From forest floor to non-sexy speech – Updated

Local company TranscribeMe is tackling the mature transcription marketplace with some innovative kiwi-developed software.

Don't get us wrong, we're not talking the sexy speech recognition market in which Apple's Siri plays. Siri is fantastic for short bursts of audio, but useless for an author dictating hours of content. The market TranscribeMe is aimed at is professionals. We're talking humans turning hours of recorded audio from a conference or the like into editable text files.

How it works:

The company's free app will shortly be available for Windows phone, followed by iPhone, Android and finally Blackberry. You download their app, which turns your smartphone into the microphone.

You record your event, meeting, interview, or dictate your content into the smartphone.

The recording is then uploaded to the company's servers, which are hosted in the cloud on Microsoft's Azure platform. The recording is then broken up into smaller micro tasks and distributed to professional transcribers. The software matches dialects to transcribers in your region and indentifies the sentence structure so that the audio is split at logical breaks in the audio.

Once transcribed, the text is sent back to the customer by email within 24 hours. Secure access is also provided for the customer to download the original audio recordings.

The advantages:

Group meetings are the bulk of the work right now according to CEO, Alexei Dunayev. That's because humans can identify multiple authors or speakers in the recordings, which is something electronic solutions have yet to master. This combined with the ability for humans to understand subtle spoken inflections combine for a much more accurate result than any electronic transcription options currently available.

The company is planning to charge a flat fee of around US$1 per minute of recorded audio. This simplified approach is at odds with the transcription industry's norm – to charge per hour worked – which can often add up to 3 or 4 minutes worked for each minute of recorded audio.

Along with the cost savings, clients using the service will avoid the time wasted on finding and vetting a transcriber, as well as the file transfer complexities, all of which are solved by TranscribeMe.

The origin:

Believe it or not the software was initially developed by Victor Obolonkin, while completing his PHD in Life Sciences at Auckland University. His idea was to install sophisticated microphone devices in forests. These devices would record audio from the forest, which would later be analysed. The analysis would identify particular birds and track their movements through the forest over time.

While TranscribeMe has had some pretty humble beginnings, it's great to see another Kiwi success story shaking up a legacy industry around the globe.

Update: TranscribeMe has been selected by Microsoft BizSpark for a scholarship to attend the Demo Asia 2012 startup conference.

TranscribeMe was chosen along with 10 companies from the area, and was the only New Zealand business to be selected.

As well as presenting an alpha pitch at the Singapore conference – the first to be held in the region – the company will have a display booth in the BizSpark pavilion, two individual conference passes, a video of their pitch on the Demo Asia website, and a three-minute backstage interview.

Tags: Blackberry, Siri,Speech, TranscribeMe
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