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By Brian Lewis
Features

IBM Announces ViaVoice 98

IBM recently announced the release of ViaVoice 98, the next generation of IBM's best selling speech recognition software, which features numerous innovations designed to make speech easier and more natural.

The most significant of the innovations are features that provide the PC user with the ability to use Natural Language Commands to create, edit and format documents in Microsoft Word in a more natural way. This provides the ability to say what they want to have happen more naturally, and the computer will react. Another innovation is the hands-free editing and correction mode into popular applications, including Word 97 and Lotus Word Pro.

"IBM took a customer-centric approach in developing ViaVoice 98. We talked to thousands of users and leveraged the experience we gained with our best selling ViaVoice products," said W.S. "Ozzie" Osborne, general manager, IBM Speech Systems. "We believe we offer the most easy to use, powerful, feature-rich software in the industry, which makes it possible for people to interact with the PCs in the most natural way. Attention to the user experience is what sets this product apart from all the other offerings in the marketplace."

Three Products

The ViaVoice 98 consists of three products: the executive, office and home editions.

ViaVoice 98 Executive Edition is IBM's most powerful continuous speech software and can be a productivity tool for writers, executives and experienced PC users. ViaVoice Executive offers direct dictation into most popular Windows applications, voice control for the desktop and applications and includes two topics, ViaVoice Computer and ViaVoice Business and Finance, which supplement the basic vocabulary. Topics are special interest vocabularies that add to the existing base vocabulary and increase accuracy. The executive edition is priced at \$149.

ViaVoice 98 Office Edition is a continuous speech dictation and voice control software tool designed to help maximize the efficiency of a small office/home office user, faculty member or advanced student. Users can supplement their vocabulary with the included ViaVoice Business and Finance. The price for the Office edition is \$89.

ViaVoice 98 Home Edition is IBM's entry-level continuous speech dictation product and is ideal for the family to use to create letters, reports or e-mail at home. ViaVoice 98 Home includes the ViaVoice Cuisine Topic to let users produce original recipes or make a keepsake of family recipes. The cost is \$49.95.

A customized, integrated version of IBM ViaVoice is included with Lotus SmartSuite Millennium edition.

New features

ViaVoice 98 offers many new features. Among them: Natural Language Commands - Users can edit text and format text in Microsoft Word 97 by saying commands naturally. A single natural command can be said in a variety of ways. For example, a user can say "double space this paragraph" or "change the spacing of this paragraph to double" to perform the same task.

Hands free correction and editing - ViaVoice 98 now includes easier to use voice commands, including "select <text>" or any visible text; "correct this," to use correction pop-up and "scratch that" to delete words spoken since the last pause, without having to switch in and out of dictation mode. Users can spell corrections or re-dictate naturally to manage changes.

Modeless Operation - Users can dictate text and issue commands interchangeably without saying any extra words - just pausing slightly before and after speaking the command. Users will no longer have to recall whether they are in dictation mode or not. Commands to bold, underline, italicize, uppercase, print and more are simply a pause during dictation. Once you visualize it, then say it, you'll see it.

"Say What You See" Navigation - On Microsoft Windows 95 and Windows 98, systems where Microsoft Active Accessibility is supported, executive and office edition users can generally speak menu commands, file names, toolbar buttons, dialogue items and even activate desktop icons - creating a more hands-free experience.

More Users Assistance - Starting with "What Can I Say", a unique feature that enables users to explore what commands they can execute in any given application that is active on their desktop. ViaVoice also has "How do I Say?" features and a number of pop-up helpers and multimedia Quick Tours.

Topic Support - These special interest vocabularies add to the existing based vocabulary and increase accuracy. Users can use one or more in conjunction with their base vocabulary. Each ViaVoice product comes with sample topics and more can be added by purchase and download from the web. Business and finance terms and computer words can be added to the base vocabulary. Also, a topic factory tool is available to enable developers to create additional specialty topics.

VoiceCenter - The VoiceCenter is a single focal area on the desktop that integrates all functions - menu, recognized voice command, status display, microphone button, audio level, help and user name - into a central interface to make it easy to locate the vital information needed.

Windows 98 ready - ViaVoice 98 is the first speech recognition product designed ready for the next version of Microsoft's operating system.

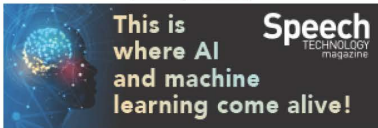
Easy enrollment - A two-sentence Quick Training enrollment session lets users get started quickly, and is followed by a choice of user scripts for enrollment. Users have the option to complete their enrollments in increments as well.

ViaVoice Transcription - Support for a number of hand-held dictation devices is included.

Large active vocabulary - A 128,000 word active vocabulary includes 64,000 active base vocabulary and 64,000 more user-added words using Vocabulary Expander and Vocabulary Manager. Users can include multiple topics (each topic can contain up to 64,000 words) and a backup vocabulary of 260,000 words.



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WEB EVENTS

IMSI, a publisher and developer of software for the corporate and retail markets, recently announced that it has signed an agreement with the Worldwide Speech Systems division of IBM.

IMSI will integrate more than 30 software products with IBM speech recognition, which translates into an estimated additional two million units of IBM speech software being distributed over the next year.

IMSI will be offering IBM's ViaVoice Gold and Simply Speaking Gold which will be transitioned to IMSI and used in its VoiceDirect line of dictation software.

"The agreement is a win-win for our mutual customers," said W. S. (Ozzie) Osborne, general manager of IBM Speech Systems. "IBM's speech recognition software is a perfect complement to IMSI's extensive software line, giving our customers even greater capability."

Over the summer, IMSI transitioned the speech recognition in its product lines from Dragon to IBM.

Also as part of their agreement, IBM will be licensing its newest ViaVoice 98 Command and Control technology to IMSI, for inclusion in more than 30 software products in the computer-aided drafting, office, utilities, personal productivity and desktop publishing and graphics categories.

For more information, contact IMSI public relations at 415 257-3000, ext 401. Or visit the web site at www.imsisoft.com.

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