

Speech Recognition: The Emperor's New Clothes?

EDITOR'S NOTE: We've received many written and verbal responses to Jim Eidelman's speech recognition article, "Talk to Your Computer" (November/December 1998). Some are positive, like the e-mail memo describing the article as "excellent and comprehensive." Others question the practicality of speech recognition technology in law practice.

Jay Foonberg, author of *How to Start and Build a Law Practice*, called Jim to say he just couldn't get Dragon's software to work well. Moreover, he said when he teaches CLE programs, he asks two questions about speech recognition. In response to the first—"How many of you have tried speech recognition?"—lots of hands go up. In response to the second—"How many of you are using speech recognition?"—no hands go up.

Rick Rodgers, a legal technology pioneer, had this to say:

At the risk of appearing like the little boy on the street in "The Emperor's New Clothes," I'd like to offer and second an opinion published in this month's *Scientific American*.

"Every year must have its wildly overhyped 'breakthrough'; the award for 1998 clearly goes to dictation software—or, as its promoters grandly call it, 'speech-recognition technology.' Dictation programs rival Salad-Shooters for the title of all-time champion in the 'unwieldy-solution-to-an-insignificant-problem' category."

The article cites three reasons that "...prevent dictation software from

EVER [Rick's emphasis] serving an audience much beyond the small fraction of people who cannot use keyboards."

Rick went on to confirm that he had successfully trained the computer to recognize and type his dictation (even with his southern accent), but also said he never has used it in production.

The Author Responds

Perhaps my article painted too rosy a picture. Indeed, I agree that current speech recognition software will generally fail to improve the productivity of either an attorney who is a fast typist or an attorney who combines good dictation skills with a good secretary.

However, there are many attorneys who do use the software successfully. The key for most is to focus on the increased effectiveness of the secretary, not the lawyer. If you use the software in batch/mobile mode, a secretary can correct the dictation in one-fourth the time it would take to transcribe a tape. The Dictaphone and SpeechLaw solutions are particularly good for this. The lawyer dictates as he or she always has, without losing productivity, and the secretary (possibly with a foot pedal) scans through the text of the document, listening to the lawyer's dictation, quickly making corrections. And whether you make your own corrections or your secretary does, you'll get faster turnaround.

And many attorneys successfully work interactively with Dragon or other software, making the most of their own corrections. It takes practice, commitment and the right combination of hardware and software, but it can work well for you. Try it in batch mode if you have a good secretary, and in interactive mode if you like to compose text by dictating and your secretary is like Murphy Brown's.

As I said, I like using the software to dictate time records, e-mail replies and database entries, in addition to letters and long documents.

And some updated information: (1) The Dictaphone Boomerang products are excellent. (2) To correct an error in the original article, the Dragon software does not let you save your speech with the text after you have closed the transcription session. (3) To use both components of the enhanced recognition with Dragon BestMatch Technology, you must have both the extra RAM mentioned in the article and a minimum Pentium II processor. (And it's worth it.)

—James A. Eidelman, Ann Arbor, Michigan, eidelman@lawtech.com

Navigation Software and the Backseat Drivers' Lament

I enjoyed reading your introduction to this month's *LPM*. ["Editor's Page," November/December 1998]. For a year now, I have had "Esmeralda" installed in my car. I can't tell you how much I have enjoyed the functionality of this navigation system, distributed by Alpine of North America. The additional benefit is that now my wife of 37 years is down to but *one* job in our marriage.

—Alan J. Steinberg J.D. L.L.M. Steinberg & Steinberg L.L.C., Creve Coeur, Missouri, www.steinberglaw.com ■

ReActions?

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