

## The Metropolitan Corporate Counsel®

### The Case For Dictation: Improved ROI , Security, Client Service, Workflow Management And Legal Staff Efficiency

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When you think of the word "dictation," what comes to mind? For many people, the word "dictation" conjures up nostalgic imagery that could be the subject of a Norman Rockwell painting. People tend to think back to a time when businesses were run by men with dedicated secretaries who prepared documents for them, usually by taking shorthand and recreating text on a typewriter.

The world has changed tremendously since those days. Today, men and women tend to support themselves and often do not have a personal assistant at arm's reach. There has been a shift among new generations to cease dictation in lieu of preparing one's own documentation. Most colleges today do not teach dictation as part of their curriculum. The result is a lack of emphasis on one of the most effective ways to improve productivity - via dictation.

Tremendous efficiency gains can be made by utilizing dictation over self-composition. The average computer user types at 33 words per minute, 19 words per minute for composition tasks. The average person speaks at a rate of 150 words per minute for standard conversation, although trained dictators can speak significantly faster. If the average person dictates information instead of composing it and preparing the documentation himself or herself, production is nearly 10 times faster. Think about the impact this could have on a department's bottom line.

It is simply inefficient for attorneys to be so heavily involved in administrative tasks. Your billable hours pay you to think, apply law and work directly with your clients. Those hours do not pay you to shuffle paperwork and be immersed in back-end documentation. When attorneys are alleviated from the hassle of completing this documentation, they have more time - time for themselves or time that can be used to acquire new work, increase their billable time and serve their clients better.

#### **The Evolution Of Dictation**

Historically, attorneys have used analog tapes to capture their dictations. This method has worked for decades, but using analog tapes does have its limits. Tapes get lost and break - resulting not only in re-work, but also in the loss of secure client information. Tapes also hold up the document turnaround process; often a single tape contains multiple client matters, none of which can be transcribed until the tape is full and given to the transcriptionist. That person then has the challenge of trying to identify how much work from which jobs is on that tape and which of those need priority attention.

Fortunately technology has evolved, and we now have a solution to the challenges posed by analog tapes. That solution is digital dictation.

You are likely familiar with the term *digital dictation*. Digital dictation is a method of recording and editing the spoken word in real-time within a *digital* audio format. The term *digital dictation* does not imply speech recognition and should not be confused with voice or speech recognition technology.

Digital dictation offers several advantages over traditional cassette-tape-based dictation. When you go digital, you are no longer limited to the staple handheld recorder that microcassette users are accustomed to carrying. Going digital frees you to choose from a wide array of devices including digital handheld devices that are very similar to microcassette recorders, speech microphones that plug into your PC and mobile devices such as Windows Mobile, BlackBerry and Nokia smartphones.

A simple digital dictation system allows authors to record digital files and route them directly to a transcriptionist for processing. An example of a homegrown system might be the use of a digital handheld device such as an Olympus digital recorder coupled with email for delivery. With this sort of setup, the user captures dictation on a device that he or she then docks to a PC in order to upload the audio files, which are then emailed for transcription.

There are certainly benefits to this solution over a traditional analog tape system. Such benefits include easy editing or insertion of voice into the files, the ability to email the files from anywhere, and better sound quality. You also benefit from instant delivery of dictation on a job-by-job basis for transcription. No longer do you have tapes to courier or courier costs associated with shipping tapes to locations outside your office, nor is your work subject to loss as a result of a lost or broken tape.

Finally, there are mobile advantages. We live in an increasingly mobile world. As staff members are more and more mobile, there is a need to decrease lost productivity as a result of transit times. In a digital world, mobile professionals can now not only capture dictation while in transit, making productive use of non-productive time, but in some cases they can send that work back to the office for completion before returning there themselves.

There is certainly something to be said for the incredible convenience of having access to a digital dictation system at all times in all places. We live in a fast-paced world, and thoughts whiz in and out of our heads at incredible speeds. It would be a shame to have a great idea or revelation on a client matter and not have the ability to capture that thought because you were in a courtroom waiting area or dining in a nice restaurant. Having an effective digital dictation system means you can be confident that your best ideas are captured.

One of the most important points is that when it comes to input devices, it is never a one-size-fits-all scenario. Some authors are happy to dictate with a BlackBerry, while others prefer digital handheld. Similarly, some will always have a separate dictation device, while others will embrace the idea of a single device to handle dictation along with telephony, email, etc.

### **Digital Dictation Workflow Management Systems**

Some individuals express concern about capturing their information digitally as they worry about what will happen to the file once they capture it. Common questions are, "So I have a file - what do I do with it now?" and, "How do I know the file won't be lost or misdirected?" That's where a workflow process comes in.

There are benefits that a digital dictation workflow management system offers that a simple digital dictation system cannot provide. A digital dictation workflow management system enhances the benefits of a digitally collected voice, while embracing the management of the flow of information after capture. This type of system offers an abundance of additional benefits.

Simplified or vanilla digital dictation systems often lack important system management tools to enable managers and users to clearly identify backlogs of work to be completed, information on who is doing what, information on support staff efficiency, promotion of priority projects, or the ability to reroute work as needed. Remember, a vanilla system is just that - plain. It does little more than capture dictation in a digital format. As a result, departments that utilize these systems often do not realize all the benefits that a better-developed system could offer.

Digital dictation workflow management solutions address all the common problems legal departments face with regard to document turnaround.

They help you to overcome issues associated with:

- The inability to monitor productivity, track down job status and reallocate jobs to available resources;
- The inconvenience of manual allocation of tapes and files throughout the organization;
- The high costs for tape and unit replacement, and
- The need for remote dictation and transcription and improved document turnaround time.

Imagine having the ability to know instantly how many dictations are pending for completion. Imagine having the ability to know who is working on what. Imagine having the ability to configure a system that can identify and remedy bottlenecks in the production process. These are just a few of the added benefits a workflow solution provides that a standard digital dictation system does not. These translate into bottom line benefits.

There is a competitive pressure to minimize the time it takes to turn around information and the costs associated with that task. Cost savings can be realized as a result of an increase in company-wide work sharing and productivity. Dictation is available immediately to your transcriptionists, which improves report turnaround time and maximizes productivity. By literally eliminating or reducing keystrokes, transcription and other administrative costs are significantly lowered. Cost savings can also be attributed to increased transcription productivity and improved document turnaround time, being able to share hardware across multiple offices, decreased courier costs and, indirectly, enhanced customer and employee satisfaction levels.

### **Flexible Acquisition Options**

If you are a member of a small department, you may be wondering, "Is this attainable for a group like mine?" It is true that in not-too-distant times the more sophisticated digital dictation workflow management systems required investments beyond what a small or mid-size firm or department could handle. Fortunately, the cost of these systems today is much more affordable and accessible by groups of all sizes.

Digital dictation workflow management systems can be acquired through traditional licensing models that many of us are accustomed to. Recently, these solutions became available as a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) as well.

SaaS is the answer to many of the IT headaches associated with the traditional on-site software model for firms that lack dedicated IT departments or staff. In this platform, software delivery is seen as a service rather than an investment into a project that must be managed. With no software or servers to buy, install, maintain, or upgrade, the popularity of on-demand grows with IT organizations that are increasingly asked to do more with less.

With traditional software licensing, applications are installed separately at each customer site on its own server. Each customer is responsible for maintaining the infrastructure the software requires. With the SaaS model, software and servers are managed by the software vendor. All upgrades to the software and the servers are performed automatically by the vendor, freeing internal resources to focus on core business activities.

There are many providers of digital dictation solutions and many consultants who can help you review your unique situation and select the platform that is right for you. When looking for a vendor, ask questions. Discuss your needs and challenges. Evaluate their offerings. Be mindful of not only the financial ROI (which is tough to measure with these sorts of technologies) but the soft return, such as improved security, better service delivery to your clients, improved visibility of documents in production and overall improved staff efficiency.

For a free test drive of WinScribe's Digital Dictation Workflow Management Suite, please visit [www.winscribe.com/testdrive](http://www.winscribe.com/testdrive).

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