Speech recognition: a new way of working for legal professionals

Legal professionals must always strive to deliver the best quality service to clients and work hard to attract the most capable workforce. They balance efficiency and maintaining the highest standards with being competitive on price. The Covid-19 pandemic means that working from home is likely to be at least a medium-term and possibly a long-term reality for many in the profession.
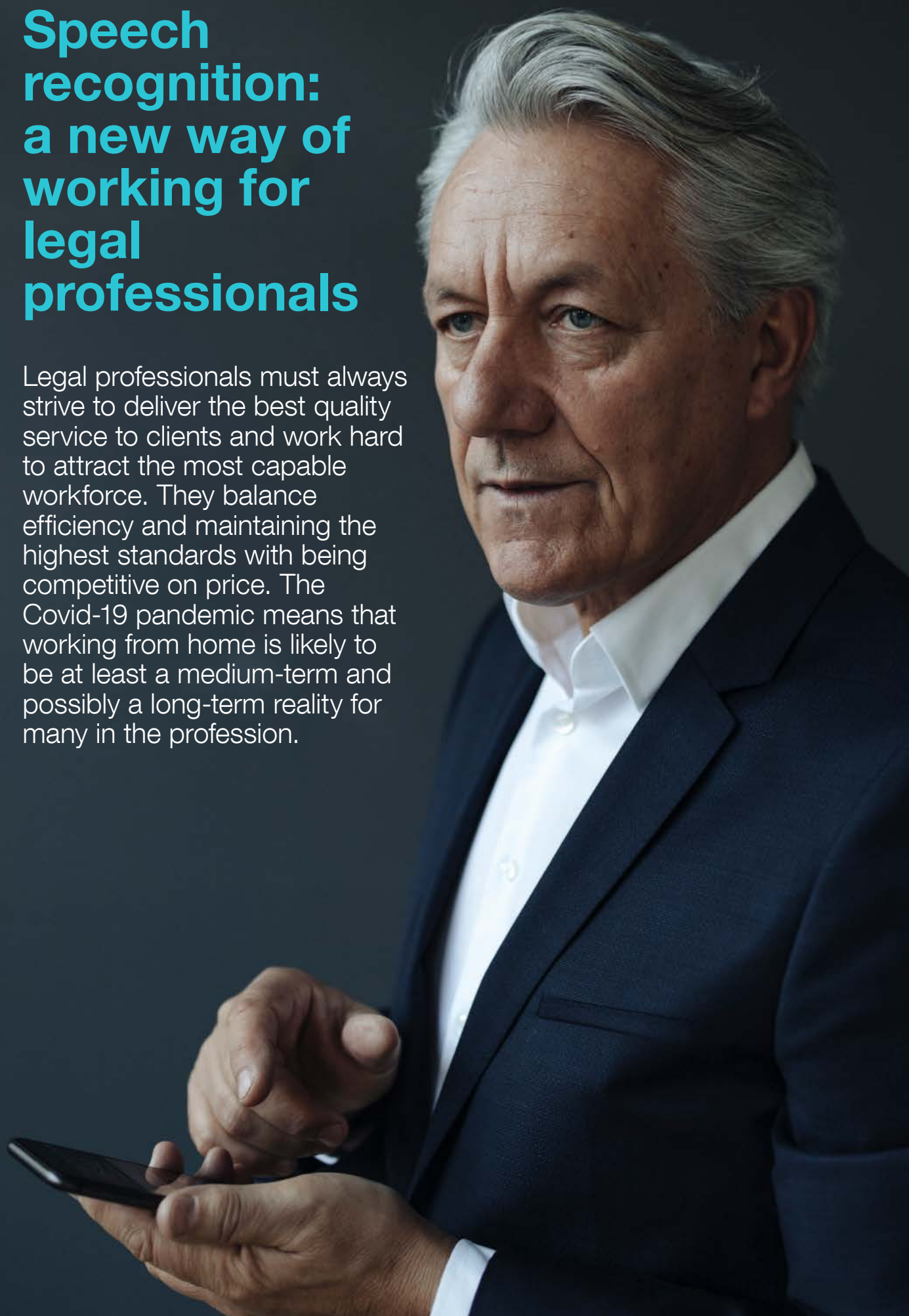
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The time is right for legal professionals to revisit their use of cloud based speech recognition solutions, to ensure they are using the most productive, cost-efficient, services. Dragon offers everything the legal professional requires.

A flexible, creative and responsive sector

The legal profession is an old and well established one. Over time it has responded to many changes in society and in technology. While the legal sector existed before typewriters, it readily adapted to their use. Later, it adapted to using computers. In both cases the key benefit was faster, more accurate document production.

More recently, the legal profession has begun to embrace more advanced digitalisation strategies such as computer networks, remote working, and the cloud. The sector has also been open to new ways of working such as supporting remote and part time working.

A strong and thriving legal firm, just like a strong and thriving firm in any other sector, needs to be mindful of short, medium and longer term horizons. Recent experience of the Covid-19 pandemic forced employers to make radical changes such as closing offices, finding ways to facilitate working from home and alternatives to holding face-to-face meetings.

For many this has meant taking a fresh look at digitalisation. However much they embraced technologies like cloud, Software as a Service (SaaS) and speech recognition before the pandemic, revisiting the technologies in place now, and the services currently used could help a firm to streamline its processes, improve collaboration among the staff team, and enhance data security.

Achieving the first two of these can help a legal firm ensure people are working effectively and efficiently. This is always important, but now, at a time of economic downturn and when people are still getting to grips with work that is not office based, it is doubly important.

Enhancing data security is vital in scenarios where people are often using their home internet connections and consumer grade technologies that lack the security features office systems have. A shift to cloud based, SaaS working can improve data security significantly.

For those legal firms that have not yet tried speech recognition software, and for those using freeware or other solutions with which they are not entirely happy, this is the ideal time to try Dragon. Its accurate speech recognition is faster than typing. It is cloud based, offering advantages like easy and flexible deployment, scalability, and great support for collaborative working. It is ideally suited to the distributed workforce that is in place today, and data security features are deeply embedded.

In this white paper we take a closer look at Dragon and the advantages it offers the legal sector. We draw on the findings of research[1] we conducted within the sector in June 2020. Our aim was to identify the key issues lawyers in the UK and other countries were currently facing, to help us adapt our approach to supporting them.
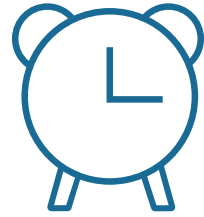
The need to find new ways of working

The Covid-19 situation has accelerated a trend that was already underway as firms, including legal firms, moved to embrace new ways of working and to make the most of digitalisation. Many legal firms have now:

– Embraced home working in sometimes challenging circumstances where technology might be consumer grade rather than business grade and people lack a permanent home office
– Set up systems to ensure legal and regulatory compliance (such as GDPR and local as well as transnational legal requirements)
– Put in place systems to ensure that data is secure at all points in its creation, transmission and storage

Our survey found that 80% of legal professionals went into the office every day before the Covid-19 pandemic, a figure which has fallen dramatically to 21% during the pandemic. Before the pandemic just 49% of legal professionals were permitted to work from home on a regular basis, and 0% always worked from home.

Our research showed that legal professionals are already attuned to the benefits of working from home, and of using new technologies. We found that 75% felt they were properly equipped for working from home before Covid-19 in terms of both hardware and software. For those that didn't feel properly equipped, 56% felt they were missing productivity tools. Given that respondents said they spend an average of three hours a day typing, this was a potentially significant problem for many.

Survey respondents said they spend an average of three hours a day typing. This factors up to almost two eight hours a day every week.

For many legal firms, accommodating the new ways of working demanded by Covid-19 may have involved making very significant changes in the core systems that underpin their everyday work. For example the processes involved in moving to a fully or primarily cloud based way of working, increased use of Software as a Service, and moving to a truly paperless office system may seem fraught with difficulties at every turn, and this is likely to seem most challenging to those firms which have so far taken the fewest steps towards the digital transformation of the workplace, and to those, often smaller firms, that lack in-house technical teams.

This is where finding the right partner organisations is of primary importance. Established providers with a proven track record of supporting firms through the process of digital transformation can ensure that the technical aspects are handled efficiently. Nuance has a proven track record of providing Dragon as a cloud based service to clients - including well-known brands - in many sectors around the globe, including healthcare, financial services, telecoms, government and legal.

80%   21%
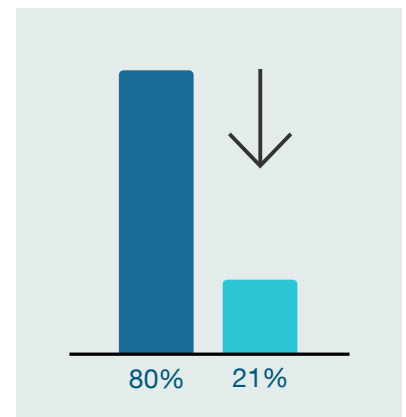
1. We commissioned Censuswide to survey 100 legal professionals and 20 IT decision makers in the legal sector. The research was carried out between 23 June 2020 and 25 June 2020.

Rising to external challenges

As service providers legal firms need to be mindful that their clients' needs are paramount. At the current time, clients are in the same position as legal firms, finding new ways to get things done, and dealing with new stresses and challenges. Successful legal firms will find ways to ease the path, and help their clients by being efficient, streamlined, accessible and timely.

This comes alongside a range of circumstances that have played a role in driving innovation and change in the legal sector for some years:

– **Competitive landscape.** Firms compete for business, and must find the right mix of service quality, price and efficiency.
– **Maximise income.** There is an ever-present need to maximise billable hours and drive up profitability.
– **Meet client expectations**. Clients, whether corporate or individual, are increasingly accustomed to modern ways of working, using new technologies to get things done, and with the expectation of top quality services delivered at speed.
– **Meet employee demands.** The best talent will look for firms that meet their expectations. Smart young professionals who are users of modern technologies in their everyday lives will want to use technologies at work to maximise efficiency. They may also be keen to be offered flexible working hours and home working. We have seen how Covid-19 has forced flexible hours and home working on employers. The goal is to achieve these in the longer term.

We asked the IT decision makers in legal firms about their use of technology in rising to the challenges they face. There was a clear recognition that using technology could help them to rise to the challenges of the modern workplace, of their clients, and of their workforce.

70% said productivity tools are a great investment with regard to staying competitive in the future.

70%

50% said they could work more efficiently by using modern technologies to the fullest (including legal technologies, cloud computing and centralised infrastructure).

50%

55% said they could save money by optimising internal and external processes to better serve clients.

55%
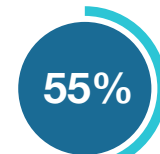
44% said it was absolutely essential to invest in a modern workplace to attract new talent to offer new and wider legal services.

44%
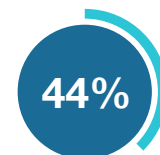
30% said there is a lot of pressure for innovation within their environment.

30%

Digital transformation with Dragon speech recognition

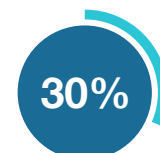Dragon speech recognition is well suited to helping legal firms meet the demands of a modern workforce and clientele and help firms get the most from digitalisation. Its key advantages in this respect fall into two key areas - the fact that it is **cloud based** with all the advantages that brings, and the **productivity benefits** it brings to document creation which will help legal firms along their road to a **new way of working.**

A cloud based solution for the digital, distributed workforce

Even before Covid-19 organisations were transitioning to the cloud as part of their ongoing digital transformation strategy. The legal profession, like so many others, see the benefits cloud offers over per-computer installa-tions. Dragon has the benefit of being either available as an on-premise cloud solution or externally hosted.

In our survey, we asked IT decision makers in legal firms what was most important when making IT decisions.

60% said thin-client support in virtual environments was important (for example Citrix, Windows Terminal Server, VMware)

55% said security in the form of encrypted workflow solution

55% said fast and accurate performance

45% said a solution that is easy to install with centralised administration

35% said synchronisation between devices (such as laptop, desktop computer, mobile phone and tablet)

30% said mobile dictation options

No excuses for poor data security

Data security is paramount for every legal firm. The sector is subject to the legal requirements of general legislation such as the General Data Protection Regulation which applies to personal data held about residents of the EU regardless of the jurisdiction of the form holding that data. It is also subject to a host of other requirements to protect the security of the information it holds such as client details and case information.

A report from the UK's National Cyber Security Centre and the Law Society noted that law firms can be attractive to cyber attackers because they handle significant funds, and are a key enabler in commercial and business transactions. The report also noted that those who handle sensitive clients might have particular attraction, as might those which work in controversial areas such as life sciences or the energy sector. Published in 2018, the report notes that "The move to offering legal services digitally would not only provide new opportunities, but also further avenues for malicious cyber exploitation."[2]

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Meanwhile the PWC Annual Law Firms'[3] Survey 2019 noted that every single respondent to its survey had suffered a security incident.

In the light of this, there is no room for complacency in law firms with regard to data security, and it is their responsibility to ensure that the systems they set in place are secure. Smaller firms which lack the infrastructure or technical expertise to maintain their own data security systems may decide to work with trusted third parties like Nuance, with a track record of providing secure, end-to-end encryption for their cloud-based services as a strategy to ensure they meet their data security obligations.

2. https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/report/-the-cyber-threat-to-uk-legal-sector--2018-report
3. https://www.pwc.co.uk/industries/law-firms/pwc-law-firms-survey-report-2019.pdf

Key benefits of Dragon in the cloud

– **Easy deployment.** Can be deployed remotely with no need for any work to be done on the end user device. This is the ideal method of software deployment to support home working.
– **Easy to scale.** Adding new seats and removing seats that are not required is easily done, and is a centralised process. There is no need for work to be done on the end user device, so again this suits home working.
– **Compliance is assured.** Nuance ensures that regulatory and legal requirements are met so that the local IT team is freed from the burden of ensuring this locally.
– **Always up to date.** Software updates are applied on an ongoing basis centrally and each user has access to the latest software version at all times, seamlessly.
– **Security is assured.** Dragon benefits from 256-bit encryption both when data is in transit and at rest.
– **Supports consumer grade hardware.** Because Dragon runs in the cloud it requires minimal local computing capability, and can be used on consumer grade hardware if necessary.
– **Requires minimal bandwidth.** Dragon requires an always-on internet connection, but the bandwidth needed is very low.

Collaborative working for the digital, distributed workforce

Legal professionals work collaboratively a good deal of the time, and also make use of administrative, typing and transcription services.

In our survey we asked if dedicated administration staff or internal typists were used for document production. Overall 98% said they used dedicated administration staff, with 19% saying they do this on a regular basis and 79% saying they do it some of the time.

We also asked if external transcription services were used, and 94% of respondents said they used these, but just 5% said they did so on a regular basis. The remaining 89% said they were used sometimes. Only 6% said they don't use transcription services.

It is clear, then, that there is a great appetite for using specific resources for document creation. It may be that those using these services on an irregular basis do so when their internal workload becomes particularly stretched. In more normal times, that might be an acceptable part of adjustment to fit workflow needs. Today, with pressures of learning a whole new way of working, and with clients also adapting to new approaches to work, demands on time may be greater. Continuing with the same approach to using transcription services might, therefore result in a greater reliance on them.

Laying the ground for future gains

A significant proportion of respondents to our survey (19%) are not yet using speech recognition software to increase their turnaround time. Of these, 63% said they would be likely to use speech recognition.

When we asked those who were, and were not using speech recognition about how well equipped they felt for working from home before they were forced to do so by the Covid-19 pandemic, we discovered that having speech recognition software was considered a significant element of being equipped to work from home.

– 80% of those already using speech recognition felt they were properly
  equipped for working from home before Covid-19
– 53% of those not using speech recognition felt they were properly
  equipped for working from home before Covid-19

When we asked people what their biggest challenges are when working from home during Covid-19 we discovered that that 11% of those who were using speech recognition said internal processes, traditional filing systems and transcription were their biggest challenge. Meanwhile 32% of those who were not using speech recognition said these were their biggest challenges.
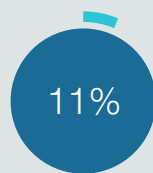
11% **...we discovered that that 11% of those who were using speech recognition said internal processes, traditional filing systems and transcription were their biggest challenge.**

These findings suggest that speech recognition can help legal profession-als be more productive in the current climate.

As it seems likely that the current situation regarding access to office-based working is at least a short-term reality, and may well be a medium-term realty, it would seem that speech recognition software is a necessary productivity tool for those legal firms wanting to minimise document creation time and maximise the quality of service to clients.

There is another factor that could have a significant effect on the demand for legal firms' skills in the short term and the medium term - Brexit.

The UK is preparing either to start a new relationship with the EU it or to proceed without a trade deal. The outcome will be formally ratified on December 31st 2020, and whatever it is, the expectation is an increased workload for many legal firms. Along with a growth in business they may also have to consider how they can give legal advice in the face of uncertainty and help their clients plan for the future.

The opportunity for new business as a result of Brexit is clear, but the challenges that Covid-19 brings to working practices are not insignificant. Introducing speech recognition now, or moving to a more appropriate, more productive tool now if less productive choices are already in use, could help legal firms ensure they are prepared for the anticipated increase in workload.

Dragon vs freeware

In our survey we asked the 81% of respondents who said they were
already using speech recognition software what they were using, and 44%
said they were using freeware.

There are many freeware options, including those that come with smart-
phone, tablet and laptop/desktop computers. While these can be useful
for creating text messages or even short emails, they lack the higher level
features that make them suitable for a professional environment such as
that of a legal firm. For example freeware options typically don't allow
for custom vocabularies, or the kind of shared, cloud based access that
enables collaborative working.

Very importantly, freeware speech recognition solutions can also have
poor integrated security. Files might be stored in a cloud environment
that's outside the control of the legal firm, and that is not governed by
detailed service level agreements (SLAs) with the legal firm. Such SLAs are
vital in ensuring the legal firm is content that their stored data is not only
compliant with general laws such as data protection requirements, but
also with regulatory frameworks that are specific to the legal sector.

For a profession with a central responsibility to ensure compliance with
legal requirements at all times, freeware solutions are not an appropriate
speech recognition solution.

Key productivity benefits of Dragon

– **Truly collaborative working.** One person can start a document, another
  can work on it later, with complete round-tripping intact.
– **Standard vocabularies**. Sector specific vocabularies can be configured
  making it easy to use complex terms and spell them correctly every time.
– **Faster than typing**. We speak on average three times faster than we
  type, so that the production of reports and legal texts is considerably
  faster using speech than the keyboard
– **Closer collaboration between paralegals and legal professionals.**
  Document creation is often shared between paralegals and legal
  professionals. Dragon stores documents in the cloud, making it much
  easier and faster to share them than more traditional email exchanges.
  Versioning is easier to manage too.
– **Device agnostic.** Dragon allows users to start a document on their
  laptop, move to their mobile phone, and finish on a desktop computer.
– **Location agnostic.** Dragon allows users to start a document in their
  home office, move to an outdoor space, and finish back in their home
  office.

Conclusion

Legal professionals are under pressure to work productively and deliver the highest quality outputs, including documents, at speed. The current situation around Covid-19 means working from home is likely to be a fixture for the short term and maybe for the medium term. This is pushing legal professionals to explore new ways of working and, most importantly, to find new ways of achieving their most important tasks while upholding their high standards of accuracy, speed and data security.

Our survey found that 63% of legal professionals not already using speech recognition said they would be likely to do so, while 82% said their company is considering providing them with speech recognition to speed up documentation.

When we consider that legal professionals said that on average they spend three hours a day typing, the potential of Dragon to help them thrive is clear. It can help legal professionals work as a team while physically located in their homes, help them produce documents faster, with no loss of accuracy, help them meet legal requirements and ensure their data is always secure both in transit and at rest, and support - or even enhance - the ways legal professionals, paralegals and other team members collaborate.
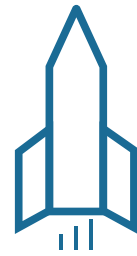
Many legal firms are already using Dragon to improve their productivity

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Not only does Dragon reduce correspondence turnaround times, but the speedier service results in increased client satisfaction.

Michael Wheatley, Gordon Brown
Law Firm LLP

Dragon helped to completely clear our backlog. The time it takes to create a letter is down from one hour to approximately 15 minutes.

Michaela Bruszniewsk,
Newstead & Walker Solicitors

It is a modern tool that's really relevant for a modern way of billing. Therefore, I wouldn't hesitate to recommend Dragon to other legal professionals.

Joanne Williams,
McKeag & Co Solicitors

"

They have taken to it like a duck to water. In fact, they are so impressed by how Dragon performs that I think they would physically harm me if I dared to try and take Dragon away from them.

John Wood,
PGS Law LLP

Now that the secretaries have less typing to do, we don't have to invest in extra resources to conduct essential tasks like filing.

Richard Scott,
Pearsons & Ward Solicitors

About Nuance Communications, Inc.
Nuance Communications is reinventing the relationship between people and technology. Through its voice and language offerings, the company is creating a more human conversation with the many systems, devices, electronics, apps and services around us. Every day, millions of people and thousands of businesses experience Nuance through intelligent systems that can listen, understand, learn and adapt to your life and your work. For more information, please visit nuance.com.