THE BACKGROUND

In common with other Police services, Northamptonshire Police Force Communications Centre has an ongoing need to recruit and train call handlers. The training is provided in a training centre by experienced trainers, during which the trainees are gradually up-skilled in the various aspects of this demanding job. Eventually, when they have shown themselves ready to take live calls from the public, the trainees move out of the training area and onto the main Communications Centre floor.

Formerly, to ensure that the service to the public was never compromised, each trainee was put under the wing of an experienced call handler. These mentors would temporarily cease to fulfil their normal role in the Communications Centre and devote their time to guiding the trainees through all their activities, and were always on hand to take over a call, should trainees find themselves out of their depths.

At the end of this induction, which normally took around six months, the call handler was considered fully fledged and capable of taking the majority of calls without assistance.

However, because this process was time consuming and involved the use of many experienced call handlers, it was very expensive. Moreover, since the experienced call handlers had different strengths and weaknesses, the mentoring that the trainees received also lacked consistency.

IN THE TRAINING CENTRE

In 2004 an 8 position SmartCC system was installed in the training room. This provided the infrastructure to broadcast the trainer’s screen and audio to the trainees, and to monitor each individual trainee’s screen as well as telephone conversation in real time.

The system proved to be very successful. Its use enabled the trainees to be accelerated through their classroom training and be ready to take live calls in the Communications Centre in a much shorter timescale. The effectiveness of SmartCC also allowed a reduction in the number of full time tutors and the combination of these benefits significantly reduced the cost of initial training.

CASE STUDY – NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE

“Coaching in the moment” with SmartCC brings quality and productivity benefits at Northamptonshire Police

IN THE COMMUNICATIONS CENTRE

With the experience gained from the use of SmartCC in the training room, it was decided to roll the system out into the 16 position area of the Communications Centre floor where the new call handlers are mentored.

In this environment SmartCC provides call handlers with a “panic button”. If they get into difficulty while on a call, pressing the button alerts the coach to that fact. The coach can then use the system to monitor the call handler’s computer screen and conversation in real time, and to provide discreet guidance by “whispering” in the call handler’s ear without the caller being aware. This delivers the most relevant coaching at exactly the time it is needed – coaching in the moment. The use of this facility has been shown to have a significant beneficial impact on the learning curve of call handlers.
Philly Hewlett, FCC Training Manager, confirms: “The simplicity of the SmartCC technology, coupled with the human touch provided by our experienced call handlers, truly enables mentors to coach in the moment”.

Because SmartCC permits one experienced call handler to mentor an entire pod, the number of people taken away from their main duties has been reduced by an order of magnitude. Moreover, by choosing the most able mentors, the novice call handlers obtain a consistent message from the best staff. This, coupled with the real time, direct coaching that use of SmartCC enables, has allowed the trainees to become much more effective, much more quickly.

Philly Hewlett adds: “Not only does the SmartCC equipment allow us to coach reactively, to help solve a trainee’s issue as it arises, but we are also able to use it proactively when, for instance, we have identified a particular development need. We then can schedule the people we want to train to use the SmartCC pod on a rota, and easily coach them all.”

Using SmartCC both during initial training and during the early stages of live call taking has enabled trainees at Northamptonshire Police Force Communications Centre to make a contribution to service much earlier and helps them to start ‘making the difference’.

ABOUT NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE

Northamptonshire Police provides the local policing services to the people of Northamptonshire.

Their Force Communications Centre, based at the Force Headquarters at Wootton Hall, receives over 1 million calls a year. More than 120,000 of these are emergency 999 calls, requiring immediate police attention. The Communications Centre employs more than 200 staff.

Northamptonshire Police pride themselves in “Making the difference”. This aim is deliberately aspirational and a means of encouraging continuous improvement in the service they provide. It is a thread running through everything they do, helping them to focus on what they have to deliver and how they will deliver it. It supports their drive to secure and maintain public confidence through a professional policing service fit for the 21st century.

CYBERTECH UK

CyberTech UK is at the forefront of the voice recording industry and has specialised in the provision of quality management and performance improvement solutions to contact centres, financial institutions, public safety operations and government organisations for over two decades. Its consolidated suite of tools enables its client organisations to manage, monitor, assess, analyse and improve the quality of their customer interactions for maximising customer and employee satisfaction and retention. CyberTech UK supports over 1,000 customers in the UK and Ireland, and is an integral part of the CyberTech International group of companies, supporting customers worldwide.