

PRODUCTIVITY ROAD TEST

Need speed? Now you're talking

With improved speech-activated software, you don't have to revert to typing, writes **Sue White**.

Since the heady days of learning to type by covering the typewriter keys (yes, typewriter) with a piece of paper, I've enjoyed the satisfaction of speedy typing. It feels like magic—the brain telling the fingers where to press to make words appear, all without more than an occasional glance at the keyboard.

But as voice-recognition technology has improved, I've wondered, why type when you can talk? After all, as much as I enjoy typing, talking is a skill I've perfected to an art form (at least in terms of quantity).

Despite the reality that learning to “type” with my voice will chip away at my already diminishing typing speed, voice-recognition programs claim “speaking” our

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work into a computer is significantly faster than typing the words.

It's a statement that most people in my circles disbelieve. Surely a good voice-recognition system isn't faster than a 60-words-a-minute typing speed? Well, my friends, it is.

In fact, there are so many non-believers out there, I've formulated a few theories about why more workers don't turn to voice-recognition programs.

Admittedly, it's not an instant fix. Voicing your work requires a rethink of how you operate. There's also the chance that colleagues in open-plan offices may object or, at least, start avoiding you in the hallways. A plus?

Having successfully used Dragon (by Nuance) voice recognition in my



Illustration: Kerrie Leishman

PC days, I test the newer Mac version. Positioning my one-eared headset to begin training my individual Dragon voice profile, I admit I feel slightly like a call-centre operator. I later learn that a headset isn't necessary, although my system works more smoothly with one.

Choosing my preferred spelling (British, not American) and accent, I'm impressed that Australian is on the list. I notice “heavily accented” Australian isn't there, nor is “I-try-to-keep-the-nasal-tones-to-a-minimum” Australian.

So, should I have a Dragon voice? According to the instructions, I'm simply supposed to talk normally, but inevitably the “Dragon” me turns out to be slightly better enunciated than the real-life me.

To write by voice, you must punctuate verbally. This means voicing commas and other punctuation, as well as navigational operations, such as “new line” for a return or “cap” for a capital letter. It's all spelt out in the instructions, but the technology isn't foolproof.

Like a new staff member, the Dragon system gets better at its job the more time you invest in training it. Advanced users can verbally dance around a document, voicing emails, opening web pages and even tweeting using only voice.

For me, the speed of writing a solid first draft of a document by voice (a task the initial five-minute training is sufficient for) is a low-stress way to start, as it requires

minimal verbal dexterity beyond saying “full stop” at the end of each sentence.

The result? Dragon is two, or even three, times faster than my 60-word-a-minute typing, even once I factor in planning my document and pausing for long periods to clearly articulate a thought into the microphone.

It may be playing havoc with my typing skills, but perhaps there's another upside to voice recognition beyond speed: a more articulate, well-enunciated me.

Sue White is a freelance writer interested in productivity, working sustainably and verbally controlling her electronic world. Follow her on Twitter at @suewhitewriter.