Dragon Helps Former Stuntman Sebastian Paul Siebert Build a New Life

In December 1999, Sebastian Paul Siebert was at the pinnacle of his career as a stuntman, working on movies all over the world. But when a charity stunt at an air-show went wrong, it left him with multiple injuries. One of which was a brain haemorrhage which virtually destroyed the right temporal lobe of his brain that caused hemispherical paralysis of his entire left side.

Despite these injuries, he survived. But when he was discharged five months later he was still suffering from brain injuries and was unable to walk or carry out most everyday tasks without assistance. He could speak though, and a friend suggested he should try Dragon NaturallySpeaking, the world's leading desktop speech recognition software solution from Nuance Communications. Thanks to Dragon, Sebastian has now authored two books, is working on a third and has also written screenplays – every word of which has been dictated and edited using Dragon.

A VALIDATING EXPERIENCE

For Sebastian, the freedom to communicate and express himself that Dragon NaturallySpeaking has given him, has been a liberating and validating experience. He is also convinced that using the software helped to accelerate his recovery.

"Whilst I was in hospital, I was mortified to find that I could no longer read. The left and right brain functions whereby I could speak, but not identify what the word was when written on the page was devastating. I'd always been a very avid reader. Fortunately I recovered from this relatively quickly, but did go through bouts of a type of dyslexia. But I could not write, and that made me feel invalidated. I had been at the peak of my profession and had gone from hero to zero in seconds."

It while discussing with a friend the challenges of not being able to write, that his friend mentioned Dragon NaturallySpeaking. After doing some research into Dragon he sought out a copy and tried it. The impact was almost instant. "All of a sudden, I could put my words down flawlessly and I could say words to the computer and it would create them for me. The main thing was that I could communicate with people again. I wasn't trapped anymore. I found great freedom in being able to contact friends all over the globe. Writing was effortless, and Dragon provided such a welcome escape."

As his recovery progressed, he started to keep a journal, which eventually turned into his first book created using Dragon. Having written one inspirational book, Sebastian soon started on another and also started to turn his newly-discovered talent towards screenplays, drawing on his many years of experience in the film industry.

FINDING A WAY BACK WITH DRAGON

For Sebastian, using Dragon feels natural, using dictation as a speedy way to get more done. "I don't even think about trying to type anymore. I can dictate at 120 to 130 words a minute. As fast as I am speaking is how fast Dragon will work for me."

Dragon's ability to learn how an individual uses language (which has been enhanced significantly since he started using the software) has meant it has become more receptive and accurate for Sebastian each time he uses it. "I have put a great deal of training into it and, what with the books and a couple of screenplays, I get remarkably good recognition accuracy."

Sebastian sees dictation rather than typing becoming the norm for all users – not just those who use this method due to injury or disability – in the future. "I think that will happen because it makes you much more efficient. It is easier and cheaper for an executive to dictate a memo or an email and pass it onto a PA to be corrected. It's a paradigm shift and it is just liberating."

Sebastian also feels that it has helped him to develop his cognitive abilities. "I feel there is a synergy between my writing speed and my speed of contemplation. Using Dragon has given me the ability to formulate words faster in my head. We think in images and we describe in words and when you say the words instead of typing them in, I guess you are taking more of a direct route to getting that idea across."

ENHANCED PERFORMANCE

Thirteen years later, having regained most of his physical dexterity, he is embarking on a journey across the Far East to find inspiration for a third book, which he will also write entirely by using Dragon NaturallySpeaking 12. It boasts over 100 new features and enhancements, to enables users to get more done in less time than ever before. It offers a 20 percent improvement to out-of-the-box accuracy, faster performance and new technology that learns the preferences of individuals as they use the software, making it even more user friendly.

Previous versions of Dragon NaturallySpeaking were capable of adapting to a person's preferred style of writing as well as the audio characteristics of their voice including pitch, speaking style, accents and even speech impediments. The Smart Format Rules in Dragon 12 take this even further, adapting to the way the user prefers to format their words. The software detects word, phrase and format corrections, including abbreviations, numbers automatically, so dictated documents will reflect the individual's own writing style every time.

PROFILE

- Sebastian Paul Siebert
- South African
- Inspirational author and screenplay writer
- Former film industry stuntman

CHALLENGE

- After suffering multiple injuries in an accident, he was left physically impaired and unable to write
- Brain injuries mean he also lost some ability to spell words

RESULTS

- Dragon enabled Sebastian to communicate effectively and embark on a new career
- He has authored two books and several screenplays using Dragon
- Dragon supported his recovery and enhanced his cognitive functions.