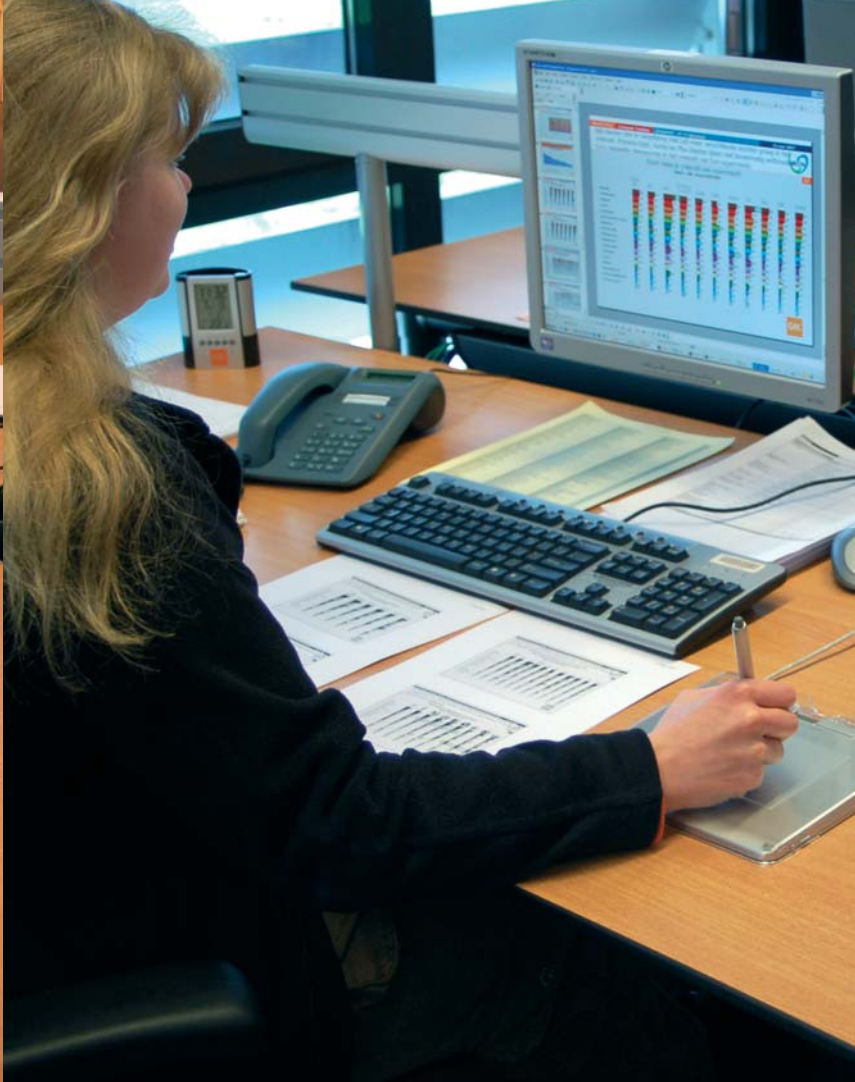


Ergonomics.

GfK prevents Mousearm syndrome with the help of Wacom pen tablets





GfK Benelux: Wacom pen tablets help to prevent RSI

GfK Panel Services Benelux in Dongen in the Dutch province of North Brabant offers consumer research to manufacturers and retailers. Clients include Albert Heijn, one of the leading super-market chains in the Netherlands, Unilever and Campina milk.

Naturally, as thousands of data set are being processed within the company every day, computers are used heavily. Due to this heavy use, employees encountered health problems such as RSI (Repetitive Strain Injury) and other symptoms. Thus, prevention has been an issue at GfK in Dongen for several years - including Wacom pen tablets as an alternative, ergonomic input device.

Especially RSI had been a problem for some departments, mainly the production department. This department is the central gathering point for all data from the 6,000 households in the GfK panel. They represent Dutch consumers and their way of living (and buying). For analysis, GfK uses its own software solution which has been programmed by the corporate headquarters in Nuremberg. Characteristics of the software include a lot of repetitive actions and clicking, movements that increase the risk of RSI. Especially since introducing the software some years ago, RSI figures had grown substantially. Finally, 40 cases of RSI had been recorded internally. In order to prevent an even stronger rise, the ICT department set off to find an alternative to using the mouse at the computer.

Jeroen Peeters, Team Leader Helpdesk, came across pen tablets in the media and read about different studies talking about alternative ergonomic input devices. Thus, he bought several Wacom pen tablets - Graphire3 models at that time - and tested them with some of his users. The results were very positive, especially in conjunction with GfK's software.

Today, more than 100 pen tablets are used at GfK in Dongen. Jeroen Peeters comments: "For us, the pen tablets are an integrated part of the ergonomics concept."

Going through GfK's offices, one can see pen tablets nearly everywhere. The employees are happy with their tablets. Ursula de Wit, Team Leader Dataprocessing & Panel Maintenance, had problems in her shoulder due to heavy use of the computer: "I got the pen tablet from our ICT department. First, I needed some time to get used to it, but today I don't want to miss it. It really helped. I don't have pain in the shoulder any more."

This quote represents GfK's general experience with using pen tablets as alternative input devices. Before the introduction of the pen tablets, 40 cases of RSI were recorded internally. Today, the figures have gone down to zero.

To be sure of the positive effects of using pen tablets, GfK did an internal research with 40 tablet users after a pilot phase. 30 users said they didn't use the mouse any more, only the pen tablet. Some used both input devices in parallel. On a score from 1 to 10, the pen tablet got a rating of 7.9.

Within the GfK group, Dongen is regarded as one of the most innovative offices. Meeuwis Geleijns, Manager ICT infrastructure, is proud of this ranking: "When colleagues from other GfK offices or from our headquarters in Nuremberg come to visit, they are impressed by our status and the energy we put into prevention. Wacom tablets have contributed immensely to this status."

Ursula de Wit: "First, I needed some time to get used to the pen tablet, but today I don't want to miss it. It really helped. I don't have pain in the shoulder any more."



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