



Meet My New Digital Pen...Really

By Bill G. Felkey



IF YOU HAVE ATTENDED ONE OF my continuing education seminars at a state or national meeting in the last five years, you've probably seen me hold up a new gadget and ask the question, "Is this a tool or toy?" Things such as continuous speech recognition should definitely get a tool classification. Other technology such as hands-free, systemwide, voice and text communication devices would also fall into this category. I have to admit that when I start evaluating new technologies, they all get the toy category until they prove their worth. For example, do you remember your first USB "thumb" drive? I couldn't really see, at first, that these devices would eventually replace floppy disks and be hanging off of every key ring and name badge necklace I own.

The digital pen gave me the same first impression. While there were three products on the market at the time, I chose to evaluate the Logitech io as my first option. This pen looked like a fat tongue depressor on steroids. The Logitech digital pen writes with ink and stores up to 40 pages of text in its internal memory. It uses special paper to keep the spatial orientation of the writing and it allows unique command boxes to generate actions or blocks of text depending upon the application. A software tool called MyScripts would type the printed or cursive handwriting into Microsoft Word with pretty amazing accuracy. It wasn't long before Logitech came out with a sleeker version of the pen called the io2. Another company made a wireless adapter called the Anoto

that would allow wireless transmission of completed documents to designated locations.

Enter the Pulse by LiveScribe (www.livescribe.com), which, in addition to doing what the Logitech had formerly provided, also had a conference microphone recording what is being said by anyone in the room where your written notes are being taken. Now before you say, "So what?" every time you make a new note entry in ink, the pen temporarily syncs up what is being said exactly to the line of notes being made. The 1 GB version of the pen that retails for \$150 can store 100 hours of recorded sound and notes. The 2 GB Pulse yields 200 hours with a \$200 price tag. Either pen supplies a starter pad of smart paper, and additional standard paper pads retail for approximately \$20 per 400 sheets. Special leather bound journals and leather pen holders allow you to accessorize your digital pen.

A cradle supplied with the device allows the Pulse to be synchronized with a computer through the USB port. This same synchronization cable charges the battery in the pen. The document that is displayed on the computer has the audio session made available so that simply clicking on a line of text replays what was



The Pulse pen: Is it a tool or a toy?

being said as the text was written. An additional click on the software allows the document and audio to be uploaded to the Internet, where anyone present in the meeting can access the document and recorded sound on an Internet browser from anywhere in the world. Sensitive documents can be kept private while documents that could be of gen-



The Pulse pen synchronizes what is being said to the line of notes being made.

eral interest can be made public and accessible by anyone who knows the location of the site.

FROM TOY TO A TOOL

So what is it that transforms your new gadget from being a toy to a tool? The short answer is finding several ways to integrate it into your work so that you become more efficient and/or effective. I have done a personal brainstorm of the ways that you

might utilize the Pulse in your practice. Consider using the digital pen during a medication history intake. You can concentrate more on the interview than your note taking with the ability to have an audio backup of your session.

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Another use of the device would be in any kind of interaction where you are doing a type of informed consent in which you use a structured document to make sure you are comprehensive. You then are able to ask a patient if he or she fully understands what you have told them, and then have them sign your notes on the session and tie the audio affirmation to the page. It's important to remember that the contents of the pen may be discoverable by an attorney. You might be interested to know that the judges who have sat in on my hospital board of trustee audiences have been running to get this device. It's because they make notes throughout a trial and they can instantly review the testimony of the first witness and then notice how the fourth witness seems to contradict it. They inform me that their personal trial notes are completely private and protected by law.

Consider using the digital pen when doing performance evaluations and/or corrective personnel sessions

with employees to document the encounter and record intended performance improvements both verbally and by signature. Use the pen for brainstorming sessions with your colleagues and staff.

You can take the Pulse to continuing education seminars where you either have access to a printed handout or electronic versions of the slides. Simply write down the slide number when listening to the lecture, and you'll be able to hear what was said about each slide in a later session.

Try using the device to record a narrative of your ideas regarding your "to do" list for projects. You can do this with your staff as well. We used our Pulse to journal the activities of each vacation day so that my wife can scrapbook our digitally captured activities that relate to our digital photos. Finally, use the digital pen with any special form that you wish to create for your practice. It will take a little design and special printing, but a smart pen may give you functionality that will even be more appropriate than typing on a keyboard of a workstation.

You've probably already guessed that the primary target market for this device is high school and college students. The perfect candidate for the pen is the poor note-taker who hears that a section of the lecture is sure to be on the next scheduled exam. The pen features a special bookmark function that allows students to go directly to only those portions of their notes where this designation has been made. Let me know if you discover other applications for this device in your practice. Also, if you see links to some sample documents and sessions I have posted online, visit my brand new Web site at <http://felkey.shutterfly.com>. You can also e-mail me at felkebg@auburn.edu. 

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