



CASE STUDY  
**Benco Dental**

Increases Sales Per Call 728% with Proton

Benco Dental's success with Proton can be attributed to stakeholder alignment, a phased approach to adoption, and ease of use and implementation of the AI-powered sales solution.

## The Challenge

Benco Dental, founded in 1930, is the largest privately owned and fastest-growing distributor of dental supplies and equipment in the United States. In a world where customers are increasingly demanding a seamless experience across sales channels, Benco was facing challenges that could only be solved with the help of AI:

**eCommerce:** Benco wanted to guide customers to the products they actually need and follow through with a great delivery experience online. Most eCommerce personalization tools are designed for B2C websites and take a reductive approach (for example, they only factor in eCommerce data to make a product recommendation, or they make recommendations that are not targeted at the specific buyer that's logged in). This approach isn't sufficient for a distributor's multichannel business model, and Benco was feeling that pain.

**Customer service and inside sales:** Customers' needs were slipping through the cracks and reps were missing sales opportunities. Both CSRs and ISRs were taking a reactive approach to selling - asking questions like "is there anything else I can add to your order?" or catch-alls like "there's a buy 2, get 1 free promotion on gloves this week - do you need gloves?". Benco wanted to transition these reps from passive order-takers into proactive order-makers, which would represent a shift from a cost center into a profit center.

**Company:** Benco Dental

**Location:** Pittston, Pennsylvania

**Industry:** Dental supplies distributor

**Proton solutions:** ecommerce, customer service, inside sales, outside sales

**Employees:** 1,500

**Website:** benco.com



**Outside sales:** Nearly 30% of the 300,000 products Benco Dental sells were introduced in the past three years. In this high-volume, high-SKU fast-changing selling environment, outside sales reps weren't equipped with the visibility and access to data they needed to confidently pitch new products or respond to customer needs or questions quickly. As Chief Revenue Officer Katy Cohen said: "If we could figure out a way to feed our reps information about their customers without them having to go search for it, they'd be able to act upon it faster and become more efficient."

"When we identified that Proton could deliver the AI models we knew we needed at a substantially reduced cost from us having to build a team internally and develop it custom, that was really compelling," said Benco Dental's Chief Information Officer Mike Burns. "And certainly, the fact that they have distribution experience and understand the problems that we're trying to solve was also very helpful."

## The Solution

Benco Dental took a phased approach to implement Proton's AI-powered solutions:

### Proton for eCommerce

Benco started by embedding Proton's AI-generated personalized product recommendations throughout its ecommerce website. "I think that one is probably a good place for a new distributor to start because there is essentially zero change management. You can demonstrate the results and the veracity of the models and that gives you ammunition as you start changing the tools that the sales reps use," Burns said.

Proton personalized Benco's online buying experience, making it easy for their customers to find what they need online with semantic/keyword search, reorder reminders, substitute or switch and save product recommendations, cross-selling recommendations, and complete the cart ideas that are tailored to the exact customer that's currently shopping. The tool also connects the dots between

human and digital channels by tracking what customers are browsing online and sharing that information with the reps that manage the account.

**Result:** In 2020, Benco attributed an incremental \$2.7 million of ecommerce revenue to Proton's "similar products" artificial intelligence model alone. The results significantly outperformed the approach Benco had taken when they tried to build a substitute product model internally, proving the value of a neural network AI approach to solving sales challenges.

### Proton for Customer Service

Benco fields 10% of its orders through phone and email. With a simple web app designed for customer service reps, Proton's tool provides real-time reorder and add-on product recommendations, and a simpler workflow for pitching during phone and email conversations.

For example, when a customer calls in and wants to place an order for bite trays, the call center reps can say, "Great! I'm also looking at your account and suspect you might be due to reorder gloves and bibs soon. Would you like to add either of those to your order?"

**Result:** In the first half of 2021, Benco customer service reps generated roughly \$250,000 in attributed revenue through Proton add-on product recommendations--transforming this team from a cost center into a revenue generator!

### Proton for Inside and Outside Sales

Proton's solution for inside sales tells reps who to call and what to sell. Benco's reps now leverage an AI-generated account prioritization list to ensure they call customers with the highest revenue impact potential. The list helps reps stay on top of over 150 accounts each, and prevent churn by flagging customers that demonstrate at-risk purchasing behaviors; the solution also helps drive more strategic conversations with customers.

"Proton made it easy and seamless. I'd say the part



that really clicked for the inside sales reps was they were able to use one unified platform for product information, CRM and calling lists. Previously they had to use multiple tools. It removed a lot of friction and allowed them to more easily be compliant in tracking who they talked to, about what and the follow-up steps,” Burns said.

To bring the solution full-circle, Benco recently rolled out Proton’s solution to its 346 outside sales reps, a group that has historically been difficult to reach with new technology.

Benco’s outside sales reps now use a single mobile and web app to tap into customer potential at their fingertips. The app gives them the information they need when they need it - like product data, order history, sales trends, and searchable sell sheets. It also enables cross-channel visibility, task management, as well as sales opportunity management.

“In just two minutes in the car before they go into a dental office, sales reps can quickly skim through the app and see everything going on with that customer, and that knowledge is powerful when they engage with their customers,” Katy Cohen said.

One Outside Sales Rep told Proton: “I’m kind of obsessed with the fact that I could look up an article for somebody or look up product information right there. The amount of time that has saved me is insane.”

Another Outside Sales Rep told Proton: “I won an entirely new category of business from one of my customers because I referenced a product they had recently browsed online during one of my site visits.”

**Result:** On average, Benco is earning \$7.21 in incremental revenue for every single Proton pitch recommendation made by a sales rep. That’s up from \$0.99 per pitch before Proton, an increase of 728%. By using Proton, Benco customers are getting targeted recommendations that are relevant to them instead of just company-wide promotional efforts.

## Why Benco Was Successful with Proton

While Benco did experience a dip in ecommerce revenue from COVID-19, it returned to pre-pandemic weekly levels in just three months. They experienced higher totals in June and July 2020 than in December of the previous year. They attributed this success in part to Proton.

They attribute their success to:

### Complexity of the recommendation engine:

Proton’s solutions are designed exclusively for B2B distributors, so the system pulls in data from every sales channel and every relevant system to make better predictions about what a customer needs. It’s cost prohibitive for a distributor to build neural network AI in-house, and a simplistic or off the shelf recommendation engine won’t have the same impact.

**Stakeholder alignment:** Research shows executive buy-in is critical to success with any technology implementation. Benco has historically invested early and often in technology, and it was no different with Proton. Benco’s leaders recognized the impact Proton’s technology would have on their business, and drove the change throughout the organization.

**Ease of use:** Because Proton is built specifically for distributors (high SKU, omni-channel B2B selling environments), the AI-driven recommendations are surfaced in an actionable way that makes it easy for reps and customers to find what they need.

**A phased approach:** Proton was able to show the results of applying AI to ecommerce (a substantial increase in revenue per customer) to its reps to demonstrate how it could help their sales efforts. “When we introduced Proton to our sales reps, it wasn’t ‘Hey, here’s this new thing. We hope it works.’ We said, ‘These are the same kind of models we use in Benco.com, which have demonstrated these verifiable results. This will help you sell more and make more commissions,’” Burns said.



“As a leader, I’m very results-oriented. This wouldn’t have progressed the way it has within Benco if Proton hadn’t delivered the results. So, I honestly started off kind of skeptical. But we started on e-commerce, and they proved it works. Then we moved on to the next phase. They proved it works. Our entire experience with Proton has been results-driven and they have earned their way into our business based on the results from each prior phase. And that is how we plan to continue working with them,” Burns said.



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