



ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

BY ROBIN E. SPRINGER

One Voice, Three Hats, and a Better Way of Doing Things

A novelist, a marketing executive and an entrepreneur: Can they all use speech recognition successfully?

Although the process to productivity might differ slightly depending on the career, meet one man who is successful in all three careers. He also is successful using speech recognition to increase his productivity.

With a background in marketing, Peter is running an Internet-based health company, which he reminds me has nothing to do with writing. Peter previously wrote as a hobby. Then he turned his hobby into a business by marketing his work, which includes three novels, more than five business books and a health book, among others. A senior executive with his core skill in marketing, he uses his communication abilities to write, create business concepts and run companies.

While Peter acknowledges he dictates differently depending on the hat he is wearing, he emphatically says that speech recognition is much faster and significantly better than his previous process.

When writing creatively, Peter's process begins by making rough notes on paper. When he has his notes down, he closes his eyes to dictate into the computer, oblivious to the words on the screen. This allows him to concentrate only on the pictures in his head and the sounds of the words.

After he finishes dictating into the computer, he corrects the document. The process is done by

voice and by hand, depending on the type of correction.

This is dramatically different than the way Peter wrote prior to using speech recognition. Formerly, Peter would write his document by hand on paper, giving the work to a secretary or transcriptionist to decipher and enter into the computer.

When the transcription was returned to him, he would correct it. Many of the corrections were because of the transcriptionist's inability to read his handwriting; the rest were editing changes. These changes were returned to the transcriptionist, who completed the final document.

He admits that his first draft, using this method, was almost worthless. The problem he had, with which many others are all too familiar, was that when he dictated into a tape recorder, he had no discipline. He would go off on tangents but could not see where he was going until his transcription was returned to him days later.

Now, by introducing speech recognition into his process, the end result of his first draft is quite usable. When he dictates into the computer and checks the screen, he is able to see when he is going in the wrong direction, saving him literally weeks in time overall.

When asked about the benefits of speech recognition software, Peter says it is much faster than typing. Even if the computer misrecognizes what he says, he can make immediate corrections and he does not have to deal with typists who cannot read his writing.

When editing, Peter makes liberal use of speech recognition. He finds it much easier to edit by voice, although he sometimes will insert the cursor with the mouse and then dictate his changes.

Peter progresses to a semifinal version by dictating to the computer. He then prints the document and rereads it on the paper, correcting any errors and poor construction on the paper. The Peter passes gives the document to a secretary, who makes the final changes.

I asked Peter to tell me what he dislikes about the software. He told me he has a tendency to be a bit long-winded in his business writing (which can be solved by editing and is not a problem in creative writing, where one is expected to go off on tangents). But he said he cannot find anything negative about his speech recognition software; in fact, Peter believes using speech recognition is improving the quality of his writing.

Peter's advice? Take the time to train the computer and yourself. The software requires a getting-to-know-you period, during which the computer learns your voice and speech patterns. Just as importantly, this introduction includes your learning how to properly use the software. Learning from someone experienced with the nuances of the software also decreases frustration and the learning curve.

Let's see. He gets his work done faster. He has control. His writing has improved. Who could ask for anything more?

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