

Dragon NaturallySpeaking Helps Disabled Employees Thrive at Southern California Edison

HELPING DISABLED EMPLOYEES BECOME PRODUCTIVE AGAIN

When Deke Lightholder attended an annual conference of the California Association of Rehabilitation Reemployment Professionals in 1998, he already had nearly 20 years of experience as a rehabilitation counselor. That's why he was very pleased to see a presentation at the conference titled: *Speech Recognition for Injury, Disability, and Prevention*. Renee Griffith of Zephyr Tech, a Dragon NaturallySpeaking® reseller and specialist in speech recognition solutions for disabilities, gave the presentation. Deke was pleased because for the first time he saw a speech recognition presentation that really impressed him.

As a member of the Disability Management team at Southern California Edison (SCE), Deke had worked to introduce speech recognition several years earlier, without much success. In the early to mid 1990s, the available speech recognition software simply wasn't powerful enough to meet the needs of disabled workers in a business environment. But when Deke saw Rene's demonstration of Dragon NaturallySpeaking, he knew that had changed. "My initial impression of Dragon NaturallySpeaking was very favorable, especially when compared to earlier releases of speech recognition software. Dragon NaturallySpeaking has a quicker set-up and training time and is compatible with most software applications."

One of Deke's challenges at SCE is to help employees with upper extremity disabilities return to work. "We were looking for ways to reduce keystrokes," he says, "It was relatively easy to demonstrate such a need, especially when we calculated the costs of lost workdays, worker's compensation, other company benefits, plus the effects of disabilities on morale. We explored and provided ergonomic methods such as special mouse/keyboards, sit/stand workstations, fully adjustable chairs, and foot rests. After Renee's presentation, I knew speech recognition had evolved to a point where it warranted careful consideration as well."

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— Deke Lightholder,
Southern California Edison

Deke started by organizing a speech recognition demo for the Worker's Compensation Department at SCE, and before long their Rehabilitation Representatives were referring employees with disabilities to

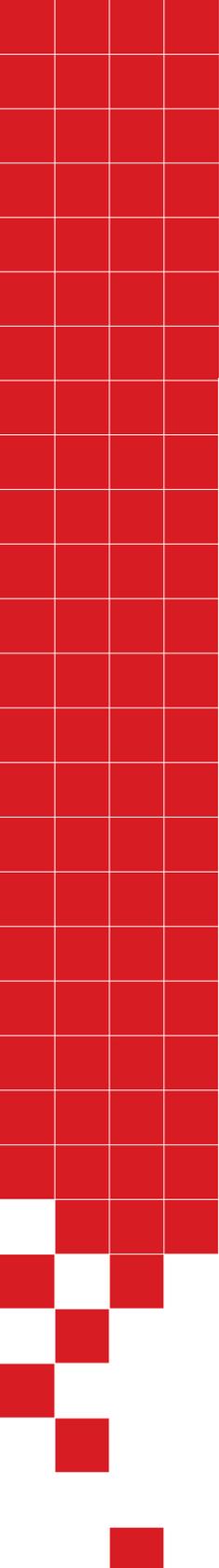
Challenge: Bring disabled employees at Southern California Edison back to work faster.

Strategy: Use speech recognition to help disabled employees meet the productivity requirements for job performance.

Results: Dragon NaturallySpeaking helps return disabled employees to work much sooner, thereby reducing costs to the company and minimizing lost time to the employee.

Zephyr Tech for training on Dragon NaturallySpeaking. The next challenge, however, was placing trained employees back on the job. "Placement was difficult because we didn't have support from our Information Technology (IT) Department," says Deke. First and foremost, for an application to be on an employee's desktop it must be "approved" by IT. After all, without IT support, employees having difficulty using speech recognition software didn't have any technical support.

So, in August of 2001, SCE's Disability Management and Workers' Compensation Departments partnered to organize a speech recognition program and started by giving two demonstrations to key people in the company. "To get IT on board," Deke explains, "the project would need the support from a cross section of departments and the endorsement



from upper management.” To help, Ric Marchi of Computer Career Connection, a Dragon NaturallySpeaking Reseller local to Southern California Edison, was enlisted. “Ric was able to demonstrate to SCE’s IT Department, management, and executives the value of speech technology,” Deke recalls, “His expertise proved invaluable and was a considerable asset to the project.”

The demonstrations were well received and by December 2001, IT was fully on board. A speech recognition technology task force was created at SCE, with a dedicated project manager and approximately 35 dedicated advisory personnel from different parts of the company. In March of 2002, the SCE help desk began taking calls from 20 speech recognition software users.

A pilot program was implemented in April 2002 and 9 participants were selected from four different SCE work areas. In each area, one employee used Dragon NaturallySpeaking and the other used a competing product. This gave the Voice Recognition Technology Project Team the ability to do side-by-side comparisons to see which solution best met the needs of SCE. “Both products were thoroughly tested,” Deke explains, “and the Project Team established that Dragon NaturallySpeaking was the best match for our business needs.”

During the pilot, employees were given classroom as well as one-on-one instruction at their workstations. When problems arose, employees were directed to contact the SCE help

desk. If this first point of contact can’t resolve an issue, it is elevated to IT’s tier three engineering staff and they consult directly with Ric Marchi when necessary. This helped the SCE help desk staff become more knowledgeable about supporting Dragon NaturallySpeaking and the most common issues.

This approach has made it easier for employees to more effectively use Dragon NaturallySpeaking. “In fact,” Deke says, “within a relatively short training time, training has enabled SCE employees using Dragon NaturallySpeaking to dictate faster than required by the company’s typing speed tests, a prerequisite for most clerical job categories.” The pilot program demonstrated training is a critical factor in the successful deployment of this technology.

After the pilot program questionnaires were given to users and IT staff and a focus group was held to gather information. “Employee and supervisor reaction to the pilot program was extremely favorable,” Deke says, “Initially, the project was targeting employees currently off work due to upper extremity disabilities. However, the program has generated interest from other areas and the most common question we now hear is ‘When can we have it?’” Looking back, Deke points to obtaining IT support as perhaps the most important hurdle to adopting Dragon NaturallySpeaking as a solution for disabled workers. “IT support also makes supervisors more receptive to their employees using the software.”

Here are some results of the pilot:

Customer Service Representatives (CSR) in the phone center pilot programs have been able to cut the number of required keystrokes approximately 40%. SCE’s Automotive Service Department was able to reduce required keystrokes nearly 75% while improving upon job productivity requirements. “In some job classifications, we have even seen productivity increase as a result of Dragon NaturallySpeaking.”

SCE’s phone center has added over 30,000 customer and street names to Southern California Edison’s confidential Dragon NaturallySpeaking vocabulary. This enables the software to recognize proper names and reduce call times. When asked if he would recommend Dragon NaturallySpeaking to his peers at other large organizations, Deke’s response was simple: “I already have.”

Deke summarizes his experience this way: “Dragon NaturallySpeaking will allow us to return disabled employees to work much sooner, thereby reducing costs to the company and lost time to the employee. Our Safety Department at Southern California Edison is a supporter of the voice project and believes the software has the potential to reduce injuries associated with keying. We see Dragon NaturallySpeaking as a win/win solution for our disabled population. And ultimately, we’d like to make it available to all employees.”

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