



Sergeant Paul Coughlin and his canine partner, Cliff

# County Sheriff's Office

## Carlton, Minnesota

### Philips digital dictation facilitates access to reports and interviews, speeds transcription

By 2007 the old-style recorders were fast becoming obsolete, with models being discontinued and replacement parts impossible to find.

This prompted Sheriff Kelly Lake to direct administrative staff to investigate alternatives, primarily a modern digital system. Ultimately, the department selected the Philips Digital Pocket Memo 9600 – and was amazed at the extensive functionality that was suddenly at its fingertips. Because files were uploaded electronically to the department's server, deputies and investigators had immediate access to vital information instead of having to wait for transcription. Administrative staff found it easy to route work and manage time-sensitive material because all transcriptionists had access to pending work and could easily identify priority files. And the sound quality of the Philips digital dictation system was much superior to the analog units – a benefit to both deputies and transcriptionists.

#### The Challenge

The Carlton County Sheriff's Office serves more than 30,000 people in a region 20 miles west of Duluth, MN. The mostly rural county employs 20 sworn deputies, in addition to Sheriff Lake. Five additional staff members provide administrative support at the jail facility and dispatch communication center.

As is typical with most law enforcement agencies, Carlton County requires deputies to dictate call reports daily. Deputies also record witness interviews, interactions with suspects and other field activities. Carlton County's legacy dictation system was heavily used and had provided staff good functionality for many years. When searching for a replacement, administrators were committed to finding a solution that retained the features and reliability users found most valuable – while enhancing efficiency, productivity and ease of use.

Although Carlton County deputies complete their dictation in the office whenever possible, the nature of their job often requires recording in the field as well. "A lot of time deputies are not in an optimal setting when recording and we get a lot of background noise," says Jane M. Willie, office and system administrator for the department. "When we looked for a new system, we knew we needed technology that offered improved sound quality."

Durability was also vital. "When the deputies are out in the field, they keep the recorders in their pocket everywhere they go," she says. "The units are always getting dropped or banged around – we use them pretty hard."

Carlton County was counting on digital dictation to help eliminate the frustrations inherent to micro cassette tapes.

The Carlton County Sheriff's Office in northeastern Minnesota had managed its dictation for the previous 20 years with a traditional analog system that was "good enough" to meet the needs of deputies and administrative staff. The tape recorders were familiar, easy to use and stood up to the demands of law enforcement fieldwork. But by 2007 the old-style recorders were fast becoming obsolete, with models being discontinued and replacement parts impossible to find.

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# PHILIPS



Sheriff Kelly Lake

“There was always an issue with bad, damaged or lost tapes,” says Willie. “When deputies were out in the field, they felt they needed to insert a brand new tape with every interview to decrease the possibility a tape was damaged or had poor recording quality. They also feared accidentally recording over something else. To compensate, they might carry around five or six tapes at a time.”

Ready access to recordings is likewise critically important for the sheriff's department. “We have certain time constraints for hearings when we have someone in custody,” explains Willie. “In the past we often had problems when we needed a report for a case background. With the old system, the report had to be transcribed before it was available for anyone to hear.”



Philips Digital Pocket Memo 9600  
USB Docking Station 9120

### The Solution

As Carlton County began searching for a replacement dictation system, it called upon Dan Meyer, Regional Manager at Chader Voice Technology (<http://www.chader.com>) in Waite Park, MN, which supplies the sheriff's department with business technology. Meyer presented the department with different options – including the Olympus DS-4000 - and conducted product demonstrations. In the end, Carlton County determined the Philips Digital Pocket Memo 9600 best suited its needs.

“We chose Philips because of its ease of use,” says Willie. “We liked the way the software looked on the screen for the transcriptionist and the recorder was similar to what we had been used to. The design was good and so was the sound quality.” Carlton County purchased 20 of the units for daily use and back-up, as well as the transcription software for the administrative staff.

Carlton County converted to the Philips 9600s in the fall of 2007. In most cases, the transition was easy, particularly among young deputies who are more familiar with digital technology. The intuitive design of the Philips recorder, however, streamlined acceptance for veteran deputies as well. The deputies now dictate files both from the field and the office, assigning case references and priority status to each individual file. They then simply place the recorder onto a docking station – which also serves as a charger – at their PCs and upload the files through the department's network. Administrative staff is automatically notified when new dictation is ready for transcription so they can assess priorities and route work as needed.



Jane Willie,  
Office and Technology Administrator

### The Benefits

The department's Sergeant Paul Coughlin believes the Philips 9600 improves the dictation-transcription process in a number of ways. “The recorders are easy to use, with a familiar look and feel to our older units,” he says. “I also appreciate the fact that digital technology allows me to insert information at the appropriate location in the dictation. I can find a particular spot in the file and add comments there, rather than having to add them to the end of the tape for the transcriptionist to go back and put in.”

The “close” feature has proved beneficial as well. “We are able to lock each individual dictation file so we now go to our next recording without worrying that we recorded over something else,” explains Coughlin. This means, he adds, that he and his fellow deputies no longer need to carry “a bag of tapes” on every call to ensure they can document activities with confidence.

In addition, the deputies appreciate the recorder's “smart button” features that allow them the flexibility to perform functions like labeling dictation files by work type (e.g., interview, report, etc.).

Another significant advantage, says Willie, is that other deputies and staff can listen to a recording before it is actually transcribed.

“Because the report is stored on our network server, everyone with a workstation can access it, rather than wait for us to complete the transcription.” In some cases, Coughlin adds, the wait in the past might have extended to one or two days.

Willie explains why the immediate playback function, along with the prioritization feature, is particularly beneficial in law enforcement. “By law, individuals in custody must receive a hearing within 36 hours of arrest,” says Willie. “We now have better tools to ensure attorneys have the required information in plenty of time.”

Investigators also need quick access to stored recordings. “There are situations where investigators are able to move forward sooner in their work because they don’t need to wait a day or two for the transcription,” says Willie. “In 30 minutes they can listen to a whole report and get moving on an investigation right away.”

Often the transcribed report is all law enforcement personnel and attorneys have when evaluating cases for hearings or trials. This makes transcriptionists particularly conscious of the need to add any and all elements that reveal the true nature of a conversation. Proper punctuation, for example, helps communicate emotions. To achieve the most realistic portrayal of an interview, transcriptionists depend on high quality recorded sound.

“Punctuation can indicate if someone is upset or agitated, so sound quality is important,” says Willie. “If we don’t have sound clarity, it is difficult to get across someone’s feelings or true meaning.”

“The sound quality with the Philips system is remarkable,” agrees Coughlin. “Often crime victims and suspects are soft-spoken, but we’ve seen a significant decrease in ‘inaudible’ comments within the transcribed text.”

There is no doubt that the transition to Philips 9610 digital dictation has been a positive move. “It is much easier to complete dictation in the field and know that the information will be available to the administrative staff and other colleagues immediately,” says Coughlin. “We had been happy with the analog system – but the Philips digital system gives us greater flexibility, and allows us to do our jobs more efficiently and effectively.”



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