



## The Federal Lawyer in Cyberia

by Mike Tonsing

# Become a More Efficient—Maybe Healthier—Lawyer: Converting to Speech Recognition is a “KnowBrainer”

### This month’s cyberian column is a review of

Version 12 of Dragon NaturallySpeaking (DNS12) voice recognition software, and more. There are many reasons to consider moving to this family of speech recognition products, the latest versions of which were first released in late 2012. The most obvious reason is that it can probably double or even triple your output when you’re writing letters, drafting legal documents, and composing e-mails.

In my opinion, this latest version of DNS merits your serious attention. If you’ve never used speech recognition software before, or you tried it earlier but abandoned it as an option that was not yet ready for prime time, this is a perfect time to start.

Among other things, DNS12 is the best and most user-friendly product that the Nuance Dragon team has ever produced. It contains many pop-up tutorials and help files that will get you up to speed quickly. While many of the previous versions required “training” your purchase to recognize your voice before you began cranking out letters or briefs, DNS12 does not. You’ll be using your speech recognition software as soon as you have it installed, and installation is not difficult.

Because of space limitations for this column, I will focus on the most important things I think you need to know to be happy with a speech recognition conversion.

### Make Yourself a More Efficient, and Maybe Healthier, Lawyer

In terms of getting your “bang for the buck,” it is hard to imagine a related series of relatively modest purchase decisions (described below) that would do more to enhance your ability to produce quality work much more quickly. (DNS12, Legal Edition, produced by Nuance ([www.nuance.com](http://www.nuance.com)) lists for \$799.99, but as of this writing it is currently available online at Amazon for \$493.55. However, I don’t recommend that you buy it at Amazon—read on.)

The better the DNS12 product you chose, the better the enhancements you surround it with, the greater will be your results, the lower will be your frustration level, and the higher will be your production. You will no longer be hunched over a desk

pounding away at a keyboard. (Yes, I’m dictating this column. Perhaps you’ve already noticed my improved mood? Actually, I have been using DNS12 for about six months already, and it just keeps getting better.) And, no ominous “carpel tunnel cloud” will be hovering overhead anymore.

### Optimize Your Chances of Speech Recognition Success by Having the Right Hardware Inside Your Computer

While Nuance suggests that 4 megabytes (MB) of RAM is adequate for operating DNS12, I consider that to be a bare minimum. RAM is ridiculously cheap, compared to years past, so I recommend 8MB.

But, to be clear, the only advantage of RAM in terms of DNS12 performance is relative to the speed of the RAM chips that your system is using. However, the true value of more megabytes of RAM, especially above 8 megs, is the ability to work with more of your applications loaded simultaneously. Otherwise, having more than 8 megs of RAM probably will not improve the performance of DNS noticeably. Another way of looking at this “RAM thing” is by analogy: how fast your automobile will run isn’t dependent upon whether you have a full tank of gas or only a quarter of a tank of gas.

And, by the way, the same sort of thinking applies to using solid state drives (SSD). Your system will boot faster and applications will load faster with a SSD, but an SSD will have virtually no impact on the speed of DNS itself, except in terms of when DNS has to simultaneously write information to your user profile while you are dictating.

What will have the most impact on overall DNS performance is the type of processor you’re using, and the amount of L2/L3 cache onboard, along with whether or not your central processing unit (CPU) supports what geeks call “hyper-threading.” These are inside-your-computer factors that will improve the overall performance of DNS12.

Also, while we’re at it, in terms of *transaction accuracy*, the type of CPU and the amount of L2/L3 cache in your unit have no impact. The level of accuracy you can achieve is wholly dependent

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upon your microphone, your sound card, and your dictation style. Between those three factors, your dictation style (including possible background noise) is more important, by a magnitude of maybe 3 to 1, over the other two. (See the section below on training.)

### Install the Right Operating System

Many law firms and agencies are still running Windows Vista, and DNS12 just doesn't seem to do well when paired with Vista, according to what I read in the blogosphere. *Now is a great time to choose a newer and more DNS12-friendly, operating system.*

In a Windows environment, I currently recommend the 64-bit version of Windows 7 as the best choice for a lawyer contemplating a purchase of DNS12. Spend a few dollars up front and save yourself some grief later.

### Buy the Lawyer Edition of DNS12

Nuance offers lawyer purchasers several different products at different price points. Don't even consider the base product, DNS Home, because it is just too basic. (I take no position on the Dragon Dictate version, which is for Macintosh systems.) Your choices in a Windows environment come down to DNS Preferred (which retails for \$199 and is available today on Amazon for \$124.46) and DNS Lawyer Edition (LE).

There are many differences between DNS Premium and DNS LE. I will not attempt to address every difference here, but I will mention just a few core differences. DNS12 LE can be preloaded with a specialized vocabulary. And DNS12 LE allows a user to "tweak" and fully customize its vocabulary for a practitioner's individual needs. Such a practice-specific vocabulary can be managed and manipulated, allowing for a greater degree of overall accuracy. Note that neither DNS12 Home nor DNS12 Premium offers this degree of control over the speech recognition software's vocabulary.

Unlike previous versions of the LE and lesser versions of all products (including Home and Premium Version 12 products), DNS12 LE is *fully integrated with Microsoft Outlook*. For most lawyers, this is by itself a justification for purchasing the more expensive professional version. For example, in the best tradition of Star Trek's Captain Picard, you can "make it so" in Microsoft Outlook simply saying: "new message" or "new e-mail." DNS12 LE will immediately and automatically generate a new Outlook message window. Then, you can simply command, Picard-like: "go to subject" and your cursor will rather magically move to the subject field in your new e-mail. Then, uttering the magic phrase: "go to body," you can redirect the cursor to the body of the text, where you can then dictate your message.

Once the message is written via voice dictation, you can simply command Outlook in your usual stentorian tones to "send message" and the message will be on its way, untouched by human hands (or, by Vulcan hands, for you serious Trekkies). Other examples of Outlook commands that will be recognized are "reply to message," "forward message," "delete message," "open message," "close message," "next message," and "previous message," among many others.

The ability to voice control Microsoft Outlook is extremely useful in most lawyer work environments. (It can, of course, enhance one's ego to be able to issue commands with such power and authority, but that's probably a topic for a separate

column.) Not only is it faster and more efficient, minimizing typing and mouse usage, but it can in my experience, lower the physical fatigue that comes from the unnatural act of typing, especially for those of us who spend a significant part of our day dealing with e-mails. As I noted earlier, none of these Outlook commands are available with DNS12 Home or Premium; they're only available with DNS12 LE.

DNS12 LE also can import or export a customized file that contains a user's tweaked vocabulary independently. This could be a crucial feature in a law firm or agency office with several DNS12 LE users. Imagine that 12 LE users will be using a common vocabulary where they are focused on a list of generic pharmaceuticals, for example. A pioneering member of that 12-person office could build a comprehensive pharmaceutical vocabulary early on, using DNS12 LE's vocabulary building tools. He or she could then export that vocabulary to the other 11 users' computers, enabling the others to benefit from the enhanced recognition of specialized vocabulary words, improving uniformity, and saving time.

The LE version also allows a single user to back up their own vocabulary. The user's vocabulary can be exported and at a later time re-imported if that user has to retrain Dragon NaturallySpeaking due to a malfunction that erases their carefully constructed enhanced vocabulary trial. This one feature could save an enormous amount of time, especially in a pinch, since the user would not have to spend time rebuilding an uncorrupted vocabulary file from scratch. And, again, both DNS12 Home and Premium lack this capacity.

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## **Make All Your DNS12-Related Purchases From the Same Dragon-Approved Secondary Source**

My vendor of choice, mentioned in a previous column, for those of you who keep score, is KnowBrainer, hands down. I stumbled upon this vendor last year wholly by accident. KnowBrainer user forums are the largest, most trafficked user forums for the whole DNS product family. A Tennessee-based company, KnowBrainer has over 20 years of specialization in speech recognition and voice recognition.

This expertise extends from hardware such as PC sound cards, microphones, etc., to specialized product offerings like KnowBrainer's own Command Software that extends the functionality of Nuance's DNS products outside of a limited range of applications into full PC automation. Founded by Lunis Orcutt, a friendly guy with whom I have personally spoken with in putting together the ideas and research for this column, KnowBrainer specializes in speech and voice recognition support across multiple industries and needs, such as medical speech recognition and dictation, legal speech recognition and dictation, and speech recognition enhancements for persons with disabilities.

I recommend that you visit the information-rich KnowBrainer website, at [www.knowbrainer.com](http://www.knowbrainer.com), where decade-old forums—launched in an enhanced version in mid-2012—are an amazing free resource. The affable Orcutt said, upon their launch: "These new forums not only provide a speed improvement over our old forums, they also integrate other key new features, such as blog and wiki services, allowing us to extend our knowledge assets to users in one unified, cohesive environment." Indeed.

These free KnowBrainer forums are now home to over 26,000 users, many of them very knowledgeable engineers, engaged in active discussions across a dozen forum categories that focus on Nuance's DNS software products, as well as KnowBrainer's own DNS-enhancing software products, Microsoft Windows own speech recognition products, general PC and voice recognition hardware issues, as well as transcription units and digital recorders. (As a sure sign that this is a labor of love, Orcutt himself has about 22,000 posts to the dozen forums his company hosts!)

It was at the KnowBrainer website that I learned that the DNS microphone that comes in the software box is simply inadequate to the task and that most PC's lack a sound card that has sufficient horsepower to drive DNS to its destiny. By the way, KnowBrainer's own, thumbs-up 12-page review of DNS 12, written last year when this version was in a late beta stage, can be found at [www.knowbrainer.com/downloads/DNS\\_12\\_Review.pdf](http://www.knowbrainer.com/downloads/DNS_12_Review.pdf).

Though I am seldom opposed to a bargain, and it is hard to resist buying DNS12 LE for about \$300 less from Amazon, I think the "smart money" approach for new users is to make a bundle purchase through a single vendor, and I believe that paying the street price for DNS12 LE will pay dividends down the road. It is similarly hard to buy a flat screen TV from a local retailer, but when you have a problem, you'll probably be glad you did. Unlike the online stores and brick and mortar computer showrooms, KnowBrainer includes 30 days of free technical and installation support on all software products purchased from them. For lawyers and beleaguered staffs where time is money, this changes the equation. One disheartening crash and you're ahead of the game.

## **Consider Add-Ons That Will Enhance Your Power, Accuracy, and Efficiency**

As alluded to above, KnowBrainer vends its own DNS software enhancements. I recommend them for serious users. Their core software product is known as KnowBrainer Command (\$199). Here's what they say about it on their own website:

KnowBrainer Command 2012 is compatible with Windows XP, Windows Vista, Windows 7 32-bit & 64-bit, and Windows 8 operating systems. KnowBrainer's features:

- Adds 11,000+ commands to NaturallySpeaking.
- Fixes numerous NaturallySpeaking bugs and design flaws.
- Simplifies the learning process by combining basic multi-step commands.
- Works with all versions of NaturallySpeaking from Preferred on up.
- Includes step-by-step (with pictures) installation and training guide for both NaturallySpeaking and KnowBrainer.
- Allows hands-free use of your computer.
- Customers typically report the elimination of 25 percent or more of their labor costs when adding KnowBrainer to NaturallySpeaking.
- Our exclusive Command Browser allows you to copy, edit, or create your own Advanced-Scripting commands for an even greater reduction in labor costs.
- The ability to delete or toggle off any command.
- VerbalBasic: our patent pending ability to create commands verbally.
- Includes our exclusive VerbalBasic (command writing) training guide.

My own experience with KnowBrainer Command convinces me that these statements are more than just puffery; I know that this product is a good investment. KnowBrainer also vends other software products, like vocabulary enhancements.

### **Buy the Right Microphone**

I am a serious convert to the stand-alone microphone that I purchased from KnowBrainer for about \$300. I find it to be much easier to deal with than a headset (try fumbling with a headset when a colleague walks into your office and you'll see what I mean) and its technical superiority is clearly demonstrated when you experience how it instantly upgrades DNS' recognition accuracy. Go to the KnowBrainer website and view the options, the descriptions that indicate the plusses and minuses of each option, and make a truly informed decision. My decision cost me about \$300 and it was money well spent.

### **Buy the Right Sound Card**

Most sound cards create a bottleneck that can choke recognition accuracy. Throttle-up by purchasing a sound enhancing external device from KnowBrainer for about \$60, and I believe you'll notice an accuracy difference, as I did.

### Consider Buying a KnowBRAINER DNS12 Service Contract

You've probably heard the stories. People buy a boxed speech recognition product on sale at a big box store or online, install it, and it fizzles. They don't seek help, they get frustrated and confused, they have poorly matched software and hardware, and they uninstall their software and go back to pounding a keyboard.

This need not be the case. Spend an hour or less browsing through the products that meet your needs, are most friendly with one another, and make some choices; then, be even smarter and choose the KnowBRAINER support package that best suits your needs. They range from the free forums, through e-mail support (KnowBRAINER claims its e-mail technical support usually responds in less than 24 hours), to packages where you can be talking to an expert located in Tennessee in minutes, who will take control of your computer via the Internet and start looking under the hood immediately. Here's what they say on their website:

1. When you call us, you speak with a software developer who has over 15 years' experience in technical support.
2. Virtual on-site technical support, always available to you, allows us to physically see your computer problem from our computer.
3. There is generally no wait time for KnowBRAINER telephone technical support. However, if we are busy with another client, we will immediately answer and arrange to promptly return your call.

What's not to like about that? Minimum price is \$30 per call and I believe you'll agree that will be a bargain if a fix is needed when your brief is nearly due.

### Invest in DNS12 Training

Nuance, the maker of DNS, offers a CD that contains start-up level training videos that you can watch at your own speed, when you want to get past the merely intuitive level. It sells for about \$20, online. The CD also contains a copy of the official Nuance DNS user workbook and a few other enhancements. KnowBRAINER also offers training. Its forums also offer the opportunity to dialog with a great number of very intelligent and experienced users in real time. It also sells its own manuals, products that are more detailed and easier to follow than the similar Nuance products. (I suppose one could say that they are, well, more nuanced.)

### Conclusion

What will we all do when we've enhanced our writing capability by a magnitude of 2 or 3:1? Maybe I'll see you at a ballgame by this summer, or on the golf course occasionally, perhaps with one of your astonished clients. In any event, I'll definitely plan to see you again soon in cyberia. ☺



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