



Speech-Enabled Technology Has Exploded Into Mainstream Corporate America: Are You Ready to Reap Its Benefits?

Scott Alden of Best Tel Discusses Its Value to Small and Medium Sized Businesses

PORTLAND, OR — October 28, 2003 — Have you ever asked yourself, “How did I ever do business without cell phones or email?” They’re definitely not something that we could live without today. Well, there’s another technology that has exploded into mainstream corporate America, that will make you ask the same question very soon. The communications tool being referred to is speech-enabled technology, also commonly known as voice recognition. This technology has experienced significant improvements during the last few years to the point where many companies cannot survive without it. In the past, speech-enabled technology was considered to be a business solution only utilized by large enterprises, however it has now become extremely popular among small to medium sized companies.

Speech-enabled technology, in its simplest form, is a solution that listens to human voices. The system then recognizes the voice, translates commands from the individual into a computer system, and responds based on the information it has received. It has now become much more than that and contains significant features aiding companies in all types of industries. For example, users of speech-enabled technology can tap into the following capabilities in real-time – all based on the recognition of someone’s voice.

- Auto-attendant answers, screens, and transfers calls instantly
- Takes voice mail messages, automatically returning, copying, or forwarding calls based on name recognition
- Finds people with a follow-me feature at any location
- Connects to anyone when a user identifies the person
- Voice activates users’ email systems enabling them to:
 - Listen, compose and send, and copy or forward emails
 - Create email replies to individuals or large groups
 - Send voice mail messages into user’s email in-box

The technology truly gives people the freedom to communicate and conduct business from any location – in their car, at home, across the country or around the world.

Speech-enabled technology has seen rapid growth and it’s not expected to slow down anytime soon. Allied Business Intelligence (ABI) projects the market to increase to \$897 million in 2003, up from \$677 million in 2002. ABI has forecasted the technology to grow to \$5.3 billion by 2008. This growth is being driven by a few distinct factors. One is the mobile workforce with more and more people conducting business on the road.

Today, the average American rush-hour driver wastes 51 hours sitting in traffic annually. This is valuable time that could be used in a more productive manner, like responding to email. Second, many states throughout the country are considering banning the use of handheld cell phones so drivers can communicate “hands free.” This law has already passed in New York, and California is very close to mandating it as well. Finally, a report by Gartner found that when comparing speech recognition versus touch-tone respondents favored speech recognition by a factor of 6 to 1. In order to adapt to these environmental changes, companies and their employees have rushed to adopt speech-enabled technology.

Previously, the technology used to be available and affordable only to large enterprise corporations, however, that has drastically changed. It has become a very cost effective and valuable communication tool for small to medium sized businesses. They are finding that speech-enabled technology is giving them a competitive advantage and increasing their profitability. Organizations in every industry are implementing this technology to increase employee productivity. Here are a few examples:

- Organizations of every size are arming their mobile workforces

(e.g. sales teams) to function as if they were in the office

- Patients of medical and dental facilities are scheduling their own appointments
- Customers of restaurants are placing their own orders
- Companies with call centers are replacing their touch-tone IVRs

Another perfect example, which can be applied to almost any industry, exists in real estate firms. Real estate agents are out of the office 50% to 75% of the day and they do not have access to e-mail, fax, or voice mail unless they call in. Their customers want to be connected to them without delay, especially in today's hectic real estate market. Therefore, agents have tapped into speech-enabled technology to minimize phone tag, access email via voice recognition from any location, connect to clients, and reduce costs by not having to staff additional employees for administrative tasks. They now have the power to conduct business as usual whether they're in the office or on the road.

Speech-enabled technology has become a real solution to the way business professionals communicate and manage their daily activities. Economic, legal, and competitive factors have strongly influenced small to medium sized companies to utilize this technology in order to stay ahead in their market places and ensure the productivity of their employees. They are seeing the value and flexibility voice recognition can bring and will be reaping its benefits well into the future.

ABOUT BEST-TEL, LLC.

Best-Tel LLC's Portland office is a member of the Technology Assurance Group (TAG). Best-Tel has built a team of professional voice and data specialists dedicated to the highest levels of customer support. Best Tel's pattern of steady growth reflects their commitment to keeping pace with the constantly evolving telecommunications

technology arena, and the dramatic expansion of the Pacific Northwest's business market. With offices located along the I-5 Corridor in Portland, Eugene, Medford, and Seattle, Best Tel is uniquely positioned to respond quickly and effectively to a wide range of customer equipment and service requirements.