The tale of the time-saving dragon

Robyn Pearce

Earlier this year I gained a whole new level of empathy for people with limbs that don't work properly. While rock 'n rolling a little too vigorously at a client function I slipped and cracked my wrist (No, alcohol did not play a large part in said experience!) However, there is always a silver lining. Six weeks with an arm in plaster created a whole new view on a really useful productivity tool.

That might not make immediate sense, but let me tell you more.

The accident forced my hand (excuse the pun) to try out some amazing software that will save you enormous amounts of time (and they're not paying me to tell you).

How fast a typist are you? Do you sit hunched up over the computer, two fingers picking and poking at the keyboard, perhaps reasonably quick but certainly not a touch typist? Do your shoulders get tired? Does your neck get a crick in it? If you answered yes, have you also ever wished for a convenient way to speak and have your words transformed into text?

Over the last few years a number of people have waxed lyrical about Dragon NaturallySpeaking – voice recognition software. I had thought about investigating it a number of times but, being a fast typist, decided not to bother. I had also heard that it was a little cumbersome to use.

Then earlier this year, as I was speaking at a conference, one of the participants absolutely raved about his efficiency gains from using version 11, the latest iteration. So, with arm in plaster and my typing speed somewhat reduced, I decided it was time to check it out.

For example, this article for you is being written with no hands on the keyboard, except

It takes less than an hour to train the software to your way of speaking

for the occasional correction. I'm talking, words are just zipping across my screen, and the more I practice the better this experience gets.

For a little extra you can have a wireless headset, rather than having to be tethered to your computer. And it also comes with a digital voice recorder, which can then be downloaded when you're back at your computer. For example, you might be somewhere around your school and notice something that requires a written note to a staff member or supplier. If you just happen to have the recorder in your pocket you could speak a first draft into your handheld voice recorder and then later on, once plugged in to the computer, your voice can be turned into written words.

Of course you still have to check that it has recorded correctly but the desk time can be spent focusing on content and correct expression of your thoughts, instead of typing and spelling. Even though I am a pretty fast typist, the words still flash across the screen at least three times faster than I could type them. Also, Dragon gets more accurate over time as it learns your word choices and writing style.
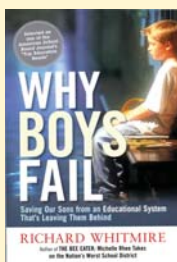
It takes less than an hour to train the software to your way of speaking. And you can easily add specific industry terms and any other frequently used unique phrases.

But it's far more than that. I wanted to give you other peoples' stories as well so a few minutes have just been invested in a quick online search. Result? Jaw-dropping!

I urge you to take a look at http://community.nuance.com/groups/i-speak-dragon2011/forum/default.aspx. This is a life-changer. Dyslexics, low self-esteem people from terribly dysfunctional homes, quadriplegics... the list is long and grows day by day.

Less dramatic but just as life-changing for busy professionals – you can do a myriad of time-saving things with this software. Just one example: the conference delegate I mentioned above has trained the program to open his regularly used Word and Excel templates on command. He then sits at his desk and tells the computer where to put the new information; saves him hours per week.

If you would rather be working with your students and colleagues and getting home at a decent hour instead of spending ages getting words on paper, just get the product. It's available in all good software supply stores. **ET**

Why Boys Fail
Richard Whitmire
McGraw Hill Professional
ISBN 9780814420171
RR $21.95

Richard Whitmire writes from the perspective of education in the US but what he has to say applies to Australia. Here, educators are also acutely aware the boys are not doing as well as they should – they give up on school too soon and the boy–girl pendulum is swinging steadily towards the girls at all levels of education, including university.

In *Why Boys Fail*, Whitmire explores the reasons and suggests that the changing classroom is the major cause. Classrooms have grown increasing verbal, he asserts, but boys have not… many lack the reading and writing skills needed to keep pace.

Most of the content, research and information relates to the situation in the US but the author has made good use of a visit to Australia to include some valuable local content.

This book contains a lot of food for thought; Australian educators will find it useful.

Robyn Pearce is a Certified Speaking Professional Check the resources on her website www.gettingagrip.com including a free report for you: How to Master Time in Only 90 Seconds.