

## Digital Dictation ... "Take this down Mrs Jones"

**Do you recall the 1950s film portrayals of business men where Mr Chumley-Warner summons his prim secretary into his office to take a dictation? How times of changed. You don't find many scenes like that now: for a start the boss is just as likely to be female and who does short-hand anymore?**



Despite advances in technology, typing correspondence and reports is still very much at the heart of modern day business. Dictation may have come a long way since short-hand, with tape recorders and more recently digital recorders, but still relatively few people do it. We may dream of speaking into our PC and a finished report appearing, ready to go. However, the complexities of speech recognition, means learning a whole new language to get your instructions across, making it a painful experience that falls far short of our expectations.

We have a long wait ahead for perfect speech recognition and formatting. So, it looks like digital dictation and transcription are here to stay, for a few more decades at least.

So, what do you need to know about digital dictation and transcription services?

### **Dictating**

If you've not done it before, dictating is easy enough, once you get the hang of it. There are rules and protocols to follow, that make it easier for the Transcriber – which means they'll be faster and cheaper - so they will usually provide you with some basic training and guidelines.

Normally, you'd squirrel yourself away somewhere to dictate a letter or report, be that in your office, car or just somewhere private. You don't often hear someone dictating in public, but it's not uncommon to find someone recording meeting minutes (e.g. at construction site meetings). This avoids typing work after the meeting, so you can move on to the next task with a clear head.

Common uses for digital recordings include notes, meetings and interviews. Surveyors and Estate Agents make notes and dictate reports as they conduct a survey; HR Managers sometimes record sensitive employee meetings (e.g. disciplinary hearings); and Market Researchers and Consultant Psychiatrists record interviews. This way they have a permanent record of conversations and find it easier to work from the full transcription.

Less obvious examples where dictation can save time include, making research notes (from observations, books and internet searches), capturing information thoughts after a meeting or sales call (especially when there was too much going on to get it all down in the meeting), or perhaps even capturing your thoughts and ideas when you're relaxing in the bath?



## What Equipment Do I Need?

All you need is a Digital Recorder. These hand-held devices also go by the name “Voice Recorders” or “Pocket Memos” and come in a variety of shapes and sizes. You can get Key Fob memos and other novelty formats, but for business you need a device that’s been designed for the job.

Sound quality is important: your Transcriber needs to understand what you are saying. You can get cheap recorders from as little as £25, but it’s worth paying more to get a better quality one.

The most popular makes are Olympus, Sony and Phillips, but there are others. I would suggest getting a simple one to start with (i.e. as few buttons as possible). Top of the range models have a wonderful array of features and capabilities, but they can be complex and fiddly to use.

If you are not sure what to buy, or need one for a short period only – for a project or assignment – then your Transcriber may be able to rent you a digital recorder with the option of buying it. This is a great way to test drive equipment and see how you get on with dictation.

## Which Transcription Service?

There are lots of transcription services around, but what’s right for you depends on what you need. If you want cheap, then you could try the Far East and India. Don’t expect any frills or consistency, and the quality may be variable, but it is cheap. America can be cheaper than the UK and benefits from the time difference, so you can have typing done whilst you sleep, and the quality is good too.

If you are looking for a more personal service then you need to look closer to home. You may prefer your Transcriber to get to know you and your business, so they understand the context for your work and can interpret your notes. You may want them to undertake a broader range of instructions and tasks, for example, sending out finished letters, formatting your report, or making appointments for interviews. A UK based service might cost a few pounds more, but you’ll get exactly what you need.

If you are going off-shore, then language, culture and data security are all important considerations, especially if your information is personal or of a sensitive nature. All EU states have equivalent protection to the UK’s Data Protection Act 1998 – there are no such laws in the US or the Far East and their attitudes to confidentiality may not be comparable either. You need to assess this risk.

Finally, the technology options vary too. Some services are 100% online – uploading & downloading files via a website, paying per transcription online with a credit card and no personal contact. You’ll need to decide what’s acceptable compared with using email and paying monthly on invoice.

If you would like to find out more about Office Lifeline’s [digital dictation services](#), you can contact me on 01926 659 120, or via email at [denis@office-lifeline.co.uk](mailto:denis@office-lifeline.co.uk).

### About the author

Denis Pelych is a professional Management Consultant specialising in e-business technology and practice. He spent many years with IBM Consulting Group and went on to establish [The National B2B Centre](#) at Warwick University. He is now a Director of [Viretec Consulting](#) and [Virtual HQ Solutions](#), and both businesses help people to exploit IT and the internet to the full.

