Episode Book

EPISODE #6474

Why to Call a Headset Specialist Instead of Amazon

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SYNOPSIS

Buying a headset or dictation setup online often leads to drawers full of ill-fitting gear and incompatible cables. Independent business headset shops and dictation dealers in the US, the UK, and Austria offer direct phone lines, trial units, and tailored advice. Learning what questions to ask sellers about return policies, microphone placement, and software compatibility reveals whether a shop offers true product expertise or merely reads from a catalogue.

TRANSCRIPT



Corn

Amazon will put a headset on your doorstep by tomorrow. It will not tell you whether that headset survives six hours of dictation into speech recognition, because there's nobody on the other end to tell you. Daniel's asking who is on the other end elsewhere. Real specialist sellers in the US and Europe, businesses you can phone today, whether they sell online, and what makes each one worth the call.



Herman

Two trades are hiding in that question, and they overlap less than you'd think. One is the business headset specialist, the people who live on Jabra, Poly and EPOS, gear built for call centres and open offices. The other is the dictation dealer: handheld microphones, foot pedals, transcription kit, speech software. Someone who talks to their computer all day might need either one, or both, and the two kinds of seller know different things.



Corn

We did the Philips SpeechMike by itself a while back, so I'm leaving it out of today.



Herman

Fine by me. There's plenty else. The interesting problem is how you tell a shop with a person in it from a shop with a chatbot and a returns form.



Corn

What does proof of a person look like? Every homepage says "expert".



Herman

A phone number you can ring without fighting a menu. That beats stars, it beats testimonials. Second best is a trial, where they send you a unit and you hear it before you pay. Headset Advisor is the clearest US case on the business side. They're in Rancho Cordova, California, and their contact page says, in those words, no phone trees. There's a phone line, a text number, live chat, weekdays seven in the morning to four in the afternoon Pacific.



Corn

Seven to four. Ring from New York at lunch and you're calling a shop that's already closing.



Herman

Which is the sort of detail you only find out by reading the page. The page also names the founders. David, Dustin, Doug and Drew.



Corn

Four D's. Family firm, or a very strict hiring policy.



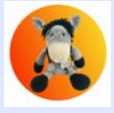
Herman

The page title says trusted partner for headsets since nineteen ninety-four, and a search snippet had a line about being family-owned with US-based advisors on the phone. I haven't seen that on the About page itself, so I'd hold it loosely. The shipping and returns page I can speak to. Thirty days to send it back, a prepaid label on request, refund minus fifteen dollars for return shipping, free shipping over fifty dollars. They sell online. I don't know which brands they lean toward, so that's your first question.



Corn

Fifteen dollars to return a headset you hate is cheap tuition.



Herman

One practical note on those hours. Seven in the morning Pacific is mid-afternoon in London, so a European can ring after lunch. And the Arizona shop's hours are shorter again at both ends.



Corn

Nobody mentions that the specialists keep office hours. A person is only a person while they're at work.



Herman

Compare Headsets Direct, in Prescott, Arizona. Founded in nineteen ninety-six, at the same address since two thousand eight, phone lines open seven thirty to four Mountain. They carry Poly, Jabra, Logitech, Bose, EPOS Sennheiser and Yealink. And they describe their reps as consultants, not salespeople, with hands-on training on the products.



Corn

Anyone can type that. What would I check?



Herman

Whether they ask about your use before they mention a price. But there's a caveat, and it's printed in their own site header. Fifty dollar minimum order, and "No Returns".



Corn

No returns. On a product where the whole question is whether it fits your head.



Herman

It cuts against the try-it-and-see logic, I agree. The charitable reading is that the consultation replaces the return: someone guides you so you get it right first time. You're the one who buys things, Corn. Would you accept those terms?



Corn

From a person who's heard how I work and put the model in an email first? Maybe. From a webpage, never. I want it in writing before I pay.



Herman

Good instinct. They also say they serve international customers with discounted shipping rates, but no country is named.



Corn

Let me argue the Amazon side for a minute. If I already know the exact model, a shop with a person in it adds nothing.



Herman

Agreed, and that's where I'd stop recommending anyone. Known model, known need, buy it wherever it's cheapest. The person matters when you don't know the model. A first headset for a new job, a dictation setup for someone with a quiet voice, a dozen units for an office. There the cost of a wrong guess is a drawer full of things you hate.



Corn

Or a drawer full of things you can't send back, in Prescott's case.



Herman

Which is why the call comes first, and why you get the recommendation in writing. Here's what I'd like to know from you, though. Cheaper, or the one that picks up the phone?



Corn

Picks up. I'd pay a bit more to be told no by someone who knows, and I'd rather lose twenty dollars than lose a week.



Herman

Then the call is the point. They also don't hide the policy, which counts for something.



Corn

And the names everyone would try first, Headsets dot com and Headsets Plus?



Herman

I haven't seen anything current on either that I can vouch for. Headsets dot com has a contact page and not much readable beyond it. Headsets Plus shows up mainly in a twenty-sixteen press release that offered a helpline for any brand, even if you'd bought the headset elsewhere. A lovely idea, and a ten-year-old press release proves nothing about today. Ring and see whether it still picks up.



Corn

A helpline for headsets you bought from someone else. That's a business model built entirely on goodwill.



Herman

Possibly it was a lead generator. I don't know. Europe, then. The Headset Store is in Coleshill, Warwickshire. They call themselves the headset experts, say the team averages more than ten years in the industry, and tell you to speak to the team before ordering. Poly, Jabra, EPOS Sennheiser, Yealink and a few trade brands, and they sell refurbished and ex-demo too, which helps if the budget is tight.



Corn

Returns?



Herman

A hundred percent money back guarantee, fourteen days, price difference paid or refunded if you swap. Delivery detail is UK only on the pages I saw, so international is a question. And one oddity. The home page cites fifty-one thousand one hundred UK customers. The About page says over thirty thousand British businesses.



Corn

Two pages, two numbers. Either they count differently or it's the restaurant school of "over a million served".



Herman

Customers against businesses could both be true. I just wouldn't repeat either figure.



Corn

Not repeating. Though I notice you just repeated both.



Herman

To make the point. The refurbished and ex-demo line is the part I'd ask about on the phone. A shop with a person in it can tell you which of the demo units is sound.



Corn

Or which one spent a year on a salesman's desk. Ex-demo means somebody else's ears.



Herman

Then it's price difference against hygiene, and I'd want to hear what they do to a unit before it goes out again.



Corn

Another question for the list. The list is getting longer than the headset.



Herman

The other European one I like is run by Imtradex Communications in Vienna, and the shop is headsets dot at. Founded in nineteen ninety-four. Free, non-binding consultation, and they call themselves manufacturer-independent. They list test samples, try and buy, though the terms aren't described, so ask what that means. Brands include EPOS Sennheiser, JPL, Jabra, Poly, Konftel and Invisio. They focus on the German-speaking countries but have customers in other European countries too, and their address changed in June, so check it before mailing anything.



Corn

Manufacturer-independent does a lot of work in that sentence. Everyone says it.



Herman

It's only worth something if they stock several brands and will tell you which one isn't the best margin for them. I can't verify that from a page. The test samples are better evidence. If a seller will lend you the thing, they're confident it'll still be on your head in a week.



Corn

Which is a bet most sellers on Amazon never have to make. Fit is the whole game with these. A decent headset is basically a tiny prison for your ears, and I mean that with love.



Herman

Apologies to anyone who loves their headset.
Gloria: Gloria, standards and practices. That comparison of a headset to a, quote, tiny prison for your ears, end quote, drew a complaint from the Association of Consumer Audio Devices, policy number four four seven one. Please say it is a metaphor. This is the fourth clarification I have issued today.



Herman

A mic that sits perfectly in a showroom can wander by four in the afternoon, and I'll admit nothing is designed around ears like mine.



Corn

I've watched you wear one. It sits like a hat on a coat stand.



Herman

So you ring the shop and the first thing you ask about is the headband. Now the dictation side. The question to ask a business headset shop is whether they've set one up for speech recognition. A call headset is built for human conversation, where a little room



Herman (continued)

tone doesn't matter. Speech software wants a clean, close microphone signal, and the cheap way to get it wrong is a mic that sits a few centimetres off.



Corn

I'd put money on half the answers being "it has a microphone".



Herman

I'd put it higher than half for general retailers. A specialist at least has the vocabulary: boom arm, noise-cancelling microphone, the difference between a mic made for a phone call and one made for software to read. That's what the question is for. A good seller says something specific, or admits it isn't their area and sends you to a dictation dealer. The second answer is also a good call.



Corn

What do I say if I want to find out in two minutes whether they know?



Herman

Say what software you use, and whether you dictate sitting still or walking about. A real specialist asks the next question: USB or Bluetooth, laptop or desktop. The ones who just quote a product are reading you the catalogue.



Corn

The trap I'd fall into is the headset arriving with the wrong plug.



Herman

That's a real one, and it's where a specialist earns the call. Plenty of business headsets are made to plug into a desk phone, with a connector that does nothing on a laptop, and some need an adapter cable that isn't in the box. Amazon answers that in the small print, if at all. A person says it in one sentence.



Corn

So what the shop sells is knowing which box to put in the basket, and I'm paying for that sentence.



Herman

And you get it for nothing if you ask. Name the computer and the software and make them say the cable out loud before you pay.



Corn

Fine, and the dictation dealers themselves?



Herman

One choice first, because a seller should help you with it. Handheld dictation microphone or headset. A handheld with buttons suits someone who edits as they go. A headset leaves your hands on the keyboard. Which would you pick?



Corn

The handheld, and I'd lose it inside a week. Headset. I'd forget I was wearing it and take it to the kitchen.



Herman

Then wireless range matters, and battery life, and only someone who has used the thing can answer that straight.



Corn

Straight as in "it dies at three o'clock"?



Herman

That kind of straight, yes. Now the dealers. In the US, Speech Recognition Solutions lists the M E three at one hundred thirty-nine dollars ninety-five, about one sixty with a USB connector, and the TravelMike at two hundred fifty-nine, the TableMike at two hundred seventy-nine. I can't date those prices, so call them ballpark. DictaMic, in Brooklyn, offers thirty-day returns and a price match. Sound Professionals in Langhorne, Pennsylvania sells kits in the region of eight hundred fifty to seventeen hundred dollars. And KnowBrainer has resold Dragon since nineteen ninety-four.



Corn

Dragon is the software this entire shelf of products grew up around.



Herman

Which gives you a question for the call. Ask a dictation dealer which software they've tested a microphone with, and for how long. A seller who has used a particular model with the software you run is worth more than the spec sheet.



Corn

And if they've never heard of my software?



Herman

Then you've learned that for the price of one phone call, which is cheaper than a returned microphone.



Corn

A table microphone at two seventy-nine is one you set down and never wear. I like that it can't give you a headache.



Herman

It suits someone who sits still at a desk all day, and not much else. In Europe, DIKTAT-STUTTGART, with Stuttgart and Berlin addresses, offers a free fourteen-day test and carries EPOS. Voicewords sells Philips and Olympus and sends free test units. There's a German site, professionell-diktieren dot de, that lists a SpeechMike Premium Air at three hundred thirty-two euros and one cent. And in the UK, Speech Products, and Voice Technologies in Paisley and Sheffield. SpeechCom in Sweden too. The pattern is the same as the headset shops. The trial period is how a dictation dealer proves a person is behind it.



Corn

Two weeks free is generous for a thing that goes in your mouth's neighbourhood.



Herman

Put the two regions side by side and a difference shows up. The US shops I found lean on return windows: thirty days at one, a price match at another. The European ones lean on trials, test samples and free units before you've paid. I'd say that's a pattern in what I found, not a rule about two continents.



Corn

The trial is better for you. The return window is better for them, because you've already bought it.



Herman

Which means a US seller's return policy is the thing to read closely, and a European seller's trial terms are.



Corn

Anything for the Netherlands?



Herman

I couldn't confirm a dedicated headset specialist. Coolblue has a specialist advice option on its Jabra page, and KantoorArtikelen advertises free, non-binding Jabra advice, but both are generalists, and I only saw snippets. Fine to try, not something I'd call a specialist.



Corn

Dead sites worry me more than donkey ears, though.



Herman

They are. SpeechWare is the example: their old domain now just redirects to a page selling the domain. The microphones, FlexyMike and TwistMike, still sell through other shops, but nobody is home at the original address. One review cited the FlexyMike dual-ear with a USB adapter at two hundred eighty-nine dollars, undated. And Speak-IT Solutions, the UK firm, an aggregator lists it in England, but I couldn't find a working site of its own.



Corn

So an old forum post saying "ring these guys" has a shelf life.



Herman

When you need a plumber, do you trust the directory or the one your neighbour used?



Corn

The neighbour. Obviously.



Herman

An old forum recommendation is a neighbour who has since moved house. Check the site loads before you plan a phone call around it. Dictation is a small trade, and small trades quietly close.



Corn

What does that say about the sellers that survive?



Herman

That they've got a customer who rings back. The ones I've named have been around since the nineties, several of them, and that's more than a star rating can tell you.



Hilbert

Specialist. Dennis wouldn't use that word. He says he's the man with the stock cupboard, out past Wednesbury, and I've been ringing him on the same extension for twenty-odd years. Herman, you read out two sets of opening hours. Dennis has none. You ring. If he's there, he's there.



Corn

That sounds like a trade you can't search for.



Hilbert

I've got thirty-seven yokes in the loft, Corn. Every one from him. Each has a luggage tag on the cable with what Dennis said when I rang. Mostly it says no. This week I'm loading all of them into the van and driving up so he can tell me which to keep. He doesn't know yet.



Herman

The cables, though. They'll be in a heap.



Hilbert

Coiled. By date. He told me once the good one was a hundred and ninety pounds and the one I wanted was seventy-four.



Corn

He'll need a bigger counter.



Hilbert

I took the seventy-four. Three days later he rang to ask whether the ear pad had come off yet. It hadn't.



Herman

So the useful question for any of these sellers is what they'd buy at their own price. Seventy-four against a hundred and ninety is an answer a star rating never gives.



Corn

Same for the yokes. I'm borrowing that word, by the way.



Herman

The practical questions, then, in order. Ask about returns first, because the three policies diverge sharply: thirty days at Headset Advisor, fourteen days with the price difference at The Headset Store, none at all at Headsets Direct. Ask what they'd buy. Ask whether they've set one up for speech recognition. Shipping outside the home market, Israel included: none of them state it, so ask.



Corn

And now the misconception, which I'll cheerfully play the wrong side of. A specialist is the safe option, so if it doesn't suit you, you can send it back.



Herman

Backwards. Headsets Direct is a specialist, and the header on its own site says no returns. Knowing the market and taking the thing back are separate promises, and you have to ask for each one separately.



Corn

So I ring three of them and buy nothing on the first call.



Herman

One of the US business shops, one of the European ones, and one dictation dealer if you dictate for a living. Headset Advisor, The Headset Store and DIKTAT-STUTTGART would be my starting trio, with Headsets Direct as the one to read the terms of first. Ask each the same three questions and compare how they answer, not what they answer.



Corn

Ask three people the same question and listen for who sounds bored. That's market research I can manage.



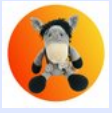
Herman

The answer I'd be waiting for is the one where the seller talks you down to the seventy-four-pound yoke. Nobody on Amazon has ever done that.



Corn

Thanks to our producer, Hilbert Flumingtop, for keeping the desk running. This has been My Weird Prompts, and you can find every episode at my weird prompts dot com.



Herman

See you tomorrow.