



PLANTRONICS GUIDE

# To smarter working for the ageing population

Summer 2011



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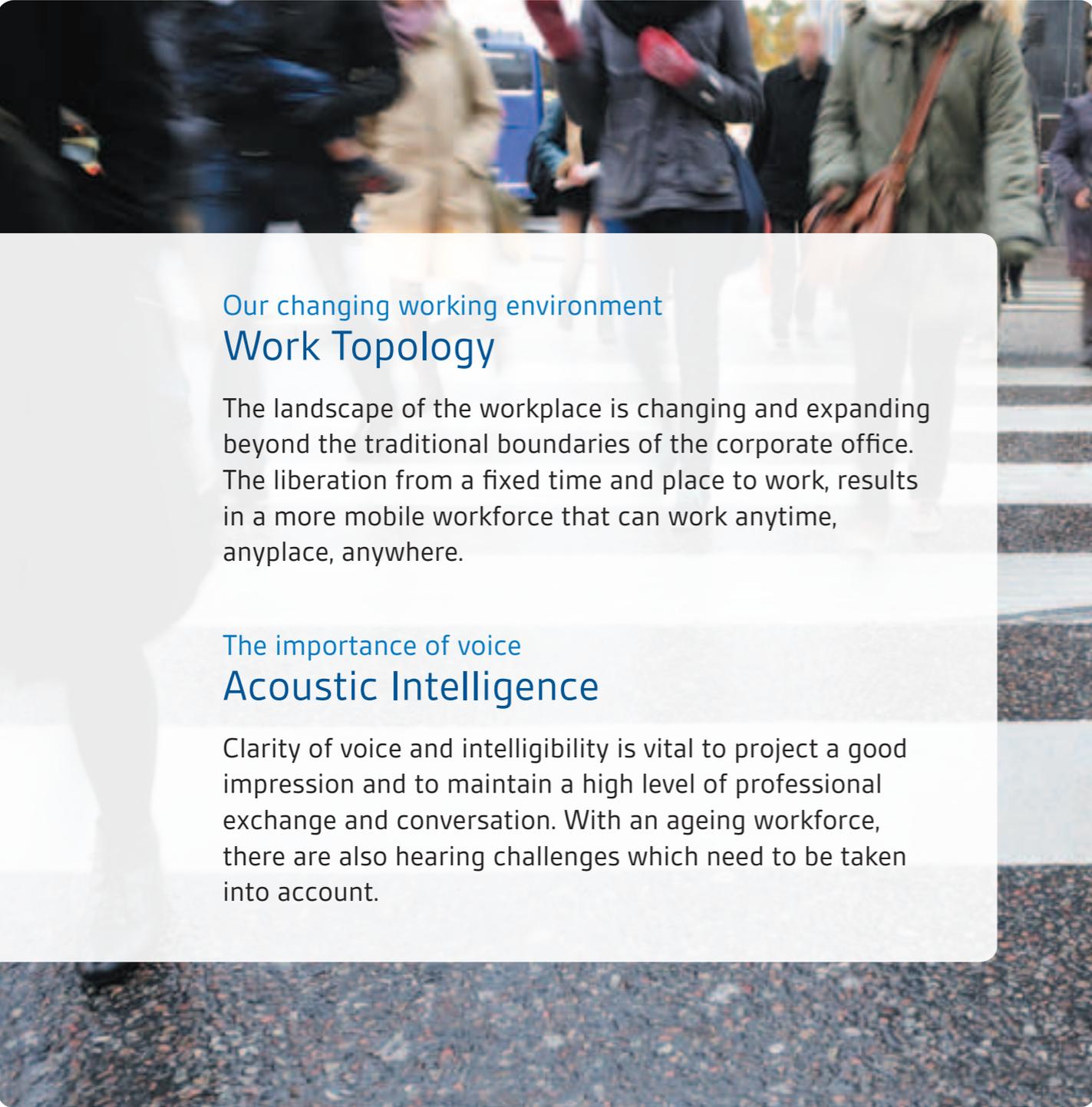
Every stage of life presents different workplace and individual needs and the new over 50 work generation presents real challenges for employees and employers alike. Plantronics, world leader in personal audio communications for professionals and consumers, understands the acoustic needs of the new work generation and here gives practical tips on how to get the best out of your working environment.

# Employers

## How to make the most of your workforce

### An ageing workforce: facts

- During the past two recessionary years: the proportion of people over 55 planning to work beyond state pension age has jumped from 40% to 71%.<sup>(1)</sup>
- Many people say they want to remain economically active beyond state pension age: 64% women and 24% men.<sup>(2)</sup>
- Many workers remain ambitious and want to continue developing their careers.
- A significant proportion of workers over 50 have undertaken training in the past three years: 55% of those aged 50-55, 44% of those aged 56-59 and 33% of those aged 60-64. One in 5 trained to improve their job prospects.<sup>(3)</sup>
- Most people (62 per cent) feel they are as strong physically and mentally at work as when they were in their 20s and 30s.<sup>(4)</sup>



Our changing working environment  
**Work Topology**

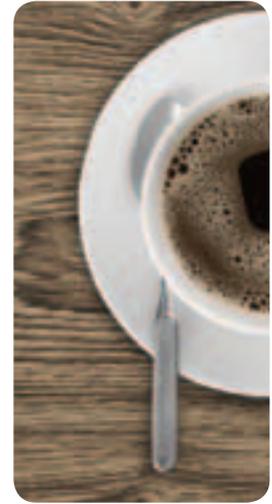
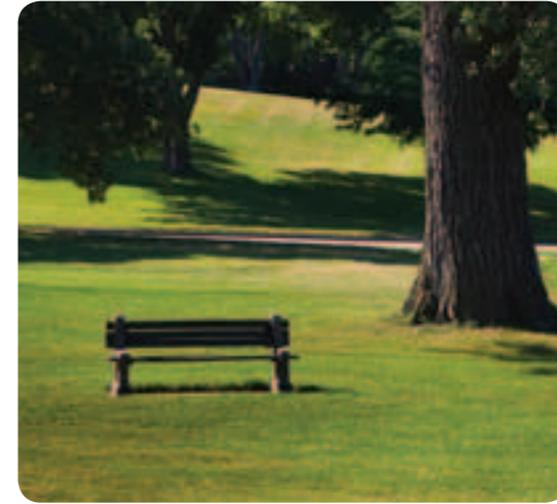
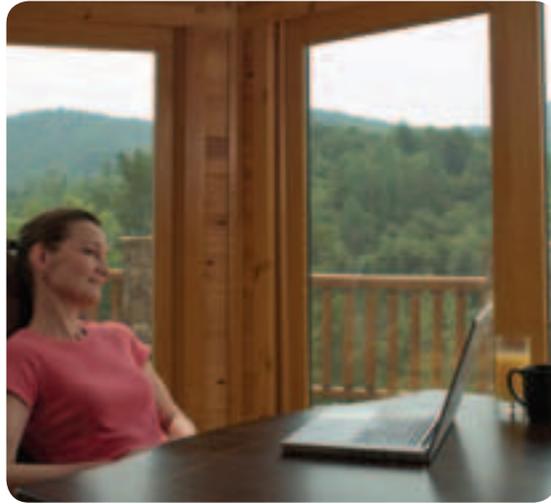
The landscape of the workplace is changing and expanding beyond the traditional boundaries of the corporate office. The liberation from a fixed time and place to work, results in a more mobile workforce that can work anytime, anyplace, anywhere.

The importance of voice  
**Acoustic Intelligence**

Clarity of voice and intelligibility is vital to project a good impression and to maintain a high level of professional exchange and conversation. With an ageing workforce, there are also hearing challenges which need to be taken into account.

# Smarter working

How to get the best out of your  
working environment



## 1. Location

The environment in which we work has a big impact not only on productivity and motivation but also ultimately results. A recent study by The Equality and Human Rights Commission shows that there is a significant demand for greater flexibility in location of work for the over 50s, with 1 in 5 wanting greater flexibility in their working location, including the option to work from home.<sup>(5)</sup>

It is important for employers to listen to their staff and offer a working environment that is suited to their needs. It may be creating separate rooms in an open-plan office, where people are offered total peace and quiet with acoustic privacy or offering the option to work at home. However the most suitable environment may not necessarily have the best acoustics and by equipping staff with the right headset, which include noise-cancelling microphones to restore audio quality, employers can ensure their employees can work anywhere.

## 2. Flexibility

Rigid work patterns with fixed daily hours five days a week reflect working routines from a time gone by. With an older workforce, there is a need for more flexible working options that are sustainable through these longer working lives. Research shows that 40% of over-50s would like to stay in their current jobs but with greater flexibility in hours or days worked.<sup>(6)</sup>

**“An ageing population, flexible working locations and increased mobility bring new challenges in terms of workspace design.”** Says Jo-anne Bichard, co-author of *New Demographics, New Workspace* **“Offering a workspace that suits older employees’ needs is important, and modifying working arrangements by adapting work schedules, hours and workload could help retain workers for longer. When re-evaluating the workplace provided for an ageing workforce employers need to take into account issues such as hearing, vision, mobility, dexterity and safety, which can all be effectively catered for with careful planning and organisation.”**

### 3. The right tools

We use a range of devices to communicate today, whether it's a fixed PC or laptop, broadband internet or wifi and multiple hard and softphones (VoIP). It is essential that employers provide devices that are ergonomically suited to their employees' needs. Using a handset for long periods is not ergonomically sound and a headset can reduce and prevent physical complaints associated with cradling a handset between the head and neck, as well as enabling multi-tasking. A wireless headset also enables workers to move more which offers several health benefits, including improving flexibility and circulation. Additionally movement away from the PC also allows for regular screen breaks to rest the eyes.



“In the absence of face-to-face meetings and body language triggers, the right headset is a necessity to help the voice have the right impact and be understood. Additionally the ability to stand whilst speaking can also improve voice power, something which is useful as our voices weaken with age.” Says Philip Vanhoutte, EMEA Managing Director at Plantronics “A headset is a critical foundation to the acoustic intelligence of an ageing workforce.”

### 4. Hearing better

Indisputably as we get older, our hearing weakens and in particular we lose the ability to hear higher frequencies, which contain information about consonants, the part of speech that has the most influence on intelligibility. Plantronics headsets boost the higher frequencies of speech to improve intelligibility and the audio processors in headsets further enhance intelligibility by reducing noise levels, using digital signal processing (DSP) technology. Headsets can also be a preventative measure of protecting hearing now. There are also many other effective tools that can be used to support hearing difficulties, including amplified telephones and assistive listening devices which enable the user to carry out their work effectively. It is the employer's duty to initiate and facilitate discussions on this topic and provide suitable solutions.

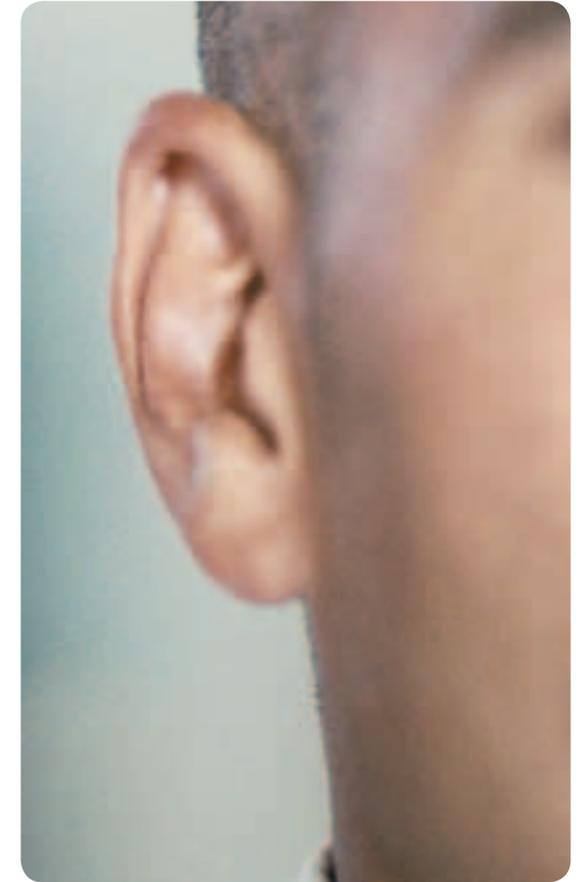
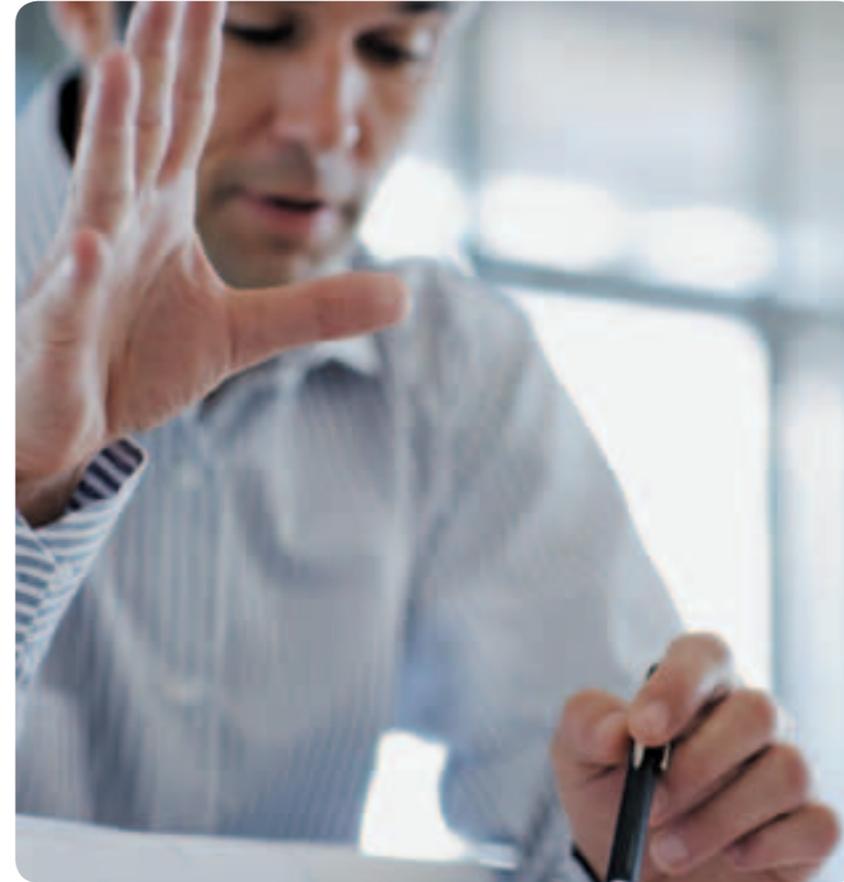
“With 42% of over 50-year olds<sup>(7)</sup> having some kind of age-related hearing loss, and the workforce getting older, the ability to manage both background and ambient noise levels when making and taking calls and also to ensure inbound voice dialogue is clear is becoming more and more important.” Says Carsten Trads, President of Clarity, the leading supplier of amplified telephones “It is essential to ensure that employees are equipped with a device that best serves their needs, in terms of audio and ergonomics so they can communicate easily and effectively by telephone.”

## 5. Listening harder

In order to ensure that the current workspace environment is effective, not only in terms of layout, design, facilities, aesthetics, practical needs and technical requirements, but also intangible factors such as noise levels and air quality, it is essential to consult the workforce and listen to how they use and view their workspace, and then make changes accordingly.

This may mean radical changes – re-designing office layouts, removing traditional office walls and creating more flexible “elsewhere space”, allowing people to choose the setting most appropriate to the work they are conducting at that time – or it might mean offering a more flexible home working policy. Either way, it should be done on the basis of direct and quantifiable feedback from employees to create a working space that is fit for the purpose.

“In order to optimise the productivity and effectiveness of staff in their workspaces, workplace managers need to take a thorough analysis of their employees’ satisfaction and engagement with the work settings provided for them.” says Tim Oldman, Managing Director of Leesman, an online survey, data capture and audit service provider specifically for the workplace design and management industry. “The Leesman Index – the first unified and truly independent workplace effectiveness employee survey and index rating – provides workplace managers with an immediate snapshot of their employees satisfaction and engagement with the work settings provided for them.”



## 6. Open dialogue

Older workers with poor health often do not feel able to approach their manager to discuss difficulties and request alternative arrangements. It is important for employers to discuss and offer mutually acceptable solutions to health problems, which may be very personal, and offer comprehensive health programmes and ergonomic tools and facilities, to enable their staff to continue working effectively.

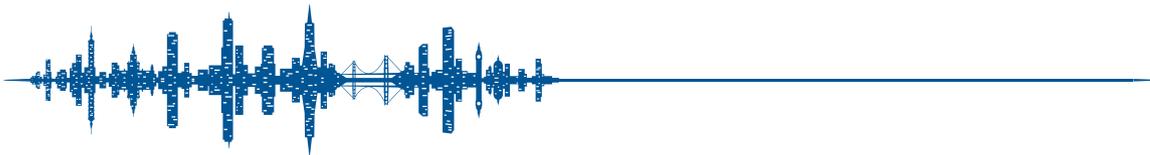
# Employees

## How to get the best out of your working environment

### Practical tips

1. **The right tools for the job** – Don't be afraid to ask for ergonomically sound equipment including the right chair, keyboard and headset.
2. **My workspace** – Figure out what kind of working environment suits you best and in which you are most productive – whether it's in a quiet space alone, in a busy open plan office with other people, in an inspirational place such as a park or museum or at home. It may be that you choose a different location depending on the type of work you are doing or the time of day.
3. **Flexibility** – Approach your boss regarding flexible working options, including hours and location. As long as you do not abuse your employer's trust, a good manager should be flexible when it comes to accommodating the needs of an employee.
4. **Looking after yourself** – Using a fixed telephone at a desk, even for as little as 2 hours a day, can contribute to neck and lower back pain, particularly when phone cradling between head and neck. Using a headset not only helps reduce these physical complaints but is also less fatiguing and helps you multi-task as well as giving you the freedom to move around.
5. **Easy on the eyes** – if you spend a lot of time on a PC or laptop it is advised to take regular short breaks from looking at your screen – e.g. 5-10 minutes every hour. Arrange for an eye test and have regular check-ups. When working at a computer screen, make sure you can sit comfortably with your eyes at screen level. If possible, vary the type of work you do so you are not sat for long periods of time in the same position.

(1,2,3,4,5,6,8) Stats from Equality and Human Rights Commission, UK Jan 2010) (7) Source: RNID, UK statistics



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