

CCMA 2nd Quarter Case Study 2008 - Polaris - 2007
Australian Technology Show Case Winners - Soundshield 3G



**CCMA CASE STUDY SECOND
QUARTER 2008**

History

Established in 1981 by Managing Directors, Wayne Guest and Trevor Guest, **Polaris Communications** was driven from the outset by innovation, pioneering the use of lightweight headsets in Australia, and selling the first model soon after in 1981.

Headquartered in Melbourne, 30 people are employed nationally and formal partnership relationships with distributors and resellers both nationally and internationally are long standing. Polaris Communications is the leader in supply and manufacture of Acoustic Shock Protection devices in Australia and is in partnership with the federally owned Australian Hearing organisation for a collaborative R&D program covering improvements to telephone headset technology and overall hearing health.

With all the telephony peripheral equipment Polaris provides, the Soundshield particularly has grown in capability and will continue to evolve in the future. A long standing excellent record in facilities management of telecommunications equipment is substantially supported with an exclusive supply contract with the Telstra Corporation for the provision of a fully managed, end-to-end recovery, refurbishment, repair, warehousing and delivery program for Centrelink nationwide. As an exclusive contractor to Telstra Corporation for the supply and service of headset equipment and an install base of approximately 20,000 headsets across Telstra

Corporation, Polaris Communications supply 45 percent of the Contact Centre market in Australia.

Situation

An escalating problem among headset users is the increasing frequency of Acoustic Shock incidents, when loud or high pitched noises (acoustic shrieks) unexpectedly reach headset users through a telephone line.

The aim when developing Soundshield was to develop a technology that uses Digital Signal processing to regulate the maximum levels of sound that can get through to telephone headset users, and immediately recognise and destroy two simultaneous acoustic shrieks. Operating between the headset and handset, risks of injury from loud, distressing and potentially damaging shrieks are eliminated, reducing them to barely audible 'pips'.

The National Acoustic Laboratories (NAL) is a division of Australian Hearing, and a government funded research facility into hearing aid innovations. NAL have researched the problem of Acoustic Shock extensively, and have developed the software that runs the Soundshield product. The Cochlear Research Centre (CRC), also collaborators in the development of the Bionic Ear, and have worked closely with NAL in the software development.

Polaris Communications is the only headset manufacturer in Australia and the only headset manufacturer globally, that specialises in acoustic safety and comfort in contact centres in the industry. In 2001 Soundshield, a world first Acoustic Shock protection device, manufactured by Polaris Communications revolutionised the contact centre market. More recently the new range of Silvertongue headsets and amplifiers has again raised the bar on contact centre equipment.

Top 5 Challenges

1. To understand the source and acoustic nature of the sounds that cause an acoustic shock in order that an effective solution may be designed. A great deal of research was needed by qualified experts in the fields of acoustics, telephony and audiology.
2. Find the most commercially viable and sustainable technology to use for the development of the required solution for this relatively small, niche market application.

3. Create awareness and full understanding of the importance and extent of acoustic injury in the call centre workplace. This was a difficult task due to the broad range of symptoms of the injury, the pre-existence of malingering & false or minimal reporting of acoustic injury and apathy from call centre managers and agents alike.

4. To clearly and effectively communicate how the Soundshield eliminates unexpected loud, high pitched noises thus providing essential and complete acoustic safety.

5. To manufacture and implement relatively small numbers of Soundshield devices requiring, by the nature of the problem and solution, customisation to the individual call centre and desktop, and yet be affordable.

Key Results – Achievements

Turning Point - Our turning point was researching and developing Soundshield in response to a growing worldwide issue – Acoustic Shock. This superior world first advanced technology provides Acoustic Safety for office and Contact Centre environments. Soundshield is a world first Acoustic shock protection device, with perfect digital voice clarity, Soundshield can capture and destroy up to 2 dangerous sounds simultaneously, leaving normal intelligible conversation. We knew that we had a world first on our hands and the market take-up to date has exceeded our expectations.

Internal Business Partners - Polaris has developed a strong sales channel with products that have been specifically selected to meet the needs of contact Centre customers and small business users.

With a dedicated sales team, Polaris can deliver extensive support programs including marketing support, product training, merchandising and sales material.

Key Customer Prospects -

- Australian Taxation Office – replace all existing headsets with Soundpro; 3,500 units for immediate rollout and 4,000 to 5,000 coupled with Soundshield Acoustic Protection Device
- Telstra – supplied 18,000 Soundshield units to contact centres nationally

- Centrelink – supplied 5,000 Soundshield units to contact centres nationally
- Telstra, TCNZA & Optus – provision of desktop management and refurbishment programs for a number of their major corporate and government customers.

Investment

With a philosophy based on service, innovation and excellence, Polaris Communications recently invested over \$1.5 million in R&D, and will continue to sponsor the development of new products, cementing its place as a market leader in the telecommunications sector. Sales and Service Contribution - Customer service is what really sets Polaris apart. The Polaris Firstpoint team comprises of experienced sales executives built to handle all enquiries relating to products, pricing, order queries, compatibility, repairs and technical assistance.

External Recognition

2007 Australian Technology Showcase Winner - Soundshield 3G. This award is presented to the most innovative nomination for developing outstanding communications technologies or for developing ICT solutions that make creative use of communications technologies.

Summary

Number One - The only true edge in competition is service without this you are unable to then continue to nurture and develop your new and existing business relationships. Number Two - Define objectives clearly - Your objectives MUST be associated with profitability, with this brings excellence and the pursuit of it should be a passion. Number Three - Communication needs to be the spirit of an organisation. It makes small numbers formidable, makes success available, and is appreciated by all.