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Vlingo on the iPhone: Speak and spell

A new version of Vlingo for the iPhone lets you update Twitter and Facebook and send emails just by talking to your phone like a crazy person

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The iPhone 3GS has some cool voice-control features -- you can call contacts and play songs, for example -- but Vlingo adds Jedi-like levels of mind tricks with the latest version of its iPhone app.

Open the app and tap the giant button to search the Web, dial your phone, update Twitter and Facebook, or search Google Maps. You can also buy the option to send an email or text message, although the latter requires a quick bit of copying and pasting.

We were impressed with Vlingo's ability to recognise our mangled consonants, whether tested by an Anglicised Canadian or a dyed-in-the-wool Londoner. Facebook updates and Google searches all went off without a hitch. Vlingo even made a good effort with words such as 'Southwark', suggesting 'Suffolk' -- it's wrong, but it's a good try.

Vlingo handles all the voice-recognition heavy lifting on its servers, so you must have a data connection for it to work. We found that over Wi-Fi it was very fast, even for emails which contain full sentences rather than just a few keywords. Vlingo says its databases learn from everyone's chat, so if you introduce a new word it didn't know, everyone gets to benefit from your vocabulary.

"Adaptation is applied to individual users -- for example, the system learns over time that a particular user tends to ask for Mexican food," says Vlingo, "as well as across users -- a first-time user with a Southern accent benefits from other users who have spoken into the system with a Southern accent."

Unfortunately, it can't guess at punctuation. This is fine for a short Facebook update, but our emails ended up reading like stream-of-consciousness poetry. We had the chance to make corrections before sending, but tapping around adding punctuation and capitalisation, and fixing the occasional mistake, ended up taking more time than just typing the blinkin' thing in the first place.

For short sentences such as Facebook updates, however, Vlingo works like a charm. Text messages could be another handy feature, but since it requires a couple of extra taps to paste into the iPhone's texting application, it may not save much time. Vlingo's done a good job making this work as smoothly as possible, but the iPhone just doesn't give apps the option to directly access its texting feature.

For searching the Web, making calls, and the other free features, we found that Vlingo recognised our words better than Apple's built-in voice control. And the context seems to really make a difference, so Vlingo is more likely to understand that you mean Weston-super-Mare rather than 'wet son soup of merde' when you're searching Google Maps, for example.

The problem is we thought voice control was very cool when we got it on the iPhone 3GS, and now we never use it. As great as it sounds to dial the phone hands-free while hurtling along on your bicycle, the first time you accidentally dial that long-lost ex is one time too many.

Vlingo is also available for BlackBerry, Nokia and Windows Mobile phones. Get it for your iPhone from the [iTunes App Store](#) or for other phones from the [Vlingo Web site](#).

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