



Headset Research Report: The Advantages of Moving to Wireless

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Research Subject:
Brother International
Technical Support
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Brother International Case Study: Technical Support Center

Wireless headsets might be the highest ROI investment you can make. This study indicates how wireless headsets can “set agents free” and increase productivity in technical support centers.

Brother International is the well-known supplier of printers, fax machines, scanners and other office equipment, as well as sewing and embroidery machinery. Brother's Level 1 technical support center in Bartlett, Tennessee, USA, receives calls from customers, dealers and repair shops seeking assistance for the company's products. Agents are trained to offer technical advice, with the goal of helping customers get their equipment working quickly.

Because of the wide variety of models that they support, agents must be able to assist with a large range of products. Scattered around the Bartlett center are hundreds of printers and other pieces of equipment, on agents' desks and around the perimeter of the center. Although they have a good knowledge management system in their desktop applications, agents need to have “hands on” access to the machinery to assist customers. Finding the right button next to the right light - - while on the phone - - is often key to talking the customer through the steps needed to get things working properly.

Management estimated that agents spent between 10% and 30% of their day moving around, locating and inspecting the equipment needed to help their callers. At times, agents had to walk to the other side of the building from where some they sat, so there was a notable distance to be covered by the agents to get to the appropriate machines.

All of the agents in the center used tethered headsets at their workstations. Thus, when they needed to inspect a sample machine, the agents put their customers on hold, removed their corded headsets, and walked to the appropriate sample machine to be able to “match up” with the client on some particular of the machine. After having found the particular item they were looking for, they would then return to their seats, put on their headsets, take the customers off of hold, and resume troubleshooting based on what they had just observed.



Clearly, this state of affairs was not ideal, and caused a drag on agents. It created a situation where



callers were often placed on hold, sometimes more than once, and for a considerable length of time. By introducing wireless headsets, management expected to increase productivity as well as increase morale – hopefully with a minimum of disruption.

As it turned out, they were right on all counts!

Introducing wireless headsets did not pose a major installation challenge. The job was done in less than a day. Morgan, one of the agents, remembers that there was a “buzz” of excitement in the center as the time for the new headsets arrived. The agents were instructed on how to utilize the sets, and got acclimated to using their keypad button to put the headset on mute, instead of clicking the hold button on their headsets, as they had done with the tethered sets. The center was changing its telephony system (ACD, or Automated Call Distributor) at the same time as they implemented the new headsets, but all proceeded smoothly.

The first few days required behavioral modifications, as agents adjusted to the flexibility of the new technology. At first, some of the agents had to remind themselves that they were free to get up from their cubicles without putting customers on hold and removing their headsets. However, within a couple of days, it became second nature for them to respond to a challenging call by standing up and telling the caller they were walking over to a sample of the machine in question, so they could talk through the issue while looking directly at the machine.

Almost as important, the wireless headsets allow agents to more easily talk to supervisors and other colleagues who can help them solve the callers’ issues. Instead of feeling desk-bound, the agents feel free to stand and walk to the person who could answer a question quickly, avoiding the need for costly and irritating holds.

Post-installation interviews indicate the agents love the feeling of not being confined, and find it exciting to be mobile and connected at the same time. Women like the single ear wireless sets, which don’t get tangled with their hair the way the old sets did.



The agents also noted that hold time had been a big problem when they had tethered headsets. It was easy to exceed the recommended hold time with callers while the agents walked around,



which led to deductions from quality scores and performance evaluations. According to one employee, this was the biggest cause of satisfaction and celebration among the agents – and one of the reasons “stress levels were reduced” in the center.

The supervisors were also very pleased with the new headsets. They noted the increased morale among the agents and felt they, as first-line managers, had become more accessible and more useful to their agents. One supervisor, Aliscia, noted that having her team equipped with wireless headsets made it easier to monitor and assist her agents. “I’m now very hands-on with my agents.” She also saw the difference in Quality Assurance scoring and a reduction in calls transferred to supervisors. She said the happiness of the agents spilled over into the quality of their service to customers, which was very evident in the calls she monitored.

Metrics that Moved

When agents moved from tethered to wireless headsets, average talk time declined from an average of 19.2 minutes to 14.2 minutes, a 25.9% improvement. In addition, after-call work time declined a remarkable 58%, from an average of one third of a minute to less than half that.

This meant that there was an average savings of approximately 5.2 minutes per call, or an improvement of approximately 26%. Using their cost per call data (average of \$6.63), this improvement equals \$1.72 per call. This results in an extraordinarily quick payback period, and should lead to a reduction in head count needs over time, with no increase in wait times or agent stress.

The high-level calculations are as follows:

Talk +	
Before Wireless	19.5 minutes
After Wireless	14.4 minutes
Savings in percent	26.2%
Savings per Call	\$1.72

Headset Cost	\$250
Hypothetical Payback in	145 calls



The metric with the most striking improvement from moving to wireless was Calls Transferred in Percent. The improvement was 63% overall, from 21.5% to only 8%. Clearly this was because agents could walk to their supervisor or subject matter expert to get direct input, instead of having to transfer the call. If we suppose that a transferred call adds about 50% to the overall time for the call, then the savings that flowed from this improvement can be computed as follows:

Transfers	
Before Wireless	26,000 calls
After Wireless	9,674 calls
Delta Savings	16,326 calls
50% of Cost Per Call	\$3.32
Estimate Savings	\$54,119
First Year Estimated ROI	1,353%

Just as striking was some of the feedback from agents. Survey questions were asked to the agents both before and after the introduction of headsets. The percentage of agents who responded that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the comfort of their headsets increased by 43% overall, from 56.8% to 100%! Call center managers know that ergonomics are of high importance in a contact center. While exact calculation of impact on key metrics is not possible, experience shows that positive ergonomics can help metrics such as adherence, attendance and turnover.

In a telling result, 100% of the agents said they agreed or strongly agreed that their headsets helped to optimize their performance, which is a positive indication of perceived impact on productivity.

In conclusion, by moving from tethered headsets to wireless, this office equipment technical support center experienced multiple benefits, which were shown both in terms of measurable financial savings and in terms of agent satisfaction. From the CFO to the front-line agent, everyone was a winner - - especially the customers.

