

Business & Careers

Digital dictation software becoming the norm



Luigi Benetton
Hi-Tech

Several years ago, Mark Davis was preparing for a trial over the Christmas holidays. He was the only one in the office, and didn't have an assistant to transcribe recordings from his digital voice recorder. So he strolled to a nearby electronics outlet, bought Dragon Naturally Speaking, and put it to work.

"I was able to quickly start



MASAHIRONAKANO / ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

using it," says the partner at Heenan Blaikie of his purchase, which he also uses with Micro-

soft's Outlook and Word programs.

That quick start Davis enjoyed

is becoming the norm in the voice-recognition software market. Ease of use and an expanding

repertoire of features characterize the voice-driven tools people buy to lessen the amount of time they spend writing.

Jeff Mitchell once used BigHand Dictation but he has since switched to Dragon as well. His use of the system has spread beyond e-mail and letters. "I use it a fair bit to brainstorm, to prepare for a trial, to list things I want to ask—to do a brain dump," says the partner at Dentons Canada.

Mitchell didn't enjoy quite the quick start that Davis did. In his experience, it takes two "painful" weeks to train Dragon, during which his productivity took a hit. Since then, though, he claims he has saved plenty of time when he **Speech, Page 26**

ANNOUNCEMENTS



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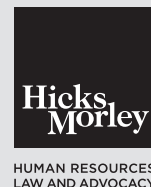
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ONE FOR ALL

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Business & Careers

Speech: Not perfect, but programs can help save time

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writes using a microphone instead of a keyboard.

David Paul has been using digital dictation technology for about 15 years. Dislike for the recording technology of the time — tapes — drove the Kamloops, B.C.-based lawyer and mediator to early-adopter status.

“You have to physically bring tapes into the office, hope you don’t lose them in the meantime and hope that they don’t break or stretch or lose the ability to properly record,” Paul says, noting that the media used by digital dictation machines don’t break down after repeated use.

When voice-dictation software first came out, Paul “dropped close to \$7,000 to buy a computer that was powerful enough to run a program called LawTALK,” he says. He remembers not being able to speak naturally when he used it. He had to break...up...his...words.

Paul now uses a Philips SpeechMike, a Pocket Memo recorder and the SpeechExec software that Philips bundled with the recorder. He did once use a USB

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I use it a fair bit to brainstorm, to prepare for a trial, to list things I want to ask – to do a brain dump.

Jeff Mitchell
Dentons Canada

microphone that connected to his computer, but he switched to the wireless model. “You don’t have an extra wire dangling from your computer, crossing the paperwork on your desk,” he says.

Paul also transcribes recordings using Dragon. He buys each update (usually waiting for promotional pricing), since he claims it’s become more accurate over the years.

“Training” the software to recognize his voice takes Paul about an hour with each new update. Paul reads speeches included with Dragon to recognize his voices, but he also has the system read things he’s writ-

ten, like precedents and e-mails, to pick up “those expressions that might not already be in the Dragon Dictate engine already.”

“Most of us use the same vocabulary each day,” he explains.

Dragon may rule voice dictation on desktops, but other systems help people talk to their phones. Davis, for instance, uses Siri on his iPhone. He appreciates its hands-free abilities in the car, but he limits his usage. “I don’t trust it with confidential information,” he says.

Paul remembers that Philips once marketed a product that worked on a BlackBerry, “and I think that’s an ideal solution,” he says. “You do your dictation on your phone, which has a connection to the Internet, so you can send the file for transcription and have it back quickly.”

Paul also trumpets the free Dragon Dictate product for iPad. “It works remarkably well without any training,” he says.

Usage of these software tools varies, depending on the type of device they’re used on. Paul, for example, uses the integrated microphone in his iPad but he recommends getting an external microphone when using a computer. This makes particular sense when a laptop’s microphone sits near spinning hard disks and fans, the noise of which can obscure the voice being recorded.

This class of software enables both transcription (live voice or recorded file) and control of the hardware it resides on. On

their computers, Davis, Paul and Mitchell all use Dragon for dictation but not to control the computer. “I’ve watched their video showing how to control the computer, but I can do it faster using my mouse,” Davis says.

On phones, however, voice control can speed up the creation of e-mails as well as the use of the phone’s software. “It’s slow,” Davis admits, “but it’s faster than me typing on my iPhone.”

If you use transcription software on recordings where two or more people talk, your mileage may vary. “It’s not perfect,” Davis says, “but as an initial quick-and-dirty, it’s helpful.”

For all the convenience of voice-recognition software, sometimes it just makes sense to type. Davis, for instance, types when he can keep his gaze on the screen, and dictates when referring to documents that take his eyes away from the screen. “The most valuable high school course I ever took was Grade 9 typing,” he quips.

Mitchell would not use the technology in a public environment, since he doesn’t want people overhearing potentially confidential information. He also “wouldn’t use it in documents that require a lot of formatting” and that include things like charts.

The software doesn’t always respond the way a user expects. Davis calls his software “a little too intuitive. I’d rather it didn’t guess at what I was asking it to do but just did what I told it to do.”

“If you dictate and you use words like ‘file’ or ‘save,’ it thinks you’re giving the computer a command instead of just dictating a word,” he explains.

Paul points to the fact that recorded voices are always clearer than the sometimes sketchy “chicken scratch” on legal pads that lawyers hand to people to type. Clearer understanding of a lawyer’s words makes assistants more efficient, he says.



TWO JUDICIAL VACANCIES ONTARIO COURT OF JUSTICE NEWMARKET

The Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee advises the Attorney General of Ontario on the appointment of Judges to the Ontario Court of Justice, and invites applications for two judicial positions in Newmarket.

These appointments involve presiding over criminal law matters and also involve travel within the regional boundaries as assigned by the Regional Senior Justice and/or the Chief Justice.

The minimum requirement to apply to be a Judge in the Ontario Court of Justice is **ten years completed** membership as a barrister and solicitor at the Bar of one of the Provinces or Territories of Canada.

All candidates must apply either by submitting 14 copies of the **current (Nov 2011)** completed Judicial Candidate Information Form in the first instance or by a short letter (14 copies) if the current form has been submitted within the **previous 12 months**. **Should you wish to change any information in your application, you must send in 14 copies of a fully revised Judicial Candidate Information Form.**

If you wish to apply and need a current Judicial Candidate Information Form, or if you would like further information, please contact:

Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee
Tel: (416) 326-4060. Fax: (416) 212-7316
Website: www.ontariocourts.ca/ocj/jaac/

All applications, either sent by courier, mail or hand delivery, **must** be sent to:

Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee
c/o Ministry of Government Services Mail Delivery
77 Wellesley Street West, Room M2B-88
Macdonald Block, Queen’s Park
Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1N3

Applications must be on the current prescribed form and must be **TYPEWRITTEN or COMPUTER GENERATED and RECEIVED BY 4:30 p.m. on Friday, February 7, 2014. CANDIDATES ARE REQUIRED TO PROVIDE 14 COPIES OF THEIR APPLICATION FORM OR LETTER.** A Fax copy will be accepted only if 14 copies of the application or letter are sent concurrently by overnight courier. Applications received after this date **WILL NOT** be considered.

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