

NEWS

What is said at the front desk stays at the front desk

23 July 2026, Tobias Engl



The reception desk at a family doctor's office is a public space. Health insurance cards, dates of birth, the reason for the visit - much of this information is spoken aloud while eight chairs behind the desk are occupied. A group practice specializing in internal medicine faced exactly this problem and solved it without having to remodel the reception area.

The Starting Point. The counter was open to the waiting area, with less than four meters between them. Anyone who wanted to could eavesdrop. Most of the time, no one wanted to, but everyone still picked up on something. In practice, this was more than just uncomfortable. Health data falls into the most sensitive category recognized by data protection law, and the duty of confidentiality doesn't end at the front edge of the counter. A partition or a second counter wasn't feasible due to space constraints and the historic preservation status of the old building.

The procedure. A (ScreenWay) display was already hanging above the reception desk, showing wait numbers and announcements. Its speaker took on a second task. It now plays a soft, broadband soundscape tuned precisely to the frequency band in which speech becomes intelligible. Right at the counter, you can understand every word. Three meters away, the speech breaks down into a murmur from which no information can be made out. This was set up in a single morning, without any new hardware and without running cables through the old building.

The result. The conversations at the reception desk stayed where they belong. Since then, anyone sitting in the waiting area hears a steady, unobtrusive hum that most people stop noticing after a few minutes. The practice manager reports that requests for more privacy have disappeared, and the data protection officer has removed the reception area from his list of deficiencies.

Discretion at the reception desk isn't a matter of architecture. It's a matter of what the room does with sound. A screen that's already mounted on the wall can handle that.