INCREASED FLEXIBILITY AND COST-EFFECTIVENESS IN ICA SUPERMARKETS

ICA, one of the leading Swedish supermarket chains, has raised the bar for internal communication. They have recently implemented new PBX solutions from Panasonic, resulting in a more cost-effective and flexible work flow, as well as increased safety and service.

Challenge
ICA faced severe communication challenges on a daily basis. Employees did not have the facilities needed to help customers and co-workers without being physically present everywhere in the store at all times. This resulted in a lot of complaints and frustrations.

Solution
Today, the challenge is solved with PBX technology, which has secured a cost-effective system that benefits both the customer, the employees and the bottom line. Panasonic has delivered a suite of communications solutions, all routed via KX-NS700 smart hybrid PBX systems.

“We have achieved a workspace, which is more cost-effective, flexible and customer-friendly. We have also increased safety, as people now know that they can always get a hold of someone. And it works every time.”

Tommy Fredriksson - ICA Supermarket
"After the buttons were implemented, we received a lot of positive feedback from customers complimenting the increased service level and the fact that they no longer have to stay in line and wait. Today, our customers can get the necessary assistance without requiring our employees to be physically present everywhere in the store all the time. Instead, they can perform other tasks in the meantime, which makes for a much more cost-effective system," Tommy Fredriksson, Head of Department at ICA Supermarket Väst says.

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When dealing with thousands of customers across approximately 1,300 stores every day, the balance between high service levels and cost-effectiveness is vital. Three years ago, 41 ICA supermarkets began a new journey towards just that. As they implemented their first PBX phone solutions from Panasonic, they based it on a recommendation from the IT provider, Accesit.

Since then, ICA has upgraded to the newest models and solutions, counting smaller and more robust phones, a new customer button system, as well as a switch board to connect all of the devices. It has proven to be such a success, that ICA now plans to expand the solution across many other stores throughout Sweden.

Pushing the right buttons
The ICA supermarkets are large in size, which means employees cannot be present everywhere all the time. Previously, this used to be a challenge when customers needed help, but that is now a thing of the past, and it all comes down to connecting phones and buttons.

For instance, a lot of customers return their used bottles in the bottle refund machine, however, bottle refund machines tend to get filled up and cause technical problems relatively frequently, which requires employee assistance. Although this process might sound simple, it has not always been so. At the ICA stores, the bottle refund machines are placed separate from the rest of the store in a different building, meaning employees are rarely present on site. Consequently, almost every day for several years, ICA received complaints as customers had to go to a different building to ask for help. The employees were simply unaware that customers were there, but thanks to the new communications system, customers can simply push a button to get in touch.

Each button is pre-installed to connect to a specific phone. As several buttons are placed around the store in different departments, the store manager can control which specific employees are called from which button. This ensures that the customer reaches out to an employee who has the expertise needed to handle the task in question. Assistance can be given directly over the communications system, increasing efficiency saving time on the employee having to move to the customer’s location.
Flexible opening hours call for flexible technology

The same applies to other departments within the store, especially at night. The stores are open until 11:30pm when less employees are present, which sets higher requirements for technical assistance.

“At our post office, for instance, no employees are present between 9 and 11.30pm, so if a customer enters, he or she can call the store manager, who will immediately arrive and assist. The buttons have helped us a lot, as they make connecting much easier and flexible, both internally between employees and with customers. Also, if the phone rings, I can see whether the call is internal or if it’s a customer, which is good to know,” Tommy Fredriksson from ICA says.

Improved internal communication and efficiency

According to ICA’s Tommy Fredriksson, the design and functions of the phones are worth highlighting as well.

“The new phones are smaller, which is more convenient as it is easier for employees to keep them in their pockets. We have only received positive responses from employees; they prefer the new models. At the same time, the new models are also tougher and smarter. If you drop them on the floor, they don’t break. And thanks to the smart buttons we have shortcuts which is very beneficial, especially when fewer people are at work, as it enables us to make call-outs via the speaker system very easily,” Tommy Fredriksson, ICA, says and concludes:

“The combination of the phones, the call-out system and the buttons have made a huge impact. We have achieved a workspace which is more cost-effective, flexible and customer-friendly. We have also increased safety, as people now know that they can always get a hold of someone. And it works every time.”