

## Speaking to the Dragon

*A review of new software products that can make a big difference to your business*

*By Michael Burns*

You will love Dragon NaturallySpeaking if you know what you're going to say before you say it and don't mumble. The package of DNS says, "Dragon NaturallySpeaking Professional 9 is up to 90% accurate. The accuracy, performance and ease of use in Dragon NaturallySpeaking Professional 9 make it the ideal solution for busy corporate professionals." When I dictated those two sentences, I achieved about 99% accuracy the first time and improved the score slightly after making some corrections. The more you train the system and the more clearly you enunciate, the better the results.

Why the high accuracy? First, DNS works with a dictionary, which can be updated. Second, it uses an acoustic model of your voice after you have trained the system (this takes about 20 minutes). Third, you can set up the system so it analyses your documents and e-mail to recognize common word patterns.

Several options are available to further train the system. You could add a specific word by selecting a menu option, typing it and then saying it. You could also create a voice command using a menu option and specifying whatever you want the system to enter (including a logo, address or signature graphic). To format a word in a different way, you could simply say "select" a specific word and then say "cap that" or "bold that." You could also change a word by choosing from a list of options as soon as you select what you want to change. Or you could just spell the word. DNS will automatically insert commas and periods but you can also give commands for other punctuation.

I did notice a slight delay as the system digested my words. You may need to upgrade your system, since a CPU speed of 2.4 GHz is recommended (1 GHz is a minimum). You should also have at least 1GB RAM with 512 MB free. If you're like me, you often have many programs open simultaneously and might run into cases where you just don't have 512 MB to spare.

You can use DNS with many programs, including Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Outlook, Excel and WordPerfect. When I tested it on Word and Outlook there was no problem at all. But on a Web-based e-mail program it did not work.

Nuance ([www.nuance.com](http://www.nuance.com)), the developers of DNS, point out that hundreds of thousands of their systems are installed around the world, and that thousands more are added every month. There are three different versions of DNS ranging from low to high end— Standard (US\$99), Preferred (US\$199) and Professional (US\$899). The differences include support for PDAs with the upper two versions. Also, a larger number of applications are supported with the higher-end versions. For a feature comparison matrix outlining the differences, please visit [www.nuance.com/naturallyspeaking/matrix/](http://www.nuance.com/naturallyspeaking/matrix/).

I have not used the system for long enough to guarantee its effectiveness. All the reviews I have read, however, have been positive. For example, PC Magazine, in its review of version 8 last year, noted that "speech recognition has never been this good. Dragon Naturally Speaking 8 Professional is better at turning speech into text than any other commercial product on the market we've seen. And though it still makes its fair share of mistakes, correcting those mistakes is remarkably easy. If you've been disappointed with speech-recognition tools in the past, Dragon 8 could turn you into a believer."

A July 2006 article in The New York Times was just as laudatory: "Version 9 is a stronger argument than ever that for anyone who can't or doesn't like to type, dictation software is ready for prime time; the state of this art has attained nearly 'Star Trek' polish."

I will continue to use DNS, but I am not a "great dictator" just yet.