

Weaning a practice from tape-based dictation



Keeping everyone happy in a practice is no easy matter, particularly when it comes to finding compatible software that is easy to use. Jake London test drives a digital dictation system.

As the IT manager for a medium sized practice in the north of England it is my responsibility to make sure that everybody from the administration staff through to the partners are happy with their computers and digital tools and to choose the software that makes a real improvement to working practices.

It is vital that the software I purchase will make the investment worthwhile. All aspects of the software must be considered, including the requirements of the computers in the practice; ease of installation and use, as well as the time it takes to train somebody up on it. I can report that BigHand digital dictation ticks all the right boxes and does so extremely well.

How does it work?

In essence, BigHand replaces old tape-based dictation systems with a digital version that runs on your computer. Dictation is done into a microphone, captured and transferred to the computer of whoever is typing the document.

What are the advantages?

- **Reliability.** Because there are no tapes you can say goodbye to low quality recordings as the tape degrades. The risk of losing dictation when the old machines lose power is also eliminated.
- **Speed.** It speeds up the workflow by removing the need for tapes to be physically moved from one person to another. Fee-earners can push dictation into the system and typists, wherever they may be, can pick the dictation up and start right away.
- **Function.** There is a good facility for pausing a dictation if a user wants to collect his or her thoughts and there is provision for marking a dictation as a priority. If a user wants to check who is typing the dictation and how it is coming along (without asking the typist) that, too, is made easy.
- **Flexibility.** BigHand can be used in the office with any computer. If users are out of the office they can take a portable dictation recorder with

them. On their return they can plug it in and update the system with the new dictation or email it into the system right away.

If users have access to the internet while away, they can open a web browser and work from there. Seamless remote dictation, whereby a dictation is placed straight into the system can be achieved with a BlackBerry or Windows mobile phone. If a user does not have their portable device while away from the office, and there is no internet available, they can pick up a phone, dial and start dictating straight into the system from wherever they might be.

- **Knowledge.** BigHand comes with a good range of pertinent reports enabling users to keep tabs of how well everybody who uses the system is doing. The reports can be analysed further with the help of excel.
- **Configuration.** Each practice is different and BigHand adapts well to different requirements. Each user can be set up to use a specific typist or typing pool or, alternatively, a single pool can be used for everyone. Dictations can be marked private and routed accordingly. Colour coded priorities simplify the use of BigHand.

Users' response

Whenever a system is changed within a practice there is always the human element to consider. BigHand has done a good job of closely mirroring (and extending) the tape-based workflow so everybody who uses the system can easily understand where they fit in.

My experience of people who are very used to the tape-based system using BigHand has been very positive, with people learning to use it and producing good results within an hour.

Training is minimal and can be carried out in house from any user. In my experience, acceptance of a completely new system within a day is a rare thing.

BigHand has worked hard at creating a program interface (or window) that shows all important information quickly and simply.


Because BigHand allows you to 'see' the dictation you can tell at a glance how long it is and where you are in it. This enables users to make complex edits of the dictation before sending it into the workflow.

The IT department

This software will make IT staff happy because it is a standard client/server setup with the reliability of Microsoft SQL Server at the heart of it all. With Microsoft SQL Server comes scalability and as your practice grows this will grow with you.

Client installations are simple with many options ranging from the standard point and click approach, to silent install via the active directory or admin share. The server installation is not that different either, using a great install routine with no fuss.

The management of this system is almost non-existent. The back-up routine needs to be changed, but that is about the extent of it.

Added to which, on the occasions when I have talked to BigHand technical support for assistance, the experience has been professional, friendly and knowledgeable. 

Jake London is the IT manager for Martin and Haigh Solicitors, Scunthorpe, North Lincolnshire.

Key points

- BigHand replaces old tape-based dictation systems with a digital version that runs on a computer.
- The software is standard client/server setup.
- Training is minimal and can be done in house from any user.