

# You heard it here first

## Neil Winton on the next big thing in voice recognition software

After many years of promise and frustration, voice recognition software is now bearing fruit and can save all but the fastest typist hours of time. With the increased memory and power that personal computers now offer, voice recognition software can deliver much higher quality and consistent results for anyone who has to transcribe their thoughts into written form.

Speech recognition is one of the PC's magic technologies – the ability to control your machine using nothing but the power of your voice. Most people speak at more than 160 words a minute, but type fewer than 40 words a minute.

So, a good voice recognition system will result in higher productivity, less reliance on support staff, and lower costs. There is no longer any need for a touch typist, leaving your assistants available to take on other responsibilities. It can speed up routine tasks on the PC, such as creating documents, entering data, launching applications, sending emails, completing forms, and browsing the internet.

Teaching the computer to recognise your voice takes less than 10 minutes, with the user reading a text that creates a voice file and will accommodate even the broadest of accents and dialects.

It is not even necessary to purchase expensive legal and medical specialist vocabularies. Simply by choosing a selection of your existing text documents, voice recognition software can scan your documents to analyse your writing style. Unknown words are identified and the author can then choose those they would like to add. This builds a new language model, improving accuracy even further.

The best known software comes from

Dragon, whose latest offering, Naturally Speaking V8, is the most accurate and easy-to-use speech recognition system so far. Version 8's improved speech engine is up to 20% more accurate than Version 7.

Dragon's vocabulary editor allows you to add additional specialist words, phrases and abbreviations at any time. Even frequently used blocks of text, including precedents, can be inserted with one-phrase commands. With built-in natural commands, what could be easier than to say "open Microsoft Word - end of line - save file - print file - insert a 7x5 table"? You can voice command your email too with "open mail", "reply to mail", "send mail" and many more.

Editing is just as easy with simple commands like "delete previous three words", "insert before (or after)", "bold", "underline", and "select paragraph".

Voice recognition can be used with every type of microphone. This includes desktop array microphones, and hand-held microphones, such as Philips SpeechMike with its built-in rollerball mouse and programmable buttons.

Many people prefer lightweight headset microphones, a number of which have excellent noise cancelling qualities. Perhaps the most exciting of them all is a new Bluetooth microphone, similar to those used with mobile phones, but specially developed for voice recognition.

The X-Communicator3® is a wireless headset that means you aren't tethered to the desk by the normal microphone cable and offers both high quality input and a high sampling rate. The specially commissioned USB adapter allows any PC or Notebook with a USB port to communicate with Bluetooth® technology



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devices.

Voice recognition can even be coupled with digital dictation recorders – particularly accurate are the Philips 9350 and the Olympus DS-4000 digital recorders.

It's easy to have Dragon NaturallySpeaking automatically transcribe recorded dictations when you synchronise with your PC. You can dictate on the move, away from the office, and have Dragon transcribe your sound files on your return. Even long recordings will soon appear as text. Any word or phrase that appears to be inaccurate can quickly be corrected by highlighting the problem and Dragon will playback, in the author's voice, exactly what has been dictated so you can correct it.

There's no real competition to Dragon voice recognition software. Lernout & Hauspie and Philips no longer produce packages, while ScanSoft (manufactures of Dragon) are also responsible for marketing IBM's ViaVoice, the present version being some two years old, and future versions of ViaVoice seem uncertain.

Speech recognition is not for everyone, but with support for everything from dictation machines to professional language databases, it should be an essential office tool. Using voice recognition to its full potential does require both effort and practice, but most people are surprised at how quickly they become fluent. The other advantage of voice recognition software – it doesn't argue with you! +