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For immediate release

Talking heads win the day

The winners of a brand new competition showcasing avatars were announced at the close of **SpeechTEK Europe 2010** in London last week.

The finalists in the inaugural SpeechTEK Europe's Avatar Challenge comprised seven avatars developed for use in a range of business applications, speaking a variety of languages, and using different text to speech synthesisers, animation and modelling techniques - from fantasy cartoons to realistic human-like appearance. All of the entries can be seen at:
http://www.speechtek.com/europe2010/avatar/

Voting took place in two separate polls - The Experts' Prize and The People's Choice Award. The winners are:

EXPERTS' PRIZES went to ejTalk and Humanity Interactive

PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD went to H-Care

In addition, a JUDGES' SPECIAL AWARD was given to VoxWeb

"*The use of avatars is controversial.*" Commented Jim Larson, SpeechTEK Europe Conference Chair and one of the competition judges, when announcing the awards winners at the close of Conference,

"*Some feel that an avatar is nothing more than a talking head while others feel they engage the user in ways not possible with text or synthesised voice alone. Some experts believe that avatars will soon replace human news broadcasters and actors, as has already happened in electronic games, while others feel that avatars are a fad that will never catch on.*"

Commenting on Experts' Prize winner, ejTalk, he continued,

"*Cassandra, the female avatar from ejTalk, caught the attention of many people. Cassandra contains a sophisticated artificial intelligence engine that enables the avatar to converse with – and not just speak to - the user. Older users felt this avatar looked freakish, while younger users found her engaging, suggesting that culture and user bias should be considered when choosing avatars.*

"*The judges found all of the entries interesting and exciting, and the Experts' Prize winners were especially realistic and engaging. One judge said that she forgot she was listening to an artificial agent because of its appearance, human-like gestures, and human-like voice.*"

The entries were judged by user interface experts, assisted by foreign language experts, using the following criteria: appearance and movement; voice expression; use of facial and body gestures; and voice, lip and facial synchronisation.

The winner of the People's Choice Award, H-care, was voted for by conference delegates in an on site ballot at SpeechTEK Europe. Carlo Benvenuti, Sales Director of H-care said,

"We're very proud to be the winner of SpeechTEK Europe's Avatar Challenge People's Choice award. This award validates H-care as a leader in technological innovation, and recognises our platforms as innovative systems that make a positive contribution to industry growth."

SpeechTEK Europe 2011 will take place at the Copthorne Tara Hotel, London on 25 & 26 May 2011.

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Editor's Notes:

SpeechTEK Europe 2010 took place in London on 26 & 27 May. This was the first-ever edition of SpeechTEK Europe, developed to capitalise on the huge growth in speech innovation and implementation in Europe, and is the sister event to the highly successful New York event series. **SpeechTEK Europe 2011 will take place at the Copthorne Tara Hotel, London on 25 & 26 May 2011.**

About Avatars
An avatar is a computer representation of a person using animated graphics and real or synthesised voice. Avatars are used to deliver messages on a variety of electronic devices such as computers, mobiles, PDA's and games consoles. Some of the many uses of avatars include:

Presenting news and other information to users
Guiding users through web sites with instructions/advice
Presenting personalised messages on social web sites
Attracting user attention in ads and announcements
Digital/automated assistance in self service, contact centres, and help desks
Representing gaming character roles
Training users to perform complex tasks
Corporate and product branding

About SpeechTEK
Launched in 1995, the SpeechTEK Exposition and Educational Conference (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 educational conference attracts a global network of speech technology providers and enterprise network customers who develop and implement speech solutions. The 2010 New York event takes place on 2 – 4 August at the city's Marriott Marquis. SpeechTEK Europe 2011 takes place on 25 & 26 May in London.

About Information Today
Information Today (www.infotoday.com), producers of SpeechTEK and Speech Technology magazine, is a leading business and technology publisher and conference organiser. In addition to Speech Technology magazine, Information Today publishes *Streaming Media* magazine, CRM magazine, KMWorld magazine, Database Trends and Applications magazine, EventDV magazine, and EContent, as well as a range of resources for the global information community.