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Dragon NaturallySpeaking

By Avril Rinn

Perhaps you've seen them? Trendy-looking people, casually sprawled in comfy chairs, "talking" to their computers. They are the faces of the most popular speech recognition program available, Dragon NaturallySpeaking (DNS).

Though Speech Recognition (SR) technology, which allows computer users to enter text and execute commands using their voices, is very popular at the moment, it isn't new – it's been around in some form since the 1980's. At one of the first DNS demonstrations in 1992, the system required extensive training, and was being primarily marketed to people with physical disabilities, and it cost around \$10,000.

There is no doubt DNS has come a long way since then. At around \$250, for the most popular edition (DNS Preferred Version 9), the software is now very reasonably priced. Recent SR advances allow the program's website to boast of up to 99% accuracy, and that using DNS is three times faster than typing. It also claims no voice training or script reading is required.

Though DNS is not primarily marketed as assistive technology – the most recent versions were not specifically designed for use by people with disabilities - it has become an essential program for many computer users who are unable to type because of physical disabilities. Adults and children with learning disabilities have also benefited from using DNS – HOWEVER... Before anyone with a learning disability buys the program, there are some important details to consider.

Assume you aren't one of those people on the package: Be prepared to work hard while you learn to use DNS. Though Version 9 requires much less training than previous versions did, to be as accurate as possible, it still needs at least some training. As you use it, the program builds a profile of the way you "write" and the words you use. The more you work with it the more accurate your results will be and the more written work you will be able to produce. It is very important to catch and correct mistakes – otherwise the program will continue to make them. If you have trouble with spelling or recognizing improperly used synonyms, for example, you may need someone to help you in the beginning.

Have realistic expectations: SR is more suited to some tasks than it is to others. It works very well for word processing, email and other programs whose primary purpose is entering text. It may work less well, or not at all, with graphics programs and other such software.

Continued on page 2...



Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario
London Region



UWO Centre for Inclusive
Education



Summer Camps for Children with Learning Disabilities

By Brenda Sword

Finding the right summer camp where your loved ones will be happy and safe can be hard, but finding a camp that fully understands learning disabilities can be even tougher. Luckily there are many sources of information available on the World Wide Web that can assist you in your search for the perfect camp that suits your specific needs. Some of these camps offer: year-round programs, programs for adults, and programs for young adults

We suggest that you do your research on any camp that you might send your camper to. Ask for testimonials or references from former campers and their parents. ATN has not checked credentials or references for these camps and therefore this list is provided to you for informational purposes only.

If you are interested in working at a summer camp, some of these camps have job postings on their websites.

Kinark Outdoor Centre

<http://www.koc.on.ca/>

Box 730 Minden, ON K0M 2K0

Tel: 1-800-805-8252

This is a camp for children and youth between ten and sixteen years of age who require a high level of social and behavioural support. Special autism programs are offered.

Camp Winston

<http://www.campwinston.com/>

1147 River Lane Pvt.

R.R. #2

Kilworthy, ON. POE 1G0

Tel: (416) 487-6229

This camp operates a residential recreational summer programme for campers with complex neurological disorders such as: Tourette syndrome, ADD, ADHD, learning disabilities,

Continued on page 3...

...Continued from page 1

Editions and versions: There are five editions of DNS, different because of the tasks each one was designed to perform, and a price that varies substantially. DNS Preferred is suitable for most people with learning disabilities. Versions numbers increase as software is changed and improved. The current DNS version available is 9.

Understand system requirements: DNS requires a 1 Gigabyte (GB) of Random Access Memory (RAM) and 1 GB of free hard disk space. If you plan to run other software as well, for example, MS Word, Excel, or Internet Explorer, more RAM may be needed. A computer purchased today will probably be powerful enough to run DNS, but an older computer won't be. A headset microphone is included with the software, but the purchase of a good quality USB microphone is strongly recommended for enhanced voice quality.

DNS is just one tool: Over the past ten years the number of software programs designed to assist people with learning disabilities to work with written language have increased dramatically. There are speech recognition programs like DNS, scan and read programs, word prediction software, and many more. Most people have the best results by utilizing a number of different strategies to assist them with their learning challenges. DNS is just one of the tools available. It isn't a perfect solution and won't solve every problem.

Speech recognition and children with learning disabilities:

A few recent studies* in Britain showed that children who used SR improved their reading and spelling, used longer words, and produced more work. There is no question that some children benefit greatly from SR when the software is properly taught and used. But parents and teachers should keep in mind that many of the above points apply even more emphatically to children. Teaching a child to use DNS requires patience and should only be done by someone who is very familiar with the software themselves. The more frequently the software is used the more productive the child will be. DNS does not "make up for" or "cure" a learning disability. Every effort should still be made to help children acquire the best possible reading skills they are capable of achieving.

So how realistic are those happy, trendy DNS users on the package? For the average person who uses the program frequently for common applications, and has good language skills, they are very realistic. Adults and children with learning disabilities can also learn to use the program efficiently, but much more time and effort will probably be required.

*Reference source: <http://www.dyslexic.com/dictben>

Success Profile

Dr. Guy Grenier – Clinical and Counselling Psychologist – Author

By Brenda Sword

What is your LD?

I have dyslexia.

When did you find out you had an LD and how was it diagnosed?

It was evident in grade one that something was wrong. When the new school year started and the teachers divided the students into groups based on their abilities, I always started out with the top students. However, after a period of time I would always be demoted through the various levels until I was in the lowest group because of my struggles with spelling, reading and to a lesser extent math. Finally in grade four one teacher recommended that I be tested; it was found that I was dyslexic.

Following your diagnosis, what did you do differently?

When I was in grade school, there were few remedial groups and no accommodations. As a function of my LD assessment (which indicated an elevated IQ) I was often placed in the advanced groups in class but this invariably led to frustration and eventually a sense of helplessness, as I was unable to perform academically at a level that was commensurate with my group mates or my assessed intellectual ability. In general, school was a real struggle despite my diagnosis until the later years of high school.

How do you accommodate your LD?

I now accommodate my LD with assistive technology, self-disclosure, and a library of dictionaries.

In my fifth year of undergraduate work (after my first year I realized I could only keep up if I took a reduced course load which meant a four year program took five for me) I could no longer keep up with the reading and writing demands. I hired a typist who could correct my spelling errors, but the additional time this required made meeting deadlines next to impossible. Fortunately, an interactive spell-checking program had just been written for the newly introduced Macintosh computer and this literally changed my life. With the use of this technology, my deadlines were no longer weeks ahead of everyone else. While this didn't solve all my problems, the help it did offer meant that graduate work became a possibility for me and I went on to earn an MA and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology.

When teaching university classes, public speaking, or conducting workshops I tell my audience that I am dyslexic. If I make spelling mistakes on handouts or have to write anything on the board and there is a spelling error my listeners are more likely to attribute this to my LD, rather than inexactitude or carelessness.

I always keep dictionaries at hand. In my office there are at least five hard copy versions plus multiple levels of spell checking software on my computer. While I am happy to speak extemporaneously, I live in fear of having to write something on the spur of the moment, without the use of a spell-checker. Book

Continued on page 4...

...continued from page 4

oppositional defiant disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety disorder, autism and other pervasive development disorders, spectrum disorders.

Camp Kennebec

<http://campkennebec.com/>

1422 Cox Rd R. R. # 2

Arden, ON K0H 1B0

Tel: 1 877 335-2114

This is an integrated summer residence for children with ADD, ADHD, learning disabilities, behavioural needs as well as mainstream campers.

Camp Kodiak

<http://www.campkodiak.com/index.htm>

General Delivery

McKellar, ON P0G 1C0

Toll Free 1 877 569-7595

Kodiak campers range in age from 6-18 and include children & teens with and without learning disabilities, ADD & Asperger syndrome.

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, London Region (LDAO-LR)

www.ldalondon.ca

205 Oxford St., London ON

Tel: 519-438-6213

"Back to School Basics". Ease the transition back into the school setting for your child with a LD and/or AD/HD. Recreational activities will be paired with structured learning to practice essential skills.

For a more extensive list of camps along with job opportunities please visit these sites:

<http://wmoore.net/therapy.html#CAN>

<http://www.mysummercamps.com/camps/index.html>

<http://www.camppage.com/ontario.htm>

<http://www.allensguide.com/Canada/Ontario/>



Online Learning Available

By Dave McLaughlin

An online learning platform developed through collaboration between London's non-profit and business communities will hold its formal launch on May 16. The product, called Academ-e Online Classroom, is the result of an increasingly popular business model known as social enterprise.

In social enterprise, private sector interests go beyond giving money to charities and offer their business knowledge and resources to all aspects of product development from design to promotion. The non-profit sector offers its expertise in a specialized area of client service and contributes to product development as well. In the end, revenue generated from sales goes back into supporting the operations of the non-profit partner.

"It is a new way of looking at the role our business community can play in contributing to community services," says Vicki Mayer, executive director of ATN for Persons with Disabilities: "businesses have more to contribute than money; they also have expertise to share. They provide a lot of insight into where to take a product like this."

The product, Academ-e, is a flexible venue for administering and offering course content online. It can be applied in situations ranging from traditional online learning, to employee orientation, to offering technical instruction for clients who just bought the latest software release. Although this product is being launched by ATN

Continued on page 5...

...Continued from page 5

signings create anxiety for me as I know I will be unable to spell names correctly and will make spelling errors when asked to write dedications.

How easy did you find it to disclose? Has disclosing helped you in anyway?

Disclosing for me is mere conversation; it's just a part of who I am. It might become a brief topic of conversation but for the most part, people don't really care that much. There was one occasion when a couple of students tried to use it to their advantage in that on an assignment, they had a spelling error and tried to tell me it was my dyslexia and not their error.

Looking back, are there things that you could have done or handled differently in your life?

I wish that I had handled my course choices better in high school, I could have better prepared for my post secondary education. Entering university, I had to drop courses the first year because it was too much to take on all at once.

I had planned on going to med school, but I eventually came to the conclusion that this wouldn't be a reasonable choice when a mis-spelling on a prescription or medication order could be a matter of life or death. Others might make different choices, but my life experience has proven this was the correct, though regrettable, choice for me.

What was your school experience like?

I disclosed often so that people knew what I was dealing with. My greatest fear was (and remains) that errors in my written work might be interpreted as ineptitude or indifference to quality.

Did your LD affect your job history? Were you hireable?

I've never experienced any prejudice over my LD. For the most part, if I got the interview, I got the job.

What would you say to a person with a LD who is looking for work?

I say to those with LDs what I say to all my patients and students: have the courage to identify your strengths and weaknesses and the discipline to deal with both. People need to realize that "if they are born short, they won't be playing in the NBA." But, other than those few things you can't accomplish that are directly related to a weakness or LD, do what you can do well and succeed in that area. I didn't attend medical school, but that didn't stop me from obtaining a PhD.

What would you say to the employer or potential employer of a person with a LD?

People tend to have selective perception when they really need to look at the "whole person".

Are you aware of the assistive technology that helps people with LD? If so, do you use any and how has it helped you?

I use my spell checkers and dictionaries absolutely everyday of my life and generally they work well for me. There is a lot of software out there now and this means people can more easily find what works best for them.

PACFOLD Survey

By Brenda Sword

Putting a Canadian Face on Learning Disabilities (PACFOLD) is a groundbreaking applied research study initiated in 2004 by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada. It was completed by a team of researchers from across Canada. Their goal: to find out what it means to be a child, youth or adult with a learning disability in Canada. This was the first time Statistics Canada has had information requested from a disability organization.

The age groups studied were 5 to 44 years, focusing on the key areas of: education, personal and social development, employment, parent and family, health, and finance.

Key findings showed that "all Canadians with learning disabilities are at a disadvantage".

Parents/guardians of children of children 5-14 with LDs reported that:

- The child was more prone to ear infections and allergies
- Poorer overall health status
- Less likely to do well in school
- Less likely to do well in math and/or reading
- More likely to miss school
- One-third requires aids, but lack access to them
- Two-thirds report child's extracurricular activities were reduced because of their LD

The Impact on the Family of the 5-14 children included:

- More likely to be caring for the LD child as a single parent
- More likely that parent has depressive symptoms
- More likely to be part of a low-income family

Young adults age 15 to 21 reported that they were:

- More likely to not have a secondary school diploma or certificate
- Less likely to be working (even part-time) or looking for work
- More likely to be part of a low-income family
- More likely to report their mental status as fair to poor
- Less likely to handle unexpected problems appropriately
- More likely to report suicidal thoughts, depression and distress

Young adults aged 22-29 years living with LD were:

- Less likely to have a secondary school diploma or certificate
- Less likely to be working
- Those who are working, earn less

Continued on page 6...

...continued from page 4

for Persons with Disabilities, Academ-e can serve everyone in almost every capacity in a wide variety of businesses.

Allen Kool of Quantum5X, is one of the business partners in the project. He will use Academ-e to offer online training support for his clients:

"Academ-e is the result of a great new approach to product design that also benefits the community. The Academ-e system's extremely intuitive and easy-to-use interface has its roots in ATN's need to develop a product that is accessible by people with disabilities. This project has really exposed the advantages of tapping into the synergy that occurs when the business and non-profit sectors come together."

The product Launch will be held on Wednesday, May 16 between 1 and 3 pm, in the Crystal Ballroom North at the London Best Western Lamplighter Inn. Product demonstrations will be offered and refreshments will be served.

For more information contact:

Vicki Mayer,

Executive Director,

ATN for Persons with Disabilities

Phone: 519.433.7950

Or visit our Academ-e webpage at:

<http://www.atn.on.ca/Default.aspx?tabid=88>



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We hope you have enjoyed this issue of the LD Edge Newsletter and that you are looking forward to the May issue.

Please help us save the environment.

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**If we give them an edge,
they may give us one.**

...Continued from page 5

- Less likely to handle unexpected problems appropriately
- More likely to report suicidal thoughts, depression and distress

As an adult aged 30-44 years living with LD

- More likely to still be living with a parent
- More likely to be unemployed or just not seeking employment
- Those who are employed earn less
- More likely to score lower on literacy tests
- Few rated their reading and writing skills as excellent or good
- Less likely to handle unexpected problems appropriately
- More likely to report suicidal thoughts, depression

The study says that: "Canadian governments can do more to enable people with LDs. The solutions should be systemic, and involve publicly funded programs, such as social services, health, employment, literacy programs, federal income tax programs and other areas."

And so the journey begins. This survey has been covered on CBC news and hopefully learning disabilities is going to become a common topic of conversation. Learning disabilities need not be avoided or ignored. The person next to you may have an LD and you would never "see" this invisible disability. However the social and economic costs are there, we can see them and they can be reduced. Addressing learning disabilities in our society is an investment in Canada. The savings to taxpayers made possible by early detection, acceptance and accommodation of LDs results in tangible social and financial benefits for everyone.

One of the PACFOLD survey interviewees stated:

"There's not enough information about leaning disabilities in the work force. Employers don't have the information they need. They often see people with learning disabilities as too much of a risk to their businesses".

The LD Edge initiative has always been about providing more information to employers, educators and the general public about learning disabilities. Should you require further information about offering accommodations to persons with learning disabilities, please contact us.

To view the survey results in their entirety, please visit:

www.pacfold.ca

LD Fact: 47 per cent of adults with learning disabilities have experienced verbal abuse and bullying
Source: <http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/index.cfm>