate decrease in the number of internal calls to the main switchboard, with Trust staff successfully getting through to other members of staff across the hospital and community sites, without having to rely on paper directories or the switchboard.

The service will be extended to external callers as well and ContactPortal is now taking 54% of calls to the switchboard at North Devon Healthcare Trust, thus significantly reducing the strain on the existing operators and eliminating the requirement to recruit and train new staff, addressing a key objective of the project.

The switchboard operators now have more time to spend with patients and the public on the telephone, enabling them to deal with more complex queries where their knowledge is invaluable and the outcome is substantially more beneficial to the caller. The operators are also free from calls for enough time to permit them to concentrate on their other administrative duties.

Communication throughout the Trust and its related sites has improved as staff can now contact each other easily and quickly, by simply picking up the phone and saying the name of the person or department they wish

to speak to. This has made a significant difference to the whole Trust and a paper directory is no longer used at all. ContactPortal is available online for staff to access contact information as well as being able to obtain telephone numbers for other staff members should they need to pass them externally.

Gill Buckler says improved

communications have positively affected productivity, saying "While we have been able to vastly reduce the numbers of calls to the switchboard, communication has significantly improved at the same time. This has had a knock on effect on productivity across all departments and wards as people can be accessed more speedily. Switchboard efficiency has also improved, ContactPortal has ensured that all calls are answered either by the switchboard within one minute, or by ContactPortal after one minute. When calls are answered faster, it generally has a positive impact on the caller's experience as well."

The introduction of an efficient voicemail system was also a key issue and Messenger+ was implemented to handle all messaging intelligently. Northern Devon Healthcare Trust staff are now able to easily retrieve their messages and spend their time effectively in responding to calls, wherever they are, in a way that suits them. Multiple retrieval methods enable users to retrieve messages anywhere, increasing efficiency and productivity. Staff can choose how they retrieve and manage their messages according to their needs using a phone or PC.

"Staff response has been very positive. It is a good value solution to support our switchboard when volume exceeds staff availability"

Trust's requirements develop.

Gill Buckler is delighted with the system. She

#### Conclusion

Northern Devon Healthcare Trust are continuing to work with Telephonetics VIP to improve communications as the solutions are based on a multiple application platform, allowing the solutions to expand as the

comments: "In addition to the voicemail service, improving the speed of answering calls and improving internal communications has eased the strain on recruiting suitable switchboard operators. Staff response to the solutions have been very positive and, all in all, it is a good value solution which supports our switchboard teams when the volume of calls exceeds staff availability."

"Having the flexibility to add extra services to the Telephonetics VIP solution is a great benefit to us as we can continue to improve the speed and efficiency with which calls are handled at the Trust."

#### How ContactPortal Made a Difference

- **Improved patient access** - Staff are more accessible to calls from patients and colleagues
- **Improved staff productivity** - Staff can take calls wherever they are and receive and respond to messages faster, enabling more effective use of time
- **Manages traffic peaks** - Handles routine calls politely and consistently, reducing queue times
- **Single contact number** - Easy to promote and remember
- **Support** - Telephonetics VIP provided initial training plus ongoing maintenance support.



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