

Softwords

A&L Computer Software Limited

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A&L's Head Office:	(905) 886-8066
Oak/Miss/Bramp/Ajax:	(416) 520-3238
Ottawa Office:	(613) 737-0677
Sudbury Office:	(705) 522-7577
Timmins Office:	(705) 268-4922
Windsor Office:	(519) 977-6050
California Office:	(760)-723-8121
Web Link Address:	www.anl.com

...Contents...



The Future Is Now

Talk To Your Computer
(Oh, It Might Respond!) ...Page 1



Records Management

Don Price, B.Sc., M.B.A.
...Page 2



The User's Corner

Year 2000 - 20 Months To Go
...Page 3



Smart System Update

Potential Projects Identified
...Page 3



The Internet And You

Two Child Safety Internet Sites
...Page 4



Document Imaging

Legal Considerations
...Insert

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◆ The Future Is Now...

Talk To Your Computer - (Oh, It Might Respond!)

Talk to your computer? That's right, it's not science fiction any more. And you don't have to speak like a computer, in monosyllables, pausing in between each word.

Speech recognition software has been around for several years. But it has been quite expensive, and you had to go through an extensive training program in order for your computer to be able to recognize your voice. Not only that, you had to speak slowly, pausing between each word. Even then, there was a great likelihood of misunderstanding on the part of the computer.

But recently the technology has taken giant leaps forward. The November 1997 Comdex show held in Las Vegas saw three companies exhibiting voice recognition software that actually worked, despite the background noise on the exhibition floor.

You might say that computers' hearing abilities have vastly improved over the past few years, as has their comprehension of the context in which the user is communicating. The new technology is able to handle continuous speech at a natural pace. It is also voice independent, meaning it is able to respond to anyone's voice without extensive training.

One of the three exhibitors at Las Vegas was **Dragon Systems Inc.**, developers of **Dragon NaturallySpeaking**. With this software the user is able to speak to the computer at a rate of between 100 and 160 words per minute, or at a normal conversational pace. The package is able to distinguish similar sounding words in context (e.g. 'its' from 'it's') but such words can also be spelled out by the user if so chosen, as can proper names.

Editing, formatting, printing and other such operations can also be carried out with the use of voice commands.

There is even a mobile dictation

kit available for the person on the move.

A second exhibitor was a package called **Voice Xpress**, a product of a Belgium-based company **Lernout & Hauspie Speech Products**. It is interesting to note that Microsoft recently invested funds in **Lernout & Hauspie** to expedite its development of voice-enabled computer technology for Microsoft's Windows products.

Voice Xpress, like **Dragon NaturallySpeaking**, is not voice specific, but surprisingly it is gender specific. There is a different version available for males and females.

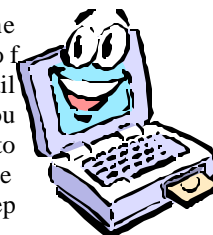
The third exhibitor at Las Vegas was **IBM**, with its **ViaVoice Gold** continuous speech software. As with the other two packages, **ViaVoice Gold** can be used for dictation and for control of the computer. Using this software the computer is able to read back the text as it is written, or play back the voice of the speaker which can be recorded as the text is being dictated.

The software works with various word processing packages and even with Microsoft's Internet Explorer 4.0 Web browser. Voice commands can therefore be used to surf the Internet.

Prices for speech recognition software have come down considerably in the past couple of years and now start at under \$100.

Voice response is even being built into some computer packages, as we mentioned with the IBM offering, allowing your computer to talk back to you. This is also available with some telephone systems found in luxury automobiles, and will eventually be included in e-mail applications.

Imagine the convenience of listening to your e-mail messages while you drive, and being able to dictate responses at the same time. But keep



Records Management - Don Price, B.Sc., M.B.A.

*This is the first of a series of articles by Don Price that will be appearing in **Softwords** in coming issues. Don Price, B.Sc., M.B.A., is a Practice Management Consultant based in Ottawa, Ontario. He travels extensively throughout Canada helping physicians and their staff tune up and revitalize their offices through consultations and seminars. In addition, Mr. Price publishes workbooks and two bi-monthly newsletters for physicians and medical office staff. He can be reached at (613) 247-8705 or fax (613) 247-8706.*

The efficient handling of patient records within a medical office can have far reaching effects on many areas of the practice, including telephone management and physician and staff management.

Few medical offices in Canada are entirely paperless, although numbers are growing annually, so it is still the majority of offices that need to tighten up their records management systems.

Many years ago I was called into an office to help improve staff telephone management. The office received numerous complaints from callers who constantly reached busy signals, or were put on hold for anywhere up to 10 or 12 minutes. Several patients transferred to other doctors because they found it impossible to get through to the office to make appointments. Other patients became no-shows when they couldn't get through to cancel an appointment.

On interviewing the staff and observing what was happening at the front desk, I realized that the main culprit here was a badly managed record system rather than poor telephone management. Charts were often not where they should be - in the filing system. Completed charts sat in piles in the reception area waiting to be filed. Doctors took charts home with them to write progress notes, or left them in any one of a dozen different places within the office. Thus, when a phone call generated the need to find information from a chart, the phone lines were tied up as the staff put the caller on hold to search for the chart.

Staff spent an unacceptable portion of each day hunting for charts when they should have been completing other work, and doctors' time was wasted as they often had to delay returning telephone calls - or even seeing patients - until a chart had been found. General inefficiency pervaded every area of office productivity, and in nearly every instance this could be traced back at some level to poor chart management.

I always recommend that no chart should be out of the system for more than twenty-four hours whether they have been completed or not. Physicians should get into the habit of writing or dictating their progress notes at the end of each patient visit. Not only does this help get the chart back into the system, but it takes a lot less time to write notes when the information is still fresh than it does to write notes after seeing dozens of patients.

Doctors should never remove a chart from the office to complete at home without a proper tracking system in place to ensure that the whereabouts of the chart are known to staff.

Staff, too, must take their share of responsibility for ensuring charts are where they should be - in the filing

system - and abide by the 'twenty-four hour rule' to return them. If the chart isn't completed at the end of the day (e.g. an insurance form or medical/legal letter is needed) the chart should still be returned to its proper place on the shelf or in the cabinet, with a log kept up to date of work that has yet to be done.

I have visited hundreds of offices over the past 18 years as a Practice Management Consultant and unfortunately have found that there are still far too many physicians and staff who don't afford the proper degree of importance to their charts and filing systems.

Patient charts should be considered the heart of a practice, and without a high level of efficiency in this area overall office productivity suffers, and doctors are unable to provide consistently excellent patient care.

A&L Computer Software Limited wins 1998 Entrepreneur of the Year Award



We are proud to announce that A&L Computer Software Limited was winner of the 1998 Entrepreneur of the Year Award presented by the Association of Chinese Canadian Entrepreneurs (ACCE).

The awards are presented in recognition of those Chinese Canadian entrepreneurs who have shown outstanding accomplishments, contribution and social responsibilities in the Canadian community.

Mr Jim Shields, Vice President of The Bank of Nova Scotia presented the award to Alex Yuan, A&L President, at a ceremony honouring the winners on Saturday, February 28th at the Sheraton Parkway Hotel in Richmond Hill.

The User's Corner

Year 2000 - 20 Months To Go!

We have recently fielded many calls concerning the year 2000 and the impact it will have on your computer and on the various A&L software applications you run. All the hype regarding computers being able to work once the year 2000 arrives centres on their ability to use a four digit year field, and to be able to recognize the difference between 1900 and 2000.

We would like to assure our clients and our readers that our **A&L Medical Software** (DOS version) and **A&L HERO*** (Windows version) are year 2000 compliant. As is **A&L Document Console**. One way to tell if a program is year 2000 compliant is to enter a four digit year, or enter the year 2000 in the date field. Even though you cannot save claims with a future date, you can enter a four digit date field.

That is the good news. But there are other factors to consider. As of this writing, the Ministry of Health has not yet introduced the protocol for a four digit year date field. They have not made nor requested changes for the year format yet. The information they receive and process is currently based on a two digit year format.

However, we have heard that the Ministry of Health is targeting this month, April 1998, for this change to occur. When we receive confirmation of this, changes will be made to our software in order that the output of your OHIP submissions produces four digit year date fields.

Other factors impacting on

2000



the successful operation of A&L software programs on your computer include the nature of your operating system and the BIOS (**B**asic **I**nput **O**utput **S**ystem) it uses. Your BIOS is that part of your computer which allows it to start up, determines the date, checks the memory and instructs the computer to allow access to all of your drives.

It is a part of the startup process regardless of whether you have a DOS or Windows operating system. Chances are that if you have a Pentium computer that was purchased since late 1996 or 1997, you should be OK. However, some of the older BIOS computers may not be capable of handling four digit year date fields.

If you have any questions on your computer's capabilities please contact your hardware dealer for further details.

*HERO is a registered trademark of HTN Inc.

SSH Update

Potential Projects Identified

On February 10th Rita Burak, Secretary to Cabinet, met with Murna Dalton and Bill Petrie of ITAC to convey her support and that of the Ministry of Health for the Program Management Office (PMO) and the Smart System for Health project currently under development.

Ms. Burak, to whom the Deputy Minister of Health, Sandra Long reports, confirmed that Premier Harris wishes to see a proposal to cabinet by the beginning of April.

The next stage will see the PMO continue its function of overseeing the development of the SSH under the direction of Mike Connolly. Several potential breakthrough projects have been identified as province wide systems including:

- ◇ Health Information Standards Council
- ◇ Primary Care Informatics
- ◇ Hospital Registration
- ◇ Community Care Access Centres
- ◇ Ontario Laboratory Information System
- ◇ Comprehensive Medication Profile
- ◇ Ontario HIV Treatment Network
- ◇ Cytobase (Cervical Test Database)
- ◇ Emergency Record (Shareable Personal Health Information)

ITAC will be meeting with members of the OMA, OHA and the OHPA to help solidify their relationships and to develop a common understanding and channels of communication.

In previous OHPA meetings with its constituents, it has been the view of provider stakeholder groups that SSH will be a critical enabler in bringing disparate and isolated health services together so that the overall goal of system integration will become a reality.

The OHPA has emphasized that the overall aim of the SSH must be to improve the quality of care. Both providers and vendors expect the PMO to take a strong leadership role in the development of required policies and standards.

Year 2000: Further Information

Those wishing to find out more about the Year 2000 situation may wish to access a few of the many web sites on the Internet offering detailed information. A sample of such sites includes the following:

http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/sc_indps/sectors/engdoc/y2k_hpg.html

<http://www.year2000.com> <http://207.182.213.132>

<http://www.y2k.com> <http://www.can.ibm.com/year2000>

Reminder: If you have not yet renewed your annual maintenance contract with A&L now would be a good time to do so. Once you do, any software upgrades we make because of the MOH year 2000 changes will be made available to you at no charge.

The Internet And You

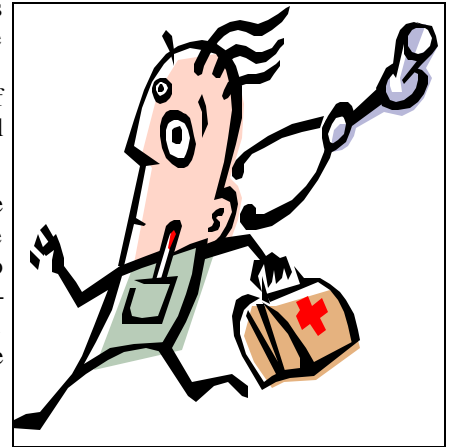


Two Internet Sites For Child Safety

Two fairly recent Canadian additions to the Internet provide health and safety information for parents, physicians and scientists alike. They can be accessed at www.motherisk.org and www.safebaby.net respectively.

The **Motherisk Program** at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, was created in 1985 to provide evidence-based information and guidance concerning the potential risks to the developing fetus or infant, from exposure to drugs, chemicals, diseases, radiation and environmental agents. The program is resourced by a team of physicians and scientists from various disciplines including addiction research, clinical pharmacology, genetics, nutrition, obstetrics, preventive medicine and psychology.

Throughout the past 12 years **Motherisk** services and specialized clinical care have given pregnant and breast-feeding women, and those planning for a family, the opportunity for rational treatment in pregnancy and while breast-feeding, the means to make well-informed choices, and a healthy start for their unborn children. Ground-breaking research on reproductive risk, hands-on training of new practitioners, and unbiased, post-marketing surveillance of hundreds of drugs and chemicals, have translated into specialized care for thousands of women and their children.



The new web site is one more feature of **Motherisk's** unique and vital services. Built in collaboration with the **Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC)** this site is designed to describe the programs and long-term objectives, highlight recent findings in maternal fetal health, treatment and care and to provide a link to other medical resources, books and published articles.

There are future plans for the site which include providing new research findings, facilitating communications between physicians and scientists to enable the exchange of knowledge and potential solutions, and to extend new services to **Motherisk** clients. We recommend you pay a visit to the site to check out its offerings. For additional information you may contact Patricia Vandal at 1-800-977-6362 or e-mail at momrisk@total.net

The second site we suggest you visit is dedicated to child safety and was put together by registered nurse and mother of three, Barbara Sklar. In 1986 Barbara, who had over fifteen years of pediatric experience, founded **Childproofers Incorporated**, a Toronto-based company dedicated to showing parents how to create a safe home environment for their children. The corporation has since accumulated many years experience in this field, and has childproofed pediatric wards of hospitals and even entire condominium complexes.

With the recent introduction of the web site **Childproofers Incorporated** is now able to provide a wealth of information free of charge to the general public. This includes a step-by-step guide to childproofing every room in the house or apartment, from top to bottom, including the bathroom, kitchen and bedrooms.



It also covers such aspects as fire safety, toy safety and car safety. The guide spends a lot of time on the dangers of house plants and other sources of potential poisons, and how to handle a situation should poisoning occur.

The web site also features a question and answer section for readers to raise questions and provide helpful insight from their own experiences. For further information about **Childproofers Incorporated**, or the web site, you may contact Barbara Sklar at safety@safebaby.net or 905-731-0751.

Don't forget to keep up to date with what's happening at A&L by visiting our web site at www.anl.com