

ASK THE EXPERTS: HOW FITTING WIDEX IMPROVES THE HEARING CARE PROFESSIONAL'S CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

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The hearing aid industry is in many ways rather undifferentiated, with many products that look alike and provide comparable functions and benefits, and with manufacturers that operate in similar ways. In this market, Widex nevertheless stands out with its unique approach to signal processing, which optimizes the sound quality and thereby confers a range of benefits, including more robust neural representation (Slugocki et al., 2020), better spatial perception (Korhonen et al., 2022), and higher satisfaction in noise (Balling et al., 2021a, 2021b).

While all these benefits affect the wearer, there are also important benefits that relate more to the hearing care professional's (HCP) daily practice and ability to run an efficient business. These benefits were investigated in a survey of 246 audiologists and licensed hearing aid dispensers. While, as expected, the survey revealed many similarities between major hearing aid brands, it also showed Widex standing out on several parameters related to the HCP's clinical experience and success in dispensing hearing aids.

DESIGN

The survey was designed by the independent research consultancy Heart+Mind Strategies to investigate HCPs' perceptions of the six major hearing aid brands on the US market. The survey included questions about all brands on purchasing behaviors, time burden, and selected product characteristics, with some additional questions on specific Widex features for which HCP perception is particularly important.

PARTICIPANTS

The 246 participants in the survey were all audiologists or licensed hearing aid dispensers; in the following, we will refer to these two categories jointly as hearing care professionals or HCPs. They all worked with hearing aid dispensing in independent hearing centers in the US: 100 of them were owners of their hearing center, while 146 were non-owners. Recruitment was restricted to those with at least two years of experience in practice, and the respondents in the sample had a mean of 16 years of experience.

All participants dispensed more than one brand of hearing aid. For 148 participants, Widex was one of the brands dispensed, while the number of participants dispensing the other five major brands ranged from 156 to 196. The ratings reported in this paper for a given brand come only from the HCPs dispensing that brand.

PROCEDURE

Participants were recruited by telephone and email by Charter Oak Research. Both online and telephone options to complete the survey were offered. The survey took about 20 minutes to complete and was conducted in February 2023.

SOLUTIONS FOR A THRIVING HEARING CARE PRACTICE

The survey investigated several questions that are important for building a strong hearing care practice,



Figure 1: Mean number of first-time users who trial hearing aids from each of the six major brands without purchasing the hearing aid after the trial. Widex has the lowest mean estimate, indicating that fewer first-time users return their hearing aids after the trial.

focusing on two key issues, namely the **return rates** and the **number of follow-ups**. If both are low, the given brand supports HCP efficiency, which in turn enables the HCP to run a thriving hearing care practice and help more people.

Looking first at the return rates, the survey asked about this in two different ways. First, specifically for first-time wearers, the question was which proportion of them trialed hearing aids and ended up not keeping them. Here, the Widex **rejection rate for first-time wearers at 21% is lower than for all other brands**, which range between 23% and 26%, as seen in Figure 1. Although these are relatively small differences, the Widex advantage is still likely to have an impact because first-time fittings are time-consuming, time that is wasted for both HCP and wearer if it does not result in a purchase. This means that even a small advantage in the rejection rate can help reduce the cost of “acquiring” new, loyal customers for the practice.

Second, the survey also looked beyond first-time wearers by asking HCPs to indicate **how often patients request to switch from each brand to some other brand**. Here **Widex also scores better than all the other brands**, as illustrated in Figure 2, with a score that is significantly lower than for brands B through E. (The difference to brand A is not statistically significant.) The scores in Figure 2 are weighted by how many hearing aids the HCP distributes for each brand, in order to make the monthly requests comparable across brands.

Together, these results are relevant for two aspects that are central to a thriving hearing care practice, namely converting potential first-time hearing aid wearers to happy and loyal customers and spending HCP time on fittings that turn out to be successful. The survey results show how Widex may support both aspects: Firstly, respondents indicated that Widex has **the lowest rejection rate** among first-time wearers, which should help the HCP grow their business

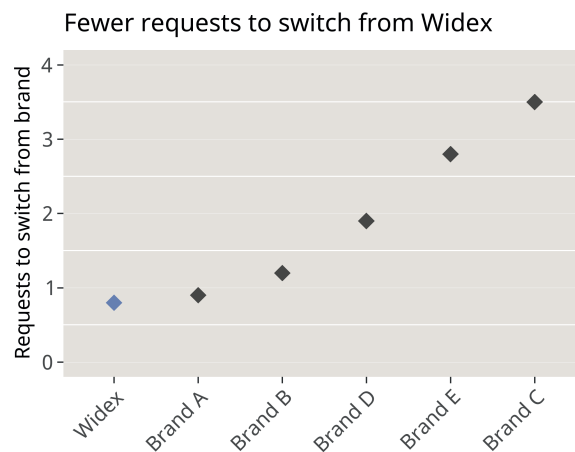


Figure 2: Mean monthly requests to switch away from each brand, weighted by brand volume as indicated by the individual HCP.

among this important group. Secondly, respondents indicated **a lower number of requests to switch away from Widex than from any other brand**, which means that, with Widex, HCPs will get a lower return rate and spend less time on fittings that turn out to be useless because the hearing aid wearer ends up requesting a switch to a different brand.

The second important parameter is the number of follow-ups needed for each brand. Figure 3 shows the frequency of follow-ups required post-fitting. This figure is based on the responses to two questions:

The number of follow-ups required during the trial period and the number of follow-ups required after the trial period but within six months of the initial fitting. On both questions, **Widex leads with the**

lowest number of follow-ups. Combining the two questions gives a good view of the number of follow-ups that is necessary while the wearer acclimatizes to their new hearing aid. The figure shows that the number of appointments is typically between three and four, with Widex having the lowest number estimated by respondents.

A low number of follow-ups has two implications: The direct implication is of course that less time spent on follow-ups means more time for other important tasks, including counselling and fitting new wearers. More indirectly, wearers who request fewer follow-ups for a brand are also likely to be happier with that brand and with the service they are getting from their HCP. This in turn may result in more word-of-mouth referrals for the practice fitting Widex.

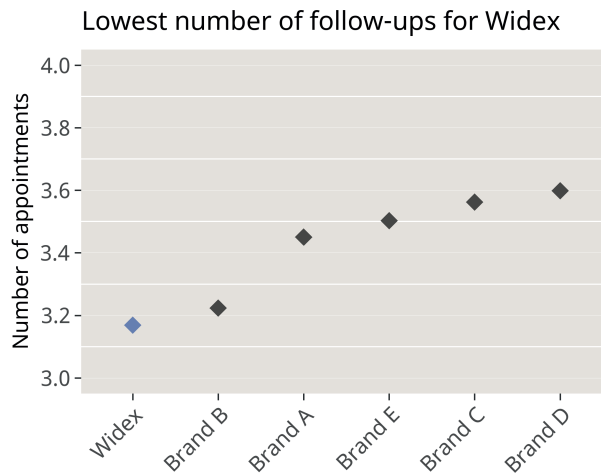


Figure 3: Mean number of follow-up appointments within six months of fitting for the six major brands investigated in the survey.

SATISFACTION WITH WIDEX FEATURES

In addition to the questions comparing brands, the survey also included a range of questions that addressed specific Widex features. These questions were of course only asked of the 148 respondents who indicated that they fitted Widex hearing aids. Satisfaction with specific features was only asked of those HCPs who indicated that they were familiar with the feature in question.

Three important Widex features stand out, with familiarity ratings above 85% among Widex HCPs. The first of these is Widex PureSound™, which is a program in the Widex Moment™ hearing aids in which signal processing delay has been minimized in order to avoid the artifacts that are characteristic of other

hearing aids on the market. This optimizes the sound quality for wearers with mild-to-moderate hearing loss and is likely a key contributor to the lowest rejection rate among first-time wearers indicated in the survey (see Figure 1). More than three-quarters of all HCPs indicated extremely or very high satisfaction with this feature (see Figure 4).

The second key feature is the Sensogram, which has been an important step in the Widex fitting process since it was introduced as the first in-situ measurement of hearing thresholds in the industry. With the Sensogram, the HCP can measure hearing thresholds with the hearing aid in the ear and using the transducer through which real-life sounds will be conveyed. This provides a more realistic image of the individual wearer’s hearing, instead of relying on the averages that audiometric equipment uses. Although

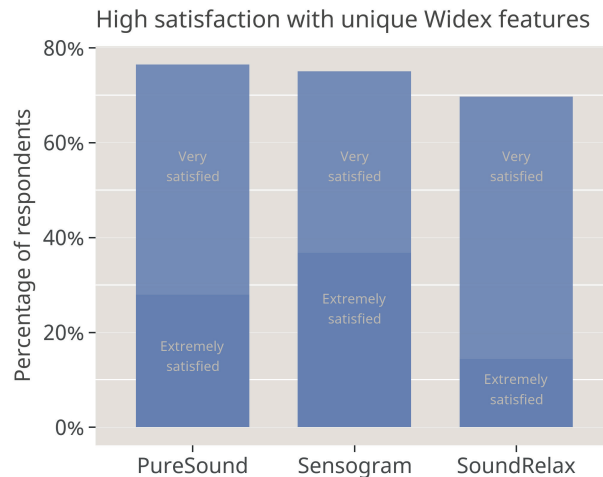


Figure 4: Ratings of specific Widex features from HCPs that are familiar with those features (n = 136 for PureSound, 128 for Sensogram, and 132 for Widex SoundRelax).

the Sensogram does require a little time in the initial fitting, HCP satisfaction with it is high, with 75% saying that they are very or extremely satisfied (see Figure 4). The Sensogram could be contributing to the leading position of Widex with the lowest number of necessary follow-ups (see Figure 3) by making the initial fitting more individualized.

Finally, the third key feature is Widex SoundRelax™, the newest generation of the Widex fractal sounds, which are well-established as sound therapy for tinnitus treatment (see, for instance, Balslev, 2017). The Widex SoundRelax sounds are chime-like melodies and wave sounds that never repeat exactly and therefore remain efficient for tinnitus treatment. The sounds are also useful for the wearer who wants to promote relaxation and manage stress. Although it builds on a long legacy and a strong research foundation, the updated feature and its name are relatively new, making it impressive to see that 89% of Widex HCPs are familiar with the feature and that 70% of them are very or extremely satisfied (see Figure 4).

WHY CHOOSE WIDEX FIRST – AND FOR WHOM?

The leading position on rejection rates and follow-up visits presented above provides a strong case for fitting Widex hearing aids first – but the question of which patients to start with might arise. Here, some clearly defined groups stand out:

- **First-time hearing aid wearers** are the obvious choice based on the current data, because of the low rejection rate for this group indicated

in the survey. Looking more specifically at the products, the PureSound™ program in Widex Moment™ has a sound that is optimized specifically for users with mild-to-moderate loss, who are likely to be first-time users. Among other things, the artifact-free sound (Balling, Mosgaard, et al., 2022), better spatial experience (Balling et al., 2021a; Korhonen et al., 2022), and more natural own voice (Balling et al., 2021a) may help first-time users habituate to the sound and get the best start on their prescriptive hearing aid journey.

- Another group of wearers to start fitting with Widex are **those who prioritize convenience and efficiency** in the delivery of hearing care, since the HCPs in the survey indicate that there are fewer follow-up visits with Widex. This finding is likely to be partly supported by the in-situ individualization of the fitting with TruAcoustics and the Sensogram in the clinic, as well as by the wearer's ability to personalize the sound in their everyday life by using the AI-based personalization with MySound in the Moment app.
- With a long history of excellence in tinnitus treatment, Widex is also a great choice for **patients with tinnitus or those looking for help to relax and reduce stress**. The Widex SoundRelax sounds have proven effective as tinnitus treatment (Balling et al., 2023) and have also been rated highly for relaxation, concentration, and well-being (Balling, Caporali, et al., 2022).

- **Music lovers** is another obvious group of candidates for a Widex fitting. It is important to remember that this should not be limited to professional musicians but includes the **broader group of people from all walks of life who simply enjoy music** and should be given a chance to connect and feel the music again, even though they need hearing aids. In the current survey, music quality stands out as a parameter on which respondents are most satisfied with Widex among all brands. The top-three satisfaction ratings for music quality on a 10-point scale are given by 66% of Widex HCPs, compared to between 45% and 61% for other brands. This confirms the reputation that Widex has among HCPs as the go-to brand for music.

Although these groups are among the most obvious candidates for an HCP's first Widex fitting, it is central not to see this list as limiting Widex to specific patient groups. On the contrary, there is plenty of research indicating the benefits of the Widex sound for a broad spectrum of users. For instance, Balling et al. (2021b) found that a broad group of 101 users were highly satisfied with their Widex devices and rated their ability to participate in daily life higher with Widex Moment than with other hearing aids.

CONCLUSION

Widex stands out in the hearing aid market with its unique sound philosophy and, as evidenced by this survey, a range of advantages in terms of running an efficient hearing care practice and helping more people hear. With a lower return rate and fewer follow-ups, the HCP who fits Widex can waste less time and use that time for other potential hearing aid wearers. Several specific Widex features are rated highly in the survey, but the clinical benefits of fitting Widex hearing aids are not limited to these features. They also offer attractive all-round solutions including hearing aids, fitting software, end-user apps, and HCP support, providing the Widex wearer with a sound like no other.

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