

# NEW LEASE OF LIFE

What digital dictation is all about and why it's giving a new lease of life to a traditional product area.



We've spoken to the 4 key manufacturers dominating the dictation market today to bring you an up to date view of the rise in digital dictation. Philips and Olympus have been in the market for digital products slightly longer but Grundig and Sanyo are also now heavily involved. All have contributed to this feature and we'd like to thank them for sharing their expertise with us.



So, why use Dictation in the first place? Well, according to Mark Larwood, Market Development Manager at Philips Speech Processing – Dictation Systems, 'we can speak up to seven times faster than we can write and up to ten 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.'

With traditional analogue systems the biggest problem has been moving the dictation around because it relies on the physical aspects of tapes containing the dictation work to be done and the finished documents in hard copy. This has restricted the use of dictation systems predominantly to large organisations where the typing resource is in the same building as the author.

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 Multi-Media Cards and these plug straight into a laptop or PC for downloading the files for onward transmission.



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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'.

Lots of people use overseas transcription services too, so dictation is typed up by a third party and ready first thing the following morning wherever you are located.

As well as using the technology for traditional dictation, digital recorders

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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 be ready and sitting on your PC for sign off upon your return.

The saving in time and money is enormous.

are also really useful to record meetings or voice mail. Another great idea is for recording 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 and confirmation letters and notes can be with the client almost the same day.





## THE LONG-EAR OF THE LAW

City firm GR Law has 'gone over' to digital dictation. Here Gavin Croker shares with us his experience so far.

### THERE ARE SOME KEY BENEFITS TO DIGITAL DICTATION TO REMEMBER:

- **SUPERIOR QUALITY** – *clear precise recording and play back. No tape hiss or broken tapes*
- **TOTAL FLEXIBILITY** – *instant access to any part of the recording plus insert/delete/over-write or add notes functions*
- **INCREASED EFFICIENCY** – *digital files are available immediately and instantly transferable for faster turnaround times*
- **EASY WORKING PRACTICES** – *no restrictions in getting files where they need to go so remote working becomes even more efficient*
- **FUTURE PROOF** – *systems are designed to work with the latest PC technology and software including workflow management and speech recognition systems*

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. Digital though is growing fast and Graham Davis at Sanyo Speechtek proved the point telling us "in fact in October last year, our sales of digital dictation machines were a massive 150% up on the previous October. Everyone we spoke to had a similar story to tell and felt very optimistic about growth opportunities in 2004.

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. Corporate business is looking to more effectively use its biggest asset: its skilled employees wherever they are located. Like Call Centres, some new typing resources are springing up in developing countries where the costs are much lower but because distance is immaterial.

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). 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 from manufacturer but most people do offer both a one 2 one and a networked solution and with both you can use hand held machines or a desktop system with a traditional dictation microphone.'

The take up of digital is such that it is the first choice when purchasing new dictation equipment for the business environment. But, if everyone's busy talking into machines, who does the typing up of such

matter. As files are emailable, the answer is anyone. But whichever digital equipment provider you go for, each will have recommended partners, or you can research one for your client. It's certainly not an impediment to uptake.

At e-dict, a company that offers digital dictation and transcription services (basically, outsourced typing), Mike Coxall explains, "Digital Dictation Workflow is the natural successor to standalone digital dictation systems, providing proven cost reductions, and productivity improvements. It fits in with employee development, integration with practice and/or document management systems. One of the added benefits it can give rise to is a greater flexibility of the workforce's environment or location. It's also associated with a lower on-going cost of ownership. The e-Dict solution working with WinScribe Digital Dictation Workflow Management system provides the most cost effective solution to the digital dictation marketplace, whether it be for legal, surveying, medical or other professional set ups."

As far as pricing is concerned we learned that prices and discounts do vary from manufacturer. However, if the benefits of using digital dictation are demonstrated and the cost savings highlighted, most of the price sensitivity is lost.

Once you get your head around the principles, digital dictation is fairly straightforward and has some great benefits to offer your customer base. 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. ■

### How are you and your organisation using the technology?

Our clients are the top 100 law firms in London and Sydney. We have a huge number of legal secretaries who want to either work from our offices (or remotely), typing up legal documents

### What benefits are you getting from it?

We have traditionally supplied legal secretaries on a permanent or temporary basis. If a client knows they are going to be busy they can organise a temp, but frequently overflow work arises late in the day and they cannot accommodate this (and temps will not turn up for just two hours work in the evening). We take over this overflow and type up the work in the firm's in-house style.

### Are there any pitfalls in using digital dictation?

Yes, the user has to get used to the technology and that can take a bit of time, but we can help them. Voice files are huge in terms of memory and bandwidths, which ISPs cannot handle. Authors need to learn to split documents into several parts. Essentially they need to create a new file after 10 or 15 minutes of dictation, rather than just rambling on, although we have found various tricks to help people out if they exceed this so a long dictation is not necessarily lost.

### What purchasing criteria did you use to choose your system?

Price and ease of use. Basically, we know digital dictation is the way forward. Our clients send work from the office, home, overseas. I had to go and work in our offices in Australia and I still kept my secretary in London pretty busy. Enough said?

Images supplied by Philips and Sanyo