Dragon NaturallySpeaking in the Real World (an Adaptive Solution)

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By Alexandria   September 13, 2010

The following article is written for the benefit of employees, employers and insurance organizations (such as WorkSafe BC) so that they might better understand the implementation of an effective speech recognition solution in an adaptive or assistive environment (i.e. return to work, quality of life, or adaptation in the work place).

Whether you choose to use Dragon NaturallySpeaking to increase your productivity or for the purposes of minimizing keystrokes and mouse clicking, it is very important for both users and employers to understand what can be accomplished with Dragon NaturallySpeaking. Often times Speakeasy Solutions is asked the question: **"How long until I will be proficient with Dragon NaturallySpeaking?"** Unfortunately, this is not an easy answer as there are far too many variables including:

- the amount Dragon NaturallySpeaking will become depended upon,
- the programs to be used with Dragon NaturallySpeaking, time available for practice,
- level of commitment,
- time available for tweaking/customization,
- having the appropriate equipment (PC that meets minimum specifications, speech recognition software version and quality microphone hardware),
- computer and program knowledge prior to embarking upon using Dragon NaturallySpeaking and so forth.

However, in the more than 10 years that Speakeasy Solutions has been implementing speech recognition solutions there are several factors that are absolutely key. Those and more will be discussed below.

Workplace Environment

The workplace environment can seriously impact the effective use of Dragon NaturallySpeaking. Initially you may find yourself self-conscious about dictating to the computer should you be in a situation where others can overhear you (i.e. amongst cubicles, out in open spaces and so on). Moreover, if your work environment is noisy at any point throughout the day, this can adversely impact your use of Dragon NaturallySpeaking (high levels of background noise will impede the effectiveness of Dragon NaturallySpeaking).

Therefore, if you are in an open space, or in a cubicle surrounded by other individuals, it is prudent for you to **find a quiet place in which to use Dragon NaturallySpeaking**. If you must be in such a location, your employer should find the quietest corner of the office in which to work. Also, your coworkers should also be made aware that you are using speech recognition technology, and should respect your need for a quiet workspace.

Knowledge Prerequisites

It is very helpful for people to **understand the basics of computer use**. For instance, knowledge of keyboard shortcuts, how to select and choose items by keyboard and similar computer functions is extremely useful. Furthermore, understanding the software programs in which Dragon NaturallySpeaking is to be used is also fairly useful. However, these prerequisites are not crucial as this information can be dispensed during Speakeasy Solutions' training (although will extend training time).

As an aside, learning to use Dragon NaturallySpeaking on an introductory level usually involves approximately 6 to 8 hours of training from Speakeasy Solutions. If basic computer knowledge and software functionality is also dispensed, then this will add the number of training hours required from Speakeasy Solutions.

Hardware & Software Prerequisites

Using the latest version of Dragon NaturallySpeaking Professional is often not enough to be completely successful. **A high quality microphone headset** (of which we provide a variety, depending on each individual's needs) **is essential**. Moreover, a telephony device allowing you to use the same headset for phone and PC may assist you tremendously if you spend as much time on the phone as you do the computer. Seamless integration of the hardware is imperative prior to the first training appointment.

Proper installation and setup of Dragon NaturallySpeaking is also crucial. Speakeasy Solutions optimizes the software, and your computer as well as Dragon NaturallySpeaking's options at the outset. This installation procedure will ensure the best possible chance of success with speech recognition, limiting any potential roadblocks that might result from just a standard installation. Speakeasy Solutions is very happy to work with your IT department to ensure a smooth transition.

Dragon NaturallySpeaking Capabilities

Dragon NaturallySpeaking can function in most computer programs and is primarily used in Microsoft Outlook (for e mail), Microsoft Word (for document creation), as well as sundry other programs. If you need to minimize the amount of keystrokes and mouse

clicks, then you wish to use Dragon NaturallySpeaking Professional in all of the programs that you use on a day-to-day basis.

Dragon NaturallySpeaking Professional performs **two primary functions**:

- converting your voice into text, and
- controlling the computing environment (i.e. computer and software functionality).

Dragon NaturallySpeaking contains commands for use within the Microsoft Office suite, Internet Explorer, and basic computer functions. Please note that Dragon NaturallySpeaking Preferred does not contain commands for use of PowerPoint. Moreover, the Premium version will not permit the level of customization (i.e. command creation) required for anyone needing to use a computer as hands-free as possible. Professional does allow for the aforementioned.

In order to control other programs by voice, automate repetitive tasks, or perform functions outside of the aforementioned commands, custom commands will need to be created with Dragon NaturallySpeaking Professional. You can be taught how to create some of these commands so that you will become more independent and able to create productivity commands on an as-needed basis. Converting your voice into text does not function well in every single program on your computer, but there are workarounds available and taught.

Speakeasy Solutions strives to address using Dragon NaturallySpeaking on a global basis so that this information can be used on a software level. Tips and tricks regarding using Dragon NaturallySpeaking in specific programs are discussed in Speakeasy Solutions' training program. It's also important to understand that Dragon NaturallySpeaking is not the be-all and end-all. There are aspects of computer use where Dragon NaturallySpeaking is not as efficient as conventional use. While rare, this information is also passed along during training.

With the careful implementation of some custom commands, virtually any activity on the computer can be emulated far more quickly by voice then by previously conventional methods with mouse and keyboard. **It is not unusual for employees who use Dragon NaturallySpeaking effectively to outperform their coworkers who are not using Dragon NaturallySpeaking.**

Practice

It is important to be able to practice with Dragon NaturallySpeaking as often as possible during the first couple of weeks. The more time you have available for practice, the more quickly you will learn Dragon NaturallySpeaking. Repetitious use of commands and methodology is absolutely vital. Speakeasy Solutions provides voice command sheets which should be photocopied and kept handy.

How much time you devote to practice is entirely up to you, however if you can use Dragon NaturallySpeaking during the course of your normal workday in a non-stressful environment then you will have the time that you need to look up commands, and not feel rushed. One of the most detrimental factors preventing the learning of Dragon NaturallySpeaking is if you are overburdened with work or under deadlines while you are trying to practice and initially use Dragon NaturallySpeaking. It is imperative in the beginning to have the time that you need to learn to use Dragon NaturallySpeaking at your own pace.

If you feel exasperated with Dragon NaturallySpeaking at any time, stop using the program and use your computer conventionally (if possible). Return to using Dragon NaturallySpeaking several hours or a day later. It's important to understand that you will not be exceptionally proficient with Dragon NaturallySpeaking during the first couple of weeks of use. Give yourself some time. Again, the more you practice, the less the learning curve, and the quicker you will become proficient with Dragon NaturallySpeaking.

Commitment

If you wish to use Dragon NaturallySpeaking due to physical limitations or a strong desire for productivity enhancement, you are already quite committed to making Dragon NaturallySpeaking work for you. If you continue to fall back on old habits including using the keyboard and mouse where Dragon NaturallySpeaking would actually be faster (often this happens because commands are forgotten), then Dragon NaturallySpeaking will quite simply not work effectively for you. Some people relegate the use of Dragon NaturallySpeaking to document creation or e mail, but even this will be frustrating if time is not taken to learn the finer points of customizing your speech recognition use.

All the work and effort you put into learning to use Dragon NaturallySpeaking, as well as customizing your speech recognition experience, will definitely pay off. **It is entirely possible to dictate up to 160 wpm with a 99% (or higher) accuracy rate**. Moreover, taking the time to automate numerous tasks on your computer (i.e. creating new documents based on templates, filling in repetitious information etc.) will save you a tremendous amount of time. Soaring with Dragon NaturallySpeaking is more than possible, but it does depend upon your level of commitment and the time that you have available for setting up your speech recognition environment.

Tweaking & Customization

Learning to use the basics of Dragon NaturallySpeaking is just one part of the process. Taking the time and effort to customize your vocabulary will minimize speech recognition errors. **Tweaking the vocabulary is absolutely essential for quick and effective voice to text**. A little bit more time-consuming is the creation of custom commands. Custom

commands can involve anything from inserting addresses and other repetitious text (also known as boilerplate, macros etc.) to creating a mail merged document based on a contact from your Microsoft Outlook contact list — all with the use of one simple spoken command.

It is important to think about what you do each and every day, and how often you perform those tasks. Any repetitious tasks, no matter how complex, can often be performed much more quickly by utilizing a Dragon NaturallySpeaking command. This is where the true power of Dragon NaturallySpeaking lies and where Speakeasy Solutions enjoys assisting their clients the most.

Speakeasy Solutions will instruct on the creation of various commands in such a way that they can be utilised in most situations where you could benefit. Speakeasy Solutions can create any custom commands beyond the scope of instruction.

Most of the tweaking that you will be doing with Dragon NaturallySpeaking will occur during the first couple of weeks of speech recognition use. One of the pitfalls people often find themselves falling in is that they just don't have the time to make a little command, or modify the vocabulary in some way. However, this is a detriment, as Dragon NaturallySpeaking will not function at its peak ability without your input. Please make sure that you do **take the time to modify the vocabulary, and create any custom commands that could assist you**. After the first couple of weeks, any customization and tweaking necessary can be performed on an as-needed basis.

User Expectations

Initially Dragon NaturallySpeaking seems like this absolutely wonderful new tool. The first couple of days holds much enchantment with Dragon NaturallySpeaking. However, once Dragon NaturallySpeaking is being used on a day-to-day basis, you will discover that it requires a little bit more than just simply dictating to the computer. Have patience with both yourself and Dragon NaturallySpeaking. **Taking the time to practice and customize your speech recognition use will make all the difference**.

Most people tend to become proficient with Dragon NaturallySpeaking anywhere from two weeks to two months after initial training with Speakeasy Solutions. This completely varies depending on many of the above factors (primarily stress levels, and time available for practice and customization). As mentioned above, the learning curve diminishes greatly if you have ample time for practice and customization.

If after one to three months time you find that Dragon NaturallySpeaking is still not "working for you", please contact Speakeasy Solutions to discuss your situation further. Perhaps there are other factors prohibiting your effective use of speech recognition.

Employer Expectations

It is absolutely vital for employers to understand that once a user has been trained in the use of Dragon NaturallySpeaking, they will not be fully functional with speech recognition. After the training process it's important that the user has time to adapt their work habits, learn Dragon NaturallySpeaking, as well as customize their speech recognition environment. Users tend not to become proficient for anywhere from two weeks to two months. **The learning curve is greatly diminished for those who have a decreased workload, very little stress, support, and ample time for practice and acclimatization**.

Employers with any questions or concerns should be encouraged to contact Speakeasy Solutions directly. Dragon NaturallySpeaking may not be a cure-all for everything, but it can improve accessibility as well as productivity if given sufficient support and time.

Questions? Call us!

To discuss options and a solution customized just for you, please call our office for a phone consultation.

Within Vancouver & Lower Mainland: 604-264-9109
Outside Vancouver & Lower Mainland: 1-888-964-9109

Contact Speakeasy Solutions to arrange for a demonstration and initial consultation regarding your needs and an exciting adaptive technology solution.