



PLANTRONICS
SOUND INNOVATION™

Windermere Real Estate Increases Business Efficiency

»»» PLANTRONICS WIRELESS HEADSET SYSTEM CASE STUDY

11.1.06

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Case Study**

STUDY OVERVIEW

A total of 70 real estate agents, administrative staff, and executives from Windermere Real Estate in Seattle, Washington, participated in a three-week trial of Plantronics wireless headset systems. Most participants, who spent at least several hours each day working and traveling outside of their offices, received a Plantronics Voyager™ 510SL Bluetooth® Headset System, which enables wireless communication from both a corded office phone and a Bluetooth mobile phone. A small number of participants, whose work was primarily office-based, received either a Plantronics CS70 Wireless Office Headset System or Plantronics CS55 Wireless Office Headset System that work with most office desk phones. Schireson Associates, Inc., an independent research organization, conducted the research study; data was collected in a post-trial online survey completed by 45 participants as well as in pre- and post-interviews conducted with 15 participants.



CUSTOMER PROFILE

Windermere Real Estate is a full-service real estate company headquartered in Seattle, Washington. The company's more than 290 offices serve communities in ten western states and British Columbia.

Ranked as the second largest regional real estate firm in the country in 2005, Windermere employs approximately 8,000 agents.



"Agents' phones are connected to them all the time. A headset makes your phone so much easier to use—100% easier."

– Jill Wood, President,
Windermere Real Estate

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Windermere Real Estate agents operate in a highly competitive industry that is being transformed by the availability of online consumer information and tools. As a full-service, full-fee real estate company, Windermere Real Estate agents differentiate themselves from competition by delivering unparalleled customer service and adhering to the highest ethical and business standards. Splitting their workdays both in and out of the office, agents' ability to communicate easily and effectively with clients from any location, whether in the office, in the car, or at a listing, is of critical importance. And in today's fast-paced world, real estate agents are increasingly required to perform multiple tasks simultaneously (e.g., talking to a client while searching a new listing online) in order to provide the rapid response and updated information that clients demand.

STUDY RESULTS

Fully three quarters of Windermere agents reported a high level of satisfaction with Plantronics Voyager Headset Systems. Given that maintaining high quality phone communications is of crucial importance to real estate agents, this represents no small achievement. While Voyager Systems's dual-use capability—using one headset seamlessly between both office and mobile phones—was found to be valuable, agents used their headsets much more with their cell phones than with their office phones. Generally, agents reported that Voyager is a highly useful business tool and found that the most important benefits were "increased communications convenience" and "an improved ability to multitask."

The smaller group of administrators and office managers at Windermere who received Plantronics' office-only headsets (CS55 or CS70 Wireless Office Headset Systems) reported similar levels of satisfaction and benefits with their headsets. A majority also found the 300-foot range of these office headsets valuable as they were able to take calls on their headsets from anywhere within their branch or company offices.

CASE STUDY

Seventy Seattle real estate agents and executives participated in a three-week wireless headset trial sponsored by Plantronics—providing new insights into the value and utility of wireless headsets for mobile professionals.

A typical day for real estate agents at Windermere Real Estate in Seattle, Washington, is virtually non-stop—with properties to visit, clients to meet, bids to negotiate, and mountains of paperwork to complete. In addition to spending time at a desk each day, getting all this work done puts these agents in their cars for at least several hours every day.

Then there are the calls. Endless calls—to stay in touch with clients, juggle appointments, and coordinate the details of complex real estate deals. So it's certainly not surprising that real estate agents were early adopters of cell phones back in the mid-eighties and are among the heaviest users today; a third spend one to two hours a day, and more than half of agents spend two or more hours a day on their cell phones (*Figure 1*). Indeed, the cell phone may be a real estate agent's most important business tool; nearly all of those who participated in the Plantronics headset study said their cell phone was important to their productivity.

Windermere agents spend less time on their office phones (either at a Windermere branch office or in a home office), but it is still substantial (*Figure 2*). Nearly a third spend one to two hours on their desk phone and nearly half spend two or more hours a day. So when Windermere's owners agreed to participate in a wireless headset trial during the summer of 2006, Plantronics selected its dual-use Voyager 510SL Bluetooth® Headset System for agents to use and evaluate. This wireless headset is unique in that it is designed to work seamlessly with two phones—making and receiving calls from both a Bluetooth-enabled cell phone and a conventional office line.



Windermere agents, joined at the ear with their phones, reported high satisfaction using the Voyager Wireless Headset System. Why? These peripatetic multitaskers got more done and said the headset enabled them to communicate more easily and effectively with clients.

respond when their customers have a need. The fact of the matter is that agents are more likely to answer and pick up a call if they're wearing a headset, so that they don't have to physically touch their phone—all they need to do is push a button.

For Windermere agents, the Voyager Headset System proved to be a popular business tool, with over three quarters of them reporting high levels of satisfaction with Voyager after the three-week trial period (*Figure 4, page 3*). Being able to use a Plantronics Voyager with both their cell and office phones also proved to be highly valuable according to a majority of agents. As Windermere Vice President Michael Fanning observed, *"The key is that it's multifunctional, so it's not just working with your cell phone, it's also working with your office phone. As we go forward, agents have to be able to*

Figure 1: Mobile Phone Usage

At work, would you say you spend more time, less time or about the same amount of time on the mobile phone as you did 5 years ago?

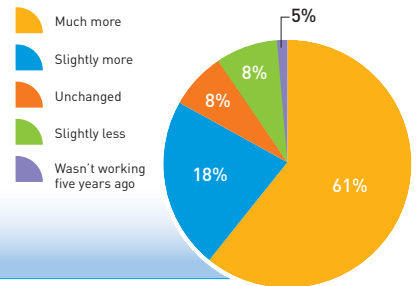


Figure 2: Desk Phone Usage

At work, would you say you spend more time, less time or about the same amount of time on the desk phone as you did five years ago?

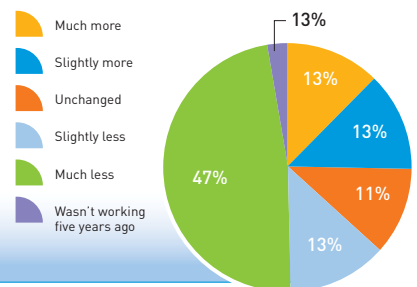
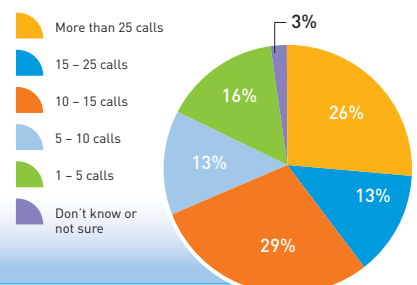


Figure 3: Plantronics Voyager 510 Usage

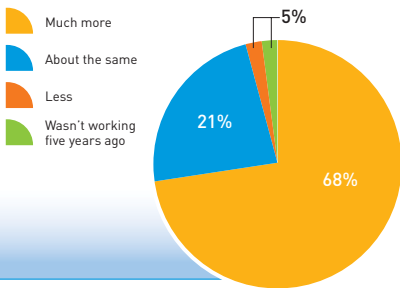
On an average workday, approximately how many calls did you place/receive in total (with both your mobile and office phone) using your Plantronics Voyager 510 headset?



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Windermere agents said that the ability to multitask was a key advantage of wearing a wireless headset in the office.

Figure 5: Multitasking

In your opinion, does your job require more or less multitasking than 5 years ago? (Multitasking might include activities like talking on the phone with a client while simultaneously researching the MLS or talking to a client while writing up an offer.)



In practice, Voyager was used more frequently with agents' cell phones. More than half of Windermere agents used it two or more hours per day with their cell phones, compared with a minority who used it a comparable amount of time with their office phones. This is a result of the fact that agents spend more time on a daily basis out of the office. In addition, it reflects the fact that agents also use their cell phones extensively while in their offices since it is typically the main phone number they provide to clients.

→ **Figure 4: Plantronics Voyager 510 System Satisfaction**

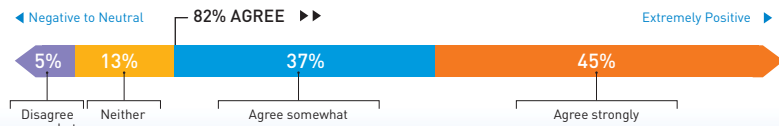
All things considered, how satisfied are you with the Plantronics Voyager™ 510 System headset? (Please use a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 = extremely dissatisfied and 10 = extremely satisfied.)



Windermere agents said that the ability to multitask was a key advantage of wearing a wireless headset in the office (Figure 6). Real estate transactions involve working with voluminous legal and other documents. Agents spend many hours at their computers doing research, responding to emails, and preparing online as well as printed materials (Figure 5). Thus, for most agents, the ability to multitask—to have both hands free for work on other tasks while talking on the phone—was thought to be one of the major benefits of using a wireless headset. As one agent explained, "Yesterday I got on a lengthy phone call in the middle of doing a preview sheet on the computer. With my headset I could just sit there and continue doing that. I wouldn't have been able to do that before. I would have had to stop what I was doing to talk." A headset also allows agents to respond more easily, in real time, to client requests, looking up something on the computer while continuing their discussion. As another agent pointed out, "A lot of times agents are getting calls from clients who say 'I saw this on the Internet, I saw a sign, I located this', and they have to jump on their keyboard immediately, picking with one finger. That's tough. So oftentimes they write down the information and say 'I'll call you right back. But that's not what the client wants. They want it now, they want it fast, they want it without having to wait.'"

→ **Figure 6: Multitask with Headset**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with this statement: "Using the Plantronics wireless headset improved my ability to multitask."

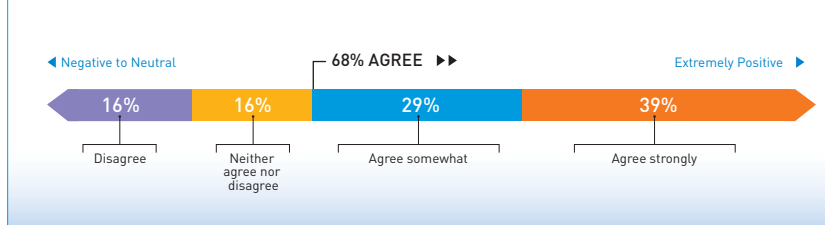


Voice clarity using a headset was almost indistinguishable from agents' cell phones. Most participants interviewed reported that sound quality on the Plantronics Voyager was well within an acceptable range. Interestingly, a few agents actually felt that their headset provided better sound quality than their cell phone, particularly when using it in a vehicle where background noise is high. As one agent said, *"The thing I liked about it was that I could hear better. And because I could hear better I felt like I communicated better. The conversations went more easily. I had much more confidence using it than I did using my cell phone."*

The Plantronics Voyager's sound quality had another important benefit for agents, enabling them to be more focused on their calls and provide a better call "experience" for their clients. As one agent reported, *"In a difficult conversation, my headset allowed me the freedom to focus on my conversation."* Several agents also said that the ease of using a headset helped them to relax more—and they felt that this ultimately got reflected in their voice. As one agent explained, *"When you're talking to someone, everything counts in terms of meaning. Words are 10%, the tone of voice is 35% and the rest is what you physically do. Since clients can't see what you're doing over the phone, a big part of it is your tone. A headset puts you in a spot where you can have good tone, provide good service."* In a similar observation, Jill Wood, President of Windermere Real Estate, explained that hands-free phone usage contributed to giving agents a stronger presence on the phone. *"I find that you're a lot more animated when you can talk with both your hands and you're not trying to sit and hang on to a handset. It's a subtle but important difference since in our business it's ultimately about building relationships with clients."*

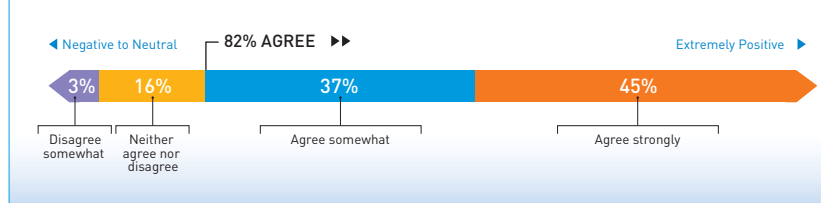
Most agents found the Plantronics Voyager comfortable to wear for extended periods of time (Figure 7). Virtually every Windermere agent agreed that Voyager reduced the discomfort of extensive phone use—mentioned most frequently was the relief from the strain of not having to cradle a phone between their head and shoulders when using a computer or taking notes (Figure 8). More than two-thirds of agents reported that in their experience, Voyager was comfortable to wear for extended periods. In fact, many found Voyager so comfortable they wore it continuously, especially in their cars, or when working alone at their desks. In particular, they liked the simplicity of pushing a button on the headset to take a call. Others indicated that they would put it on when making or receiving calls. Most reported that Voyager was easy to slip on and off—as long as it was kept powered on.

→ **Figure 7: Plantronics Voyager 510 Comfort**
Please indicate the extent to which you agree with this statement:
"The Plantronics wireless headset was comfortable to wear for extended periods of time."



• • →
Most agents found the Plantronics Voyager comfortable to wear for extended periods of time.

→ **Figure 8: Reduced Discomfort**
Please indicate the extent to which you agree with this statement:
"Using the Plantronics wireless headset reduced discomfort (for example, neck, shoulder or back strain) while talking on the phone."



A headset made cell phone use much more convenient, which translated into higher responsiveness to their clients (Figure 9). Almost all Windermere agents agreed that their Voyager headset substantially increased the convenience of communications. Over two-thirds of agents said that their headsets were easy to use, and this ease of use translated into making their cell phones easier to use. As Jill Wood, President of Windermere Real Estate, pointed out, *“Agents’ phones are connected to them all the time. A headset makes your phone so much easier to use—100% easier.”* Certainly for agents, the convenience of hands-free use was most often mentioned in terms of enabling them to drive more safely—with two hands on the wheel.



Windermere agents said that the ability to multitask was a key advantage of wearing a wireless headset in the office.

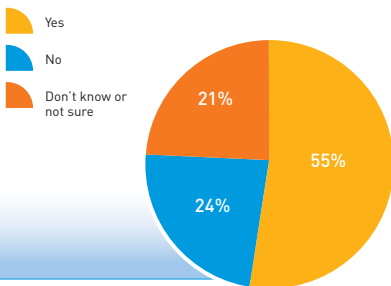
→ **Figure 9: More Convenient Phone Communications**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with this statement:
“Using a Plantronics wireless headset made phone communications more convenient (for example, standing up to talk, no tangled wires, improved mobility, etc.)”



Figure 10: Competitive Advantage

In your opinion, does a wireless headset give you a competitive advantage (i.e., more accessibility by phone, improves multitasking, etc.)?



Another frequently mentioned convenience factor was the ease with which agents could transition from their car to elsewhere when wearing a headset—all the while continuing a phone conversation, if need be. As one agent observed, *“We are going from cars to offices, cars to homes, or cars to appointments all the time. Our office is probably more in the car than it is actually in the office. So to make that transition from a car into a home and not have to hold the phone in the other hand while you grab your bag or your clipboard or whatever, and just to hop out of the car, is extremely efficient.”*

For most agents, the increased convenience of a wireless headset appeared to translate into a feeling of being more responsive to their clients. They reported that it was much easier to make and take calls at any time and from any place. Especially with real estate clients demanding faster response times, this was perceived as a real advantage. While several years ago, returning a client phone call the next day might have been acceptable, today the expectation is that phone calls get returned within an hour or two. And the trend in expectations is for agents to respond to client requests in real time. As Windermere Vice President Pat Grimm observed, *“When you’ve got six things going on at once and multiple deals that you’re working, it’s important to be able to transition very quickly from one thing to another and oftentimes you’re reaching for the landline and reaching for the cell phone. With a headset you can be very responsive to your clients, you can relax your shoulders and focus on the conversation.”*

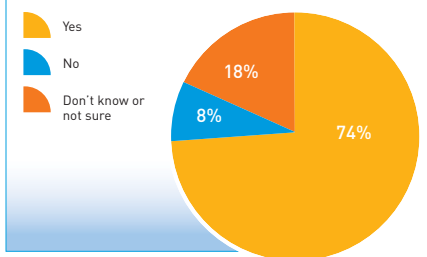
Nearly all Windermere agents concluded that using the Plantronics Voyager Wireless Headset System would help them provide a quality experience for clients and they planned to continue using it on a daily basis.

More comfort, better sound, improved tone, and ease of multitasking—each factor contributed to a greater sense of ease, responsiveness and productivity on the part of Windermere agents. In fact, a majority of agents felt that using a headset gave them a real competitive advantage. As one agent explained, *“We don’t sell houses, we build relationships, that’s really what we do. And everything counts. I would say part of the benefit of a headset is that marginal difference you can provide in terms of a quality experience for your client and quite honestly for you, too, as an agent.”*

The concern for providing a quality experience was shared by every agent. Given this strong focus on customer service, it is perhaps not surprising that nearly all Windermere agents indicated that they planned to continue using their headsets. And fully three-quarters of them said they would recommend their headset to colleagues and friends. As Jill Wood, President of Windermere Real Estate, said in summing up the trial, *“Our agents loved these headsets. I think every agent should have one. First of all, it helps to keep them safer while driving, and it’s just so much more efficient in the office. We will be recommending them to all our Windermere agents, and to our office staff as well.”*

Figure 11: **Wireless Headset Access**

In your opinion, do you think it would benefit real estate offices to provide wireless headset systems to agents?



Wireless Headsets for Office Professionals

Windermere office managers and administrative staff also gain multitasking efficiency with office headsets.

Managers and administrators, who spend the majority of each working day at Windermere offices, talk considerably less on the phone than agents. Yet during the trial most of them reported spending from one to three hours on their office phones and using a Plantronics CS55 or CS70 wireless headset for a large proportion of that time. Its 300 foot range meant that they could take calls and have phone conversations from practically any location within Windermere offices.

While some wore their headsets continuously and others put them on to make or take calls, every Windermere manager and administrator surveyed reported that their communications had become more convenient and felt that using a headset had improved their ability to multitask. As one manager noted, *“Being able to walk around the office, run and get copies, be on a computer while you’re talking on the phone is huge... It enabled me to multitask better, therefore freeing up time to do other things.”* Like Windermere real estate agents, nearly all office managers and administrators reported that their headsets were comfortable to wear for extended periods, and they all said they were planning to continue using their headset in the future.



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**PLANTRONICS VOYAGER™ 510SL
BLUETOOTH® HEADSET SYSTEM**



**Wireless freedom and unparalleled
versatility—in the office and on the go.**

Ensuring lightweight, all-day comfort, the Voyager 510SL delivers superior sound quality with WindSmart technology for clear voice transmission. At the touch of a button you can seamlessly switch between an office phone and a Bluetooth-enabled mobile device.



Bluetooth®



Sound innovation for missions to the moon. And for everyday life on this planet, too.

In 1969, a Plantronics headset carried the historic first words from the moon: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." Today, we're the headset of choice in mission-critical applications such as air traffic control and 911 dispatch. This history of proven sound innovation is the basis for every product we build—whether it's for work, for home or on the go.