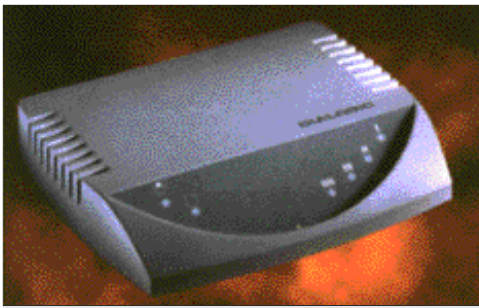


CTI[®]

Where Datacom Meets Telecom

TMC LABS

Voice Wizard

**VoiceGate Corporation**

550 Alden Road, Suite 112
 Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 6A8
 Ph: 800-668-2387
 E-mail:
 voicegate@voicegatecorp.com
 WebSite: www.voicegatecorp.com

Price: \$1,400 and up for retail; \$7,000 and up for developers

Although the Voice Wizard works with several dozen PBXs our laboratory PBX (a Nortel model) wasn't on the list. Fortunately Dialogic's New Jersey-based Professional Services laboratory which is located about 90 minutes from our Connecticut offices donated their facilities for a day.

INSTALLATION

We started by attaching the A/C adapter and a security dongle into the unit's COM 2 port. The COM ports were clearly labeled. There was no on/off switch. Instead, the Unit automatically powered on and ran a POST sequence. When this sequence was complete (when the unit's LEDs stopped flashing), we plugged in four single-line extensions from the PBX (using RJ-45 connectors) to the unit's four ports. Then we made sure that the four lines were in order, matching the unit's ports.

The next step was system programming which may be accomplished using a telephone or a PC-based terminal emulation program like Hyper Terminal or ProComm Plus. We wanted to test both methods of configuration so we did the initial programming with a telephone and then we made adjustments later using Hyper Terminal with Windows 95.

We dialed the Voice Wizard on its first extension although we could have dialed any extension to continue — it doesn't matter which port is used for set-up. We did, however have to account for the switch we were using. The Dialogic laboratory's PBX, an AT&T Partner Plus model required

that go through port number 10 or 11 for configuration, so we made sure that we used extensions 10, 11, 12, and 13 off of the PBX.

To enter the system as the system administrator, we had to press the pound Sign (#) on the telephone's key pad immediately after hearing the initial menu tree. Then, we had to enter the administrator ID and password. (The default administrator's ID is *99; the default password, *99*99.) We then navigated various options, choosing to "change telephone system" (choice 6), and electing to use the AT&T Partner Plus model (choice 110).

Once these selections are made, the user follows the command prompts to return to the main menu. From this point, every selection depends on an organization's unique circumstances, but the biggest step is to make user accounts. Entering the date for these accounts simultaneously configures data for the name search feature, but every user's name must be entered by using a letter-to-numeral charting method, which is extremely tedious. Names must be at least two characters. At least the mailboxes and extensions can be created in a lump sum.

End-user setup, like system setup, is just another trek through a tree-structure labyrinth. Navigating through these

RATINGS (0-5)

Installation: 4.5
Documentation: 3.5
Features: 5
Overall: B+

menus isn't difficult, but the choices are numerous. so we suggest keeping One of the many included copies of the menu system handy.

Basically, all setup demands of you is patience. Our patience was tried only once, when we had to program the user account passwords. Default passwords are the user ID entered three times, if the ID is two digits; or entered twice, if the ID is three digits; or entered just once, if the ID is four digits. Fortunately, once this technique is mastered, users can easily reset the password to anything they like, up to six digits.

DOCUMENTATION

Our Voice Wizard system came with four sets of documents. The first was the main administrator's manual; the second was a start-up guide; the third consisted of the user's manuals; and the fourth consisted of the user's pocket guides. Overall, the documentation does a good job explaining the features and settings, and all the guides are well organized and well illustrated. However, users and administrators may have a hard time finding certain details related to configuration.

Users, for example, may have difficulty finding information on changing passwords. (For some reason, this information is buried deep within the user's manual.) Administrators might have to consult one or another of the user's pamphlets for various configuration details. (We'd recommend repeating this information in the administrator's manual, the better to eliminate some unnecessary paper shuffling.) One other sore point: We found that the documentation for emulation access was severely limited.

FEATURES

The Voice Wizard's has so many features that discussing all of them would be tantamount to writing a book on SOHO voice mail concepts. Consequently, in this article, we'll concentrate on a few standout features, that is, features that you would expect to find only in a high-end system. Examples include remote notification, remote configuration, multiple levels of account security, surname searching, fax call detection, and a wide variety of customization options.

The remote notification feature has settings for standard and cellular tele-

phones an for three kinds of pagers. In addition, the Voice Wizard allows you to filter messages by their marked priority, that is, based on the way callers elect to mark their calls. This approach is fine, so far as it goes; however, but we'd prefer to see an option that allows filtering based on who called. That way, instead of relying on the caller to reserve the "urgent" mark for really important messages, you could set the

- Automatic gain control based on Dialogic SpringWare.
- Watch Dog Timer.
- 30-60 mailboxes.
- 2.75 hours of digital storage.
- Time- and date-determined special greeting options.

OPERATIONAL TESTING

We didn't find any features that we couldn't get to work eventually. An

End-user setup, like system setup, is just another trek through tree-structure labyrinth. Basically, all setup demands of you is patience.

notification feature to forward only those messages that you would deem important, say, messages from your boss or an important client.

Alternatively, you could read a display of the caller's number, or have the number read to you, but even this approach might not suffice. Who among us could claim to be a walking directory? Ideally, you would have a system that would filter or intercept calls based on dynamic user settings. The system would send these calls as sound files to a unified messaging server or directly to an e-mail pager, mobile communicator, or PDA device.

Another important feature is remote configuration, which is especially useful when emulator access is used. If nothing else, emulator access lets you take your time while you go through the various settings, sitting comfortably before a GUI, and avoiding toll charges — reason enough, we think, to prefer the terminal-and-modem tandem to the telephone-based configurations.

In real life, it would make sense to have a device like the Voice Wizard at a branch office and have the system administrator located somewhere else. Using a standard null modem cable linked to a PC, administrators could control the unit from that PC or from any remote PC.

Other features include:

- Dialogic D/41 H voice board.
- Two- and four-port versions of the unit.
- 486-based motherboard
- Extra COMport for future upgrades.

impressive performance. (Such complete feature access is unusual for such a young product line.)

We normally test voice mail systems by calling every port, creating users through every available method, and testing miscellaneous features. The Voice Wizard was no exception. We configured our unit to deliver messages marked urgent to a cellular telephone, we programmed holiday messages and we even customized the menu tree. We're pleased to report that everything worked flawlessly the first time even the setting of the PBX type which we feared would occasion inordinate difficulty.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Voice Wizard would be available to a much broader range of users if it were to work with standard analog lines. Indeed some of Voicegate's competitors do offer this option. Also we'd like to see the addition of an on/off switch.

CONCLUSION

Voice Wizard is feature-rich but not too difficult to set up and maintain. In addition, it has a very gentle learning curve for end users. This system is most appropriate for small to medium-sized organizations that already have one of the PBX systems on the Voice Wizard compatibility list, which includes systems from AT&T, Comdial, NEC, and Rolm. Organizations may want to consider other options however if they currently lack a PBX or if they're planning to move to a different PBX (or to a PC-PBX system).