

Connecting With the Plantronics MDA200

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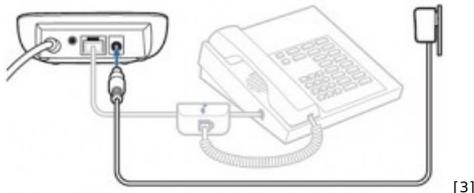
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News Organization:

Talking Pointz

Plantronics MDA200 Lets Enterprises Reduce Headset Costs And Increase User Convenience By Sharing A Single USB Headset Between PCs and Legacy Phones

Headsets are a critical part of successful UC deployments, but since not all UC deployments fully displace the existing enterprise PBX, users sometimes wind up with multiple active headsets on their desk.



One of the trends at this year's Enterprise Connect conference was that more and more enterprises seem to be rolling out Lync in parallel with existing PBXs, and letting their individual users choose which technology they prefer to use for their phone calls. Other enterprises seem to be rolling out Lync for conferencing but are not yet pulling the plug on the enterprise PBX.

That totally resonates with me since last year I was involved in an enterprise deployment of Lync to replace an outsourced audioconference service. Since the enterprise wasn't ready to rollout full-on Enterprise Voice, we emphasized the conferencing part of Lync. The old conferencing service didn't have many features, so employees really liked Lync's one-click conference access, wideband audio quality, participant lists, speaker identification and ease of muting others. The only negative user feedback on the project involved headsets—"why do I need one headset for Lync and another for my phone?"

I totally shared their frustration about needing to switch headsets depending on call type. Since that time, I've wondered why there wasn't an easy way to share a USB headset between a user's PC and legacy office phone.

Well, it turns out Plantronics has a gadget that does just that, so I was very happy when Dave Michels and Plantronics gave me the opportunity to review the MDA200.

I found it to be pretty much plug and play. Simply press the phone icon when you need to use the headset for your phone, and press the PC icon when you need the headset for your PC.

When I first started using the unit, I did have a problem with a slight echo of my own voice in the telephone mode so I wanted to verify that my Plantronics Blackwire 620 USB headset was compatible with the MDA200. I somehow couldn't find that information in the Plantronics Support Knowledge Base, so I submitted a ticket to Plantronics using their "Ask Us A Question" web form.

There was some inconsistency in the response time expectations that Plantronics set for me. While the web form indicated "we will respond within one day," the confirmation email from Plantronics indicated that a "representative will respond to your request in about one business day." The actual response came almost 2 business days later.

My headset turned out to be compatible but apparently others had experienced the echo problem also, since earlier this year, Plantronics published a "Configuration Best Practices For The MDA200" guide that provided some helpful suggestions. For the Avaya 4620SW and 9630G phones I tested with, I didn't need to tweak the slide control on the bottom (labeled "A" to "G") that represents the integration type. However, I wound up slightly adjusting the other two dials that control transmit and receive volume to resolve the echo problem.

After using the MDA200 pretty much daily for over a month with my Plantronics USB headset, I have to say this is a very convenient and well-designed gadget. I was able to enjoy high quality voice from my telephone and use PC-based audio communications (including webinars) using a single headset.

It's a great fit for enterprises that are rolling out UC but aren't fully committed to it just yet. Instead of buying users a USB headset for their PC and a separate PBX telephony-only headset and adapter (or adapter cord), you can buy them this device along with a high-quality USB headset. This gives the enterprise lower cost, and increases user satisfaction.

Additionally, enterprises that haven't rolled out UC yet but think they might can increase their future UC readiness by buying this device today (instead of a traditional telephone-only headset).

The only mystery to me about the MDA200 is why Plantronics didn't feature it at the recent Enterprise Connect show floor along with the dozens of other devices they had there. Although the friendly Plantronics rep was familiar with it, she couldn't explain its absence from the show.

Here are some more details:

The MDA200 has the following connections:

- USB plug on 3' cord (to connect to PC or docking station)
- 21" cord with a modular headset/handset plug on the end (to connect to jack on telephone) and a headset/handset inline jack located 8" from the headset plug (to connect the telephone handset if a separate headset jack isn't provided on the phone)
- USB jack (to plug in your USB headset)
- Power jack (used for power supply for optional HL10 handset lifter)
- Jack for handset lifter or electronic hookswitch (EHS) cable

MDA200 advantages:

- Low cost (\$129.95 list / \$86.49 current street price)
- Small size (3.75" length x 3.75" width x 0.75" height) takes up little desktop real estate
- Easy setup
- No degradation of voice quality
- Can be used with many Plantronics wired and wireless USB headsets (including their older Voyager Pro and newer Voyager Legend UC Bluetooth models)
- Avoids the use of an expensive telephone-only headset and adapter
- Lets users rely on one headset for legacy phone and PC needs
- Bright LED indicators with icons show if adapter is in PC or phone headset mode
- Uses USB power from PC so no batteries or AC adapter required
- Modern glossy black finish.

MDA200 disadvantages:

- Due to limited cable length, may require some rearranging of users' desks if PC and phone are more than 4' apart
- Glossy black finish accumulates some fingerprints (but still looks good)
- Requires use of a Plantronics USB headset (but since users need a high quality USB headset for UC anyway, I don't see that as a deal breaker)
- Not compatible with every Plantronics USB headset
- Needs power from the PC (via the USB cable) for the phone headset functionality to work (can be an issue if the PC is rebooted, missing, or not yet powered up, but the handset is always available under those conditions)

Available Accessories: (not tested)

- Electronic Hookswitch (EHS) cable to take a compatible legacy phone off-hook electronically when the phone button is pressed on the MDA200
- HL10 handset lifter to enable call answer/end with the headset controls (if an EHS integration isn't available)
- AC Power Supply (required when using the HL10 lifter)
- On Line Indicator (OLI) to let others know you are on a call
- USB Extension Cable (extends distance that MDA200 can be placed from PC).

Language:

English

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