

# Using Speech

## Credibility - Let the Truth Speak for Itself

By Robin Springer

Working in the trenches with desktop dictation users over the past decade I have heard repeatedly that there needs to be greater accountability from manufacturers, distributors and resellers to accurately represent speech recognition software.

This real world focus group consistently indicates that desktop dictation works, but it's not the panacea manufacturers would like us to believe. Being cognizant of this is crucial, especially now that we are more aggressively courting the non-disabled market. While the disabled market dictates out of necessity, the able-bodied market does not have the same pain points and they are doing pretty well, thank you very much, with keyboards and mice and transcription services, so if they are going to make the switch to speech they need to have an incentive to buy in. They need to decide for themselves, based on the facts, whether they want to climb on board.

To give them this opportunity, we, the speech recognition community, need to start telling the whole truth. That goes for everything from system requirements to software capabilities to how much time it's going to take to become proficient. It's not that we are lying about the power of desktop dictation but we are perpetuating the myth that desktop dictation is an out-of-the-box, ready-to-use, no-assembly-required product.

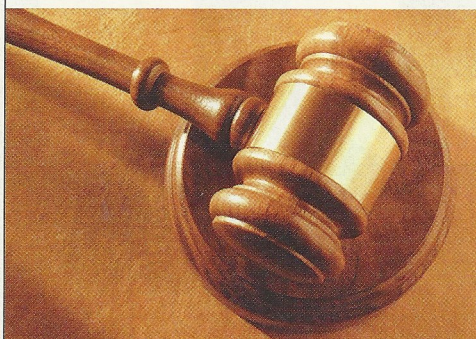
It seems so basic but we are missing the boat.

When a box of desktop dictation software states the product works on a 500MHz computer with 256MB RAM, we are telling half of the truth.

When people find out what I do for a living and four times out of five the next thing I hear is, "I heard it only takes 10 minutes for the computer to recognize

your voice. Is that true?" – we are telling half of the truth.

When the software box includes information leading users to believe they can dictate "160 words per minute" with "99 percent accuracy" by "speaking naturally," we are telling half of the truth.



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We need to be candid about what the software will and will not do. We are not differentiating between continuous speech and conversational speech. We are telling the public about minimum hardware requirements instead of stressing recommended specifications. Plus we are failing to mention things like learning curve and training.

When we give potential users the idea that desktop dictation works so easily out of the box, we are setting expectations too high and setting people up to fail or be dis-

illusioned. Once we lose them, we may not get them back.

When I get calls from consumers who have bought the software and cannot get it to work, I ask who taught them how to use it. Inevitably, no one taught them. After investing a couple of hours in training, every single one of these users was able to see the software does, indeed, work and they have a pretty good idea what the software will and will not do for them.

Doesn't that seem backward? How many users buy the software and give up before they invest in training? Wouldn't it make more sense to let people know what is going to be involved and then let them decide what is right for them? Or is all we care about moving boxes irrespective of whether the consumer has a positive experience?

The consumer needs to make the decision to try dictation or not and she can't make an informed decision without accurate information. She needs to be clear about what is going to be involved – including everything from money to time to education – before she can decide if she wants to invest. What are we so afraid of? We're dealing with a sophisticated, hard-working group of people. These are doctors and lawyers and they are not afraid of hard work. They've rolled up their sleeves, gone to graduate school and either finished their residency or sat for three days for the bar exam. They will put in the effort if it is worth it to them, but we cannot make the decision for them.

Our credibility is on the line. We have amazing technology. It works. We can stand behind it without feeling like we have to embellish. If we can find the resolve to tell the whole truth, we will be more successful in the long run.



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