

# TranscribeMe Takes On Apple's Siri With Man and Machine

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TranscribeMe has raised a total of \$1.5 million to develop its text-to-speech service.

Note to self: Good speech-to-text services aren't cheap.

[TranscribeMe](#), a startup that charges customers between \$1 and \$3 per minute for audio transcription powered by people and machines, closed a round of about \$900,000 last week, co-founder Alexei Dunayev said in an interview.

The round was led by Keiretsu Forum, with Ice Angels, Maverick Angels, Sand Hill Angels, Sierra Angels and Tech Coast Angels also kicking in money. The company has raised a total of \$1.5 million, Dunayev said. TranscribeMe is not profitable, but he expects to be by the end of next year.

The startup competes with Apple's Siri and Google's audio transcriber, which rely on computers to try to figure out what the user is saying. Anyone who has shouted at their iPhone's virtual personal assistant will know that these tools aren't always reliable, especially for longer ramblings. Nuance's popular Dragon Dictation has similar issues (though the company also offers paid services targeted at health-care professionals in which audio is transcribed by people).

How can TranscribeMe compete with free? Dunayev touts the quality of the service, which relies on computer algorithms as well as human ears. Freelance workers can sign up to be paid \$20 for every hour of audio they transcribe, according to the website. The system splits audio tracks into pieces, in part to preserve the customer's privacy, and transcribers can work in 30-second intervals during their free time, Dunayev said. Each time a person contributes an accurate transcription, the computer can learn to associate a particular accent with a word, he said.

"We can rely more and more on computers, and less and less on people," Dunayev said. "Over time, computers will do more and more of the work, but you still need people."

Dunayev started TranscribeMe in Auckland, where a dozen employees are based, before opening an office in Emeryville, California. He said TranscribeMe is headquartered in the Bay Area, despite having half as many employees based there, in order to focus its strategic efforts on the U.S. market and connect with investors there.

“I like the approach of running a business that bridges Silicon Valley and New Zealand,” said Andrew Hamilton, the director of Auckland-based investor Ice Angels. “I’ve seen a lot of companies that try to make the transition. Some succeed, and some fail.”

With money in the bank, success for TranscribeMe could depend more on whether computers can ever surpass the accuracy of the human ear.

TAGS: [ALEXEI DUNAYEV](#), [FUNDING](#), [NEW ZEALAND](#), [NUANCE](#), [SIRI](#), [STARTUP](#), [TRANSCRIBEME](#), [TRANSCRIPTION](#), [VENTURE CAPITAL](#)

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