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In an exclusive interview with SpeechTEK Europe Google's Engineering Director, Dave Burke, talks about smart phones, Android, and Google's plans for speech on the web.



Dave Burke, Engineering Director at Google, gives the opening Keynote Address at next month's European speech technology forum, **SpeechTEK Europe (London, 25 & 26 May 2011)**. In a Q&A session with SpeechTEK Europe, he describes some of the challenges Google has faced in developing speech technologies for Android, and discusses the adoption of speech technologies by smart phone users.

What's your vision for the mobile device?

The smartphone is the defining, iconic product of our time. The shift to mobile computing is happening fast - mobile web adoption in the US is ramping up 8 times faster than the desktop did in the mid-1990s. In two years, we will reach an inflection point where the number of smartphones will outstrip the number of PCs sold. And mobile computing isn't just about the devices - it's about pervasive connectivity. Your phone is connected to the Internet 24x7, no matter where you are; this will have a profound effect on the way people access information and services. Dialogue-based services will cede to rich interactive experiences in the form of web and packaged applications. Speech capabilities will become part of the applications themselves, working in harmony with other input modalities such as touchscreens.

Android phones already support speech technology. What new capabilities will be enabled on Android phones by the work your group is doing?

We've been working hard to enhance the speech capabilities on Android with each new release of the platform. We started out by building voice search ... we added the capability to use speech for any text input box by adding a microphone to the keyboard, and last year we launched a new set of capabilities, called Voice Actions, to take common but complex multi-step actions and speech-enable them. Examples include commands for sending text messages and emails, calling a business or contact, listening to music, or setting the alarm ... Expect to see more capabilities, more languages, faster and more accurate recognition and synthesis as well as API improvements.

Why will Smart phone users embrace speech applications when users are already adept at entering information by touching the Android screen?

Speech offers an adjunctive modality for the modern smartphone. Speech technologies afford the user the ability to attend to the device far less than traditional user interface techniques. For example, it is now possible to quickly and effortlessly send a text message by voice while walking down the street. There are other situations, such as in-car, where a hands-free mode is obviously beneficial. And despite great improvements in touch screens and keyboards, it is still often quicker to speak rather than type ... I don't believe speech will ever replace other input modalities entirely, but there are plenty of situations where having the ability to quickly issue queries and instructions by voice greatly enhances the user interface of the device.

What other speech technologies is Google working on?

One platform which is still conspicuously missing widely-deployed speech capabilities is the Web. Last year, Google came together with other companies including Microsoft, Nuance, and Voxeo to start a new Speech XG Incubator Group within the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). The Speech XG group is focused on extending HTML 5 with the

ability to leverage speech recognition and synthesis from within Web browsers. The goal is to make it very straightforward for Web developers to speech-enable their applications.

Dave Burke's SpeechTEK Europe Keynote Address - [Cloud-based Speech Recognition for Mobile and the Web](#) - takes place on Wednesday 25 May 2011.

SpeechTEK Europe features over 50 speakers from around the world, and from a wide range of business environments including **Google, Barclays Bank, Deutsche Telekom, Nuance, Loquendo, Openstream, Voxeo, Belgian Railways, Telecom Italia and Cable & Wireless.**

The full [SpeechTEK Europe 2011 programme is available here](#) and the conference is offering early bird discounts (expiry 29 April) plus 40% discounts for colleagues to attend.

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Editor's Notes

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25 & 26 May
SpeechTEK University Workshops 24 May
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About SpeechTEK

Launched in the US in 1995, the SpeechTEK event series (www.speechtek.com) is recognised worldwide as the industry's premier event focusing on products, services, applications, solutions, and innovations using speech technologies. The trade show and conference attracts a global network of speech technology providers and enterprise network customers who develop and implement speech solutions. The 2011 US SpeechTEK takes place on 8 – 10 August at the Hilton New York.

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