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the Case Study

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Keeping you up-to-date with the world of **noise measurement**

Hull's new 24 hour Noise Nuisance Officer

Neighbourhood Enforcement Officer Nick Tindall has worked for Hull City Council for over 20 years in a variety of roles so he is no stranger to change when it comes to dealing with neighbourhood disputes, anti-social behaviour and noise nuisance.



Hull
City Council

The local population in Hull has changed quite dramatically over recent years with immigrants settling in established neighbourhoods, children's activities and expectations changing when it comes to ideas of entertainment, and housing needs also evolving with many of the larger pre-war homes now split into multi occupancy units to meet the demand for single living and migrant workers.

"We work closely with Council Housing officers when it comes to noise nuisance within Council housing stock but Environmental Health look after the private sector," explained Nick. "Our job has changed over recent years; people seem less tolerant of each other, more belligerent perhaps. They don't seem so willing to put up with something that perhaps a few years ago they would have sorted out over the garden fence.

Gather more evidence

"Our department get around 3,500 complaints a year with Environmental Health about the same number. With each one we have to assess the severity and perhaps ask the complainant to fill in diary sheets of when the nuisance takes place.



Nick Tindall, Neighbourhood Enforcement Officer

We then may send a letter or speak to their neighbours and get a quick resolution but other times we need to gather more evidence that a statutory nuisance is actually taking place – that's where Trojan comes into its own."

Trojan and its most recent upgrade Trojan² are noise nuisance recorders that have been designed with the specific needs of Noise Nuisance Officers in mind.

“ It's so easy and fast to set up we don't waste time. ”



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On average, Nick will leave the Trojan in situ for up to 5 days. The Trojan is mains powered with secure cables but it will switch to its own internal batteries if the mains power is lost. When power is restored, the Trojan will automatically restart even if its internal batteries are spent. This allows continuity and Nick knows that they are recording everything over a set period of time.

"I really like the pre-record function, it is very handy," said Nick. "We have captured evidence using this function that has proven cases but, just as importantly, disproved them so innocent people aren't being accused of causing a nuisance and having their tenancy threatened."

The Pre & Post Trigger options for audio recording can be set as needed. The pre-trigger can be up to 30 seconds and post-trigger up to 60 seconds - particularly useful for catching out falsified recordings.

"We installed one Trojan with a gentleman who had complained about his neighbour but thanks to the pre and post record options we actually caught him also being very abusive to his neighbour. In the end they both had their private tenancy agreements removed.

"Fortunately Council tenants do tend to be law abiding on the whole; they don't want to risk losing their tenancies or having it changed from 'Secure' to 'Introductory' where they have fewer rights. The main problems come from the private rental sector."

Discretion

As well as the Trojan technology allowing Nick to get the best evidence possible, he also stressed it was important that they can be in and out of people's homes as quickly as possible. "The rucksack it comes in is great for this," he added. "It is discreet and we can be in and out without arousing suspicion. It's so easy and fast to set up we don't waste time - it does the job of an officer where we can't due to time constraints and not knowing how or when the noise is going to occur."

Of the thousands of cases that cross Nick's desk, the Trojan also helps him and his team to disprove some allegations, ensuring neighbour disputes aren't being blown out of proportion or fabricated.

“ Having a Trojan is like having another officer on the team. ”

"We had one lady who complained that her neighbour was shouting very personal obscenities at her through the walls. We installed the Trojan but when we reviewed the recordings there was nothing there. We could hear the lady moving around and doing jobs so we knew the Trojan was working and in the end we got her help through her GP as it was different kind of support she needed."

The most common complaint that Nick and his team deal with is loud music, followed by loud TVs and computer gaming. "It's a sign of the times," he explained. "Sound systems and TVs are getting more sophisticated and cheaper all the time and a lot of them have speakers at the back or sides and are wall mounted. Teenagers on computer games also just don't realise how loud they are playing when they are caught up in the moment or perhaps playing at times when other people are trying to sleep."

The new Trojan² offers a high quality, high resolution audio recording as standard using a 16bit/16kHz uncompressed WAV file. This gives plenty of frequency range (up to 8kHz) and a wide dynamic range (up to 96dB) so audio recordings can handle both high and low levels with no loss of quality.

"Having a Trojan is like having another officer on the team," concludes Nick. "It's got good displays and downloading the data is very easy. It does everything we want at the end of the day."

What are the main types of noise that the Council deals with?

The types of noise, which people frequently complain about, can be divided into three distinct types:

Domestic Noise: This includes loud music, barking dogs, burglar alarms and late-night parties.

Commercial Noise: This includes factory noise, fan noise, chiller noise, delivery noise, construction site noise and music from pubs and clubs.

Noise in Streets: This includes car alarms, ice cream chimes, machinery operating in the road and the use of loudspeakers - but excludes traffic.

Councils have powers to deal with all of the above noise complaints. There are some additional noise controls that can help to stop or reduce noise from particular sources e.g. loudspeakers in the street, construction sites and night-time noise.

By far the greatest number of complaints received relate to barking dogs. This can be incessant or one off episodes, which can be hard to pinpoint without having a noise enforcement officer on site for a considerable length of time.

Noise complaints from crowing cockerels are also on the increase.

About Cirrus Research

Founded in 1970, Cirrus Research plc is a leading specialist in the development and production of noise measurement instruments. Its latest scientific and technological developments are utilised to produce noise measurement instrumentation equipment to accurately measure noise and its impact.

Cirrus Products used in this case study

- Trojan Noise Nuisance Recorder
- NoiseTools software

(Free with the Trojan Noise Nuisance recorder)

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