

The Advantages of Digital Dictation

By JoAnn L. Hathaway

The great advantage of digital dictation is that lawyers can still dictate into small, hand-held devices as they have for years. Compared to its analog counterpart, however, digital dictation is far superior in many ways, both for the individuals dictating and those transcribing.

A digital file can be edited by a lawyer before it is sent to a transcriptionist. Also, a priority rating can be attached, something remarkably difficult to do with recordings stored sequentially on traditional tapes.

A digital voice recording unit can either be linked directly to a PC or used independently, with data transfer to a computer system when and if needed. Once in the system, the voice file can be transferred to a specific location on the network. This location could be the lawyer's own secretary in the next room, one who is working at home, a departmental secretary down the hall, or a group typing facility in a firm. The file could even be sent to a transcription center in another country via the Internet. Whatever the method, it is possible to use the available resources much more efficiently

than having the physical location and availability of a secretary as the key factor in the dictation equation.

What about the issue of not having the physical file with the dictation? There are ways of working without the actual file being in a transcriptionist's possession. Practice management and other software interfaces can help with this. If names, addresses, and other foundational aspects of the dictation can be accessed directly from a database and if a user can see the history of a matter, having possession of the physical file may not be a vital component of the end product.

Some digital dictation software systems use a special proprietary format called Intelligent Audio File (IAF), which goes well beyond the mere creation and transmission of electronic audio files. Some allow you to transmit form documents and cut and paste text, graphic images, and more directly into an audio file and exactly at the point in the file where the transcriptionist should be aware of its inclusion.

Consider this example: You're dictating a brief and need to include a portion of text from a statute. Currently, you might do this by printing the statute, highlighting the portion you want inserted into your dictation, and providing dictated instructions to in-

clude the highlighted text from the hard copy into a particular area in the brief.

With IAF format, it would work like this: Highlight the relevant text on a screen, press insert, and the piece of text is automatically pasted into the area in the dictation as it is being transcribed. It doesn't get much easier, more efficient, or failsafe in that the margin for human error is greatly decreased, if not eliminated altogether.

So if you're in the market to update your dictation processes, think about the following advantages of digital dictation as compared to its analog predecessor:

- Compact in size
- Low maintenance because of few moving parts
- High-quality recording in a variety of formats
- Compressed recordings
- Ability to transmit over the Internet or a private network
- No more expensive than traditional analog-based recorders
- Ability to play back in remote locations with little or no depletion in sound quality
- Some can seamlessly interface with voice recognition software

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If you want to save time, earn more money, and experience keyboard liberation, consider purchasing digital dictation and voice recognition software.

Consider Pairing Software for Even More Options

Even more efficiencies and versatility are available when pairing voice recognition software (VRS) with digital dictation. Over the years, many lawyers have come to associate voice recognition software with unfriendly single-use solutions and related user hassles. As a result, many still relegate VRS to its previously well-deserved seat in the back, continuing to think that it isn't worth much. However, the time has come to sit up and take notice.

Many versions of speech-to-text transcription software are available. A popular choice is Dragon NaturallySpeaking,¹ from Nuance Communications, Inc. With some major competitors, the playing field has substantially broadened. Even so, Dragon remains a major VRS force with several editions from which to choose. Powerful features in Legal Edition 10 include a preconfigured legal vocabulary with more than 30,000 legal-specific terms and phrases and the ability to format legal citations. It creates custom voice commands to instantly build and format templates for contracts or other legal documents or automate complex tasks with a spoken word or phrase.

Coupling the power of VRS and digital dictation can result in a win-win scenario. For instance, a lawyer can dictate remotely and send the dictation directly to the home base where it can be transcribed, hands-free, with VRS. A transcriptionist can listen to the recording to proof the document, en-

suring that the end product comports with the dictation.

Of course, this second layer of involvement can be done on site without the aid of digital dictation. However, many believe the real benefit comes from implementing a digital dictation workflow solution with integrated speech recognition, taking into account the entire document creation process and simplifying the transcription of dictation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, if you want to save time, earn more money, and experience keyboard liberation, consider purchasing digital dictation and voice recognition software. With a little patience and proper usage, you'll soon consider your purchases wise investments. ■

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FOOTNOTE

1. Discussion of Dragon NaturallySpeaking transcription software does not constitute a guarantee or warranty of the product or an endorsement over other software products not mentioned.