

Case Study



Avanade improves communication and increases mobility thanks to UC headsets from Plantronics

Company Profile

Avanade,
<http://www.avanade.com>

Location

Netherlands

Industry

Commercial IT services

Headset Users

250

Plantronics Solution

Voyager PRO UC V2

Overview

Avanade was created by Accenture and Microsoft Cooperation in 2000. Almost 15,000 professionals in more than 20 countries around the world work for this innovative company, which delivers commercial technology services and solutions based on Microsoft technologies. In the Netherlands, Avanade has developed into a company of over 250 people. When you enter its premises in Almere, you are immediately struck by the modern interior design and the spacious communal rooms with workstations. The design is based on a philosophy of supporting employees' mobility and flexibility. Thanks in part to the project-based nature of the work, the high level of education of the employees and their high degree of independence and responsibility, 80% of Avanade's people regularly work at home one or two days per week. 'Employees have to strike a balance that works for them. They have to get through a certain volume of work, and don't need to ask for permission if they want to take the afternoon off,' says Erik Lamers, Business Development Director at Avanade. He sees the office as a meeting place. 'You come to the office for a purpose. Our office is not like some sweatshop where you've got as many people as possible crammed in per square metre.

The offices are laid out more spaciouly, and places have been created to facilitate meetings,' explains Lamers. Thus seating areas have been created with TV screens where a mixture of business and relaxation is possible. 'For example, if you need to write a report that requires a lot of concentration, rather than sitting in a busy office it might be best to go to a library. After all, you can't ask your colleagues to keep the noise down,' explains Lamers.

Strikingly, the quiet rooms have changed function over time. 'We noticed that they were hardly being used,' says Lamers. The rooms are for at least two people, and the office has seven separate rooms for meetings. This small number meant initially that Avanade purchased a number of headsets to enable the new recruits – around five to ten people are taken on at Avanade every month – to go through the computer-based training courses. With these headsets, they were able to take the training courses undisturbed, and no longer needed a separate room. Because with so many new workers, the seven rooms were no longer enough. Once they had completed the training, the headsets were put back in the cupboard for the next employee.



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Eric Lamers,
Business Development Director
at Avanade

In addition, a number of people used a headset on their own initiative because they liked to, but they were the exceptions. ‘I myself wasn’t at all keen on headsets,’ confirms Lamers, adding: ‘They didn’t seem to me to fit in with what we were doing as an organisation – until it was explained to me properly. And I could experience it for myself.’ Avanade started talking to Plantronics, a supplier of communication solutions that has been dedicated to improving business communication for the past fifty years now. One of its products is the new version of the Voyager PRO UC, which enables users to benefit from the advantages of IP communication, regardless of where they work. Lamers says of this: ‘This product fits in brilliantly with the way we work at Avanade. For instance we use Microsoft Lync, a solution for the many international phone calls that have to be made among other things, as a communication tool. But talking via a computer in an open-plan area isn’t feasible. People walk around a lot in the office here, and want to be flexible.’ Lamers revised his opinion: ‘These Plantronics headsets are a solution for workers and good for our image in the eyes of our customers.’

The company, which in 2003 started directly with the first version of Microsoft Office Live Communications Server, took part in the Plantronics Early Adopter Program and received 50 test versions of the Voyager PRO UC V2. The most mobile group, consisting mainly of senior people with international contacts and numerous conference calls, took part in the test, the results of which were positive. Avanade has now acquired 200 headsets, and each employee is issued with one: it is part of the standard package that employees receive when they arrive. Lamers thinks that when the ‘New World of Work’ is introduced, detailed consideration should also be given to good phone practice. And good support for it too, given that it helps employees do business successfully. Avanade also provides an Internet subscription, keyboard, mouse and laptop stands.

‘Ultimately, success depends on employee satisfaction,’ concludes Lamers. He goes on: ‘The aim shouldn’t be to make it as cheap as possible. We opt for quality, and preferably the latest version, because we’ve found that this increases the level of success and enthusiasm.’ Avanade applied a simple principle when deciding whether to continue the test process. Will the workers use the product or not? ‘It’s actually a self-cleaning mechanism,’ concludes Lamers. ‘That goal,’ he continues, ‘has been completely achieved. And with a critical workforce, it’s highly significant that nobody has complained and nobody has handed their headset back in. We are even seeing the headset being used in lots of other places, such as the car. Personally I find the Voyager even handier than my car kit, so I use it in the car too. A colleague who drives

a convertible also prefers this headset to other solutions and uses it to his complete satisfaction.’

The Voyager PRO UC V2 has a number of handy features. For instance, the headset can be connected to two devices at the same time. Lamers praises this integration between the mobile phone and Microsoft Lync. ‘It’s simple, reliable and you can see that a lot of thought has gone into it.’ Moreover, the status is immediately adjusted. ‘With other solutions that’s often quite a hassle. With this headset that’s not the case at all. Because the headset is connected to a mobile phone and Microsoft Lync, the status in Microsoft Lync is immediately adjusted, for instance, if I’m making a call with my mobile phone,’ recounts a satisfied Lamers. The fact that the headset is easy to put on and to operate is another thing he sees as a plus point. ‘After all, this is the Netherlands, where many people don’t regard wearing a headset as particularly cool – unlike in America.’ The Voyager PRO UC V2 has the advantage that when it is worn, the user can answer incoming calls directly: thanks to intelligent smart sensor technology, the headset knows when it is and is not being worn. Taking it off causes the call to be automatically rerouted to the telephone.

The increased efficiency and reduction in phone charges are regarded by Lamers as added benefits, but not the goal. ‘It’s a nice side-effect of the approach we’ve chosen, but ultimately everything comes down to worker satisfaction and ensuring that communication proceeds as straightforwardly as possible for workers. For example, new workers regard email as a slow way of working. With Microsoft Lync they can see who’s available and where they can get an answer quickly. They don’t want to wait until someone replies to an email. A headset facilitates this,’ says Lamers. For this reason, he believes that headsets are very important for communication. ‘It makes Microsoft Lync so much more accessible. Just like cameras in a laptop.’ To extend the convenience even further, the integration between Microsoft Lync and traditional telephony has now also been achieved worldwide. As a result, Avanade’s people can be reached on a single number, regardless of location and device.

