

REAL PEOPLE



reviews by daniel east



Real People Reviews by Daniel M. East

Product: iListen

Manufacturer/Vendor/Developer: MacSpeech

MSRP: 149.00 (tested version incl. USB Telex headset mic/earphone)

Review date: May 10, 2004



PULL QUOTE: “functional and fun if you really need this type of product”

DESCRIPTION (What's it do? What's it got?): iListen gives you the ability to change conversational speech into text on your Mac using Apple's speech recognition technologies and the Philips FreeSpeech 2000 speech engine.

MIN. SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: OS 9.2.2, OS X 10.1.5 or 10.2x or later; 192 Mb RAM/256 Mb or greater with OS X

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: iListen for me is always a work in progress. Either I don't have the much needed time to train it, or find a quiet enough room in which to sit and use it. Having said that, you do have the ability to import most standard audio files so it is easy to dictate your words first and then let iListen to the rest.

LIKES : iListen is both functional and fun if you need this type of product. You may not even realize what it can do until you use it. Controlling applications, accessing areas of your Finder and just using the Telex headset in iChat let you fly around your desktop easily. When it comes to actually dictating e-mails and/or letters to documents, it does help to hear yourself say the words out loud to create more effective messages. In fact, I'm doing it (hopefully) right now.

DISLIKES : The learning curve for iListen is not the human one, it is the application, itself. Even after completing nearly all of the dictation teaching text provided, my errors are nearly 15%. While the iListen "correction playback" and other options are helpful, it makes the task slightly more tedious. I hear myself thinking that I might have just typed it faster.

HOW DOES THIS PRODUCT COMPARE? : At present, IBM's ViaVoice (now marketed by Scan Soft) is about the only thing out there that is visible enough to compete with iListen and it is available for around 130.00. ViaVoice is slower and doesn't support nearly as many actual words as iListen. iListen offers optional "ScriptPaks" for nearly all of the major text applications giving the user preset spoken commands for nearly every shortcut and function.

WHO MIGHT ENJOY THIS PRODUCT? iListen is effective enough for special needs users who might have limited manual dexterity, those who simply have great difficulty in learning to type or those who would just rather talk than type.

TEST SYSTEM: Apple Titanium PowerBook G4 500 - 1 Gb RAM - 10.3.3

FINAL THOUGHTS: While I love the idea of speech recognition a little more than the execution of it, iListen continues to improve and MacSpeech's dedication to this product is admirable. When you consider dialects, inflections, impediments, accents and colloquial speech, it is amazing to use once you have the application trained. This technology can and will improve as processors get faster and as the ability to simply talk to your computer becomes a reality. The setup is simple and clearly laid out in front of you.

OVERALL RATING: 3.5 out of 5 stars VERY GOOD

For more information, visit: <http://www.macspeech.com/products/iListen.html>

Daniel East is the founder and president of The Mid-Atlantic Macintosh User Groups Team (MaMUGs); a member of The Apple Consultants Network (ACN); a panelist on "PC Talk Radio;" a live speaker/presenter and a freelance columnist for several Mac publications.

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