

NEW

FOR OLD

Back in February, we spoke to four key manufacturers to bring you an up to date view of the rise in digital dictation. By popular demand we've been back to check on the latest developments. The main messages have not changed.

BY JANE SMITH



Philips, Olympus, Grundig and Sanyo are the leading players in this arena and their insight into this market shows us there's potential for office products dealers to really get sales moving.

MARK LARWOOD, MARKET DEVELOPMENT MANAGER AT PHILIPS SPEECH PROCESSING

reminded us of the benefits of dictation, saying: "We can speak up to seven times faster than we can write and up to 10 times faster than we can self-type, so by dictating just 10 letters, the average professional could save up to an hour of their time plus associated cost savings."

Traditional analogue systems rely on the physical aspects of tapes. This gives the problem of getting the tape to the typist, especially if they are in another location (which is quite often the case these days).

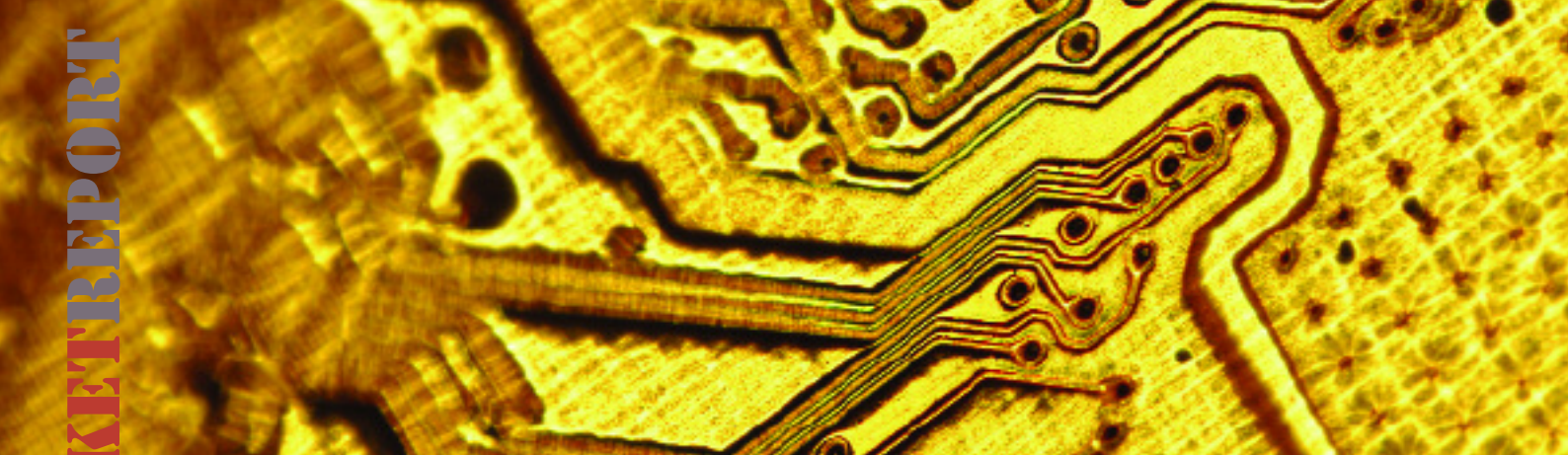
Digital dictation is different. It allows the author to record their dictation as a digital file that can be downloaded to a PC and archived and/or emailed or transferred via a network to a secretary or other resource for transcription or to the author to tidy up when they get to the office.

Dictation can be created via a microphone straight onto a PC or by using a hand-held recording machine. Using a hand-held recording machine the traditional tapes are replaced by multimedia cards (MMC) and these plug straight into a laptop or PC for downloading the files for onward transmission.

NIEVE CAVANAGH, MARKETING MANAGER AT OLYMPUS put it in

these terms, "Similar to digital cameras or MP3 players, a digital voice recorder's files can be downloaded to a PC for further processing and to free up memory space on the voice recorder."

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All digital dictation systems have been developed to be compatible with Windows (and there are some systems also compatible with Mac). They use the local/global PC networks within an organisation and email to move the dictation to wherever the typing resource exists. If you're away on business, you can record and transmit your dictation ahead so that your work can ready and sitting on your PC to sign off upon your return. The saving in time and money is enormous.

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Another great way to use digital recorders is to record meeting notes on your way back from a meeting to ensure that your thoughts, ideas or client instructions are not forgotten. Instead of listening to the radio you can simply plug in your digital recorder and ‘reel off’ the main points from your last appointment on your way to the next. When you're back in the office you can download your files, tidy things up on your PC, then confirma-

tion letters and notes can be with the client almost the same day.

There are no confirmed figures on the size of the market but the consensus is that it's somewhere around £30 million. Analogue still accounts for around 65% of this and should not be forgotten as there are still good sales opportunities.

GRAHAM DAVIS AT SANYO SPEECHTEK and everyone else we spoke to confirm that sales are growing fast with sales up on 2003.

Traditional, analogue users are switching to digital as and when contracts and/or equipment are being used but this is slow and could be because there is still confusion between Voice Recognition and Digital Dictation and the benefits the latter brings. The exciting growth area is in new markets

where digital enthusiasts are embracing new technologies. The increase in mobile working is also driving the trend with growth in sectors such as property, sales, loss adjusters and translation services.

BARRY FINCH AT GRUNDIG

told us more about the products available and the main differences to be aware of. “Excluding the hardware, the main differences between manufacturers is the memory card used and the resulting file format which is to be transferred

(SMART and MMC),” says Finch, “MMC cards and DSS file formats would appear to be taking the lead. Card sizes range from 4Mb to 128Mb with approximate recording times from 40 minutes to 20 hours respectively.

“Systems vary between manufacturers but most people

do offer both a one-to-one and a networked solution and with both you can use hand held machines or a desktop system with a traditional dictation microphone.”

“He also told us about some combination products that Grundig themselves are promoting that provide the option for organisations to use a combination of traditional analogue and the newer digital methods. This is proving particularly popular in the more traditional companies where ‘old habits die hard’ and some individuals prefer to stick to the traditional ways of dictation whilst the younger managers want to embrace the new technology.

Finally, in terms of future product development, Larwood at Philips explains, “the next logical steps will be around connectivity and the move from USB connections to wifi and or blue tooth.”

Manufacturers are keen to help too with lots of training, demonstrations and literature available. Take advantage of the renaissance in dictation and bring in some extra revenue. ■

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LARWOOD, PHILIPS SPEECH PROCESSING