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Computer Speech Software Helps ALS Patients to Communicate with Ease

ALS Patients Find That Text to Speech Software NextUp Talker Helps to Maintain Communication and Normalcy

CLEMMONS, NC – Often referred to as "Lou Gehrig's disease," **ALS** (Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) is a progressive and eventually fatal neurodegenerative disease that affects over 30,000 Americans. While the mind remains largely unaffected, the disease attacks the motor nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord, with its progression marked by severe muscle weakness, eventually impairing mobility, speech, swallowing and respiratory function. Difficulty with speech or swallowing is often one of the earliest symptoms of the disease -- which means, for those living with the diagnosis of ALS, finding a speech replacement solution is vital. ***NextUp Talker*** software offers a unique and affordable software solution so that, using an ordinary Windows computer or laptop, an ALS patient can once again communicate by voice with ease.

College Professor Stephen Smith was diagnosed with ALS in May of 2002, at the age of 55. Like many ALS sufferers, his symptoms began first with slurred speech, increased difficulty in talking, and eventually progressed to difficulty with walking and balance. "As a college professor, I make my living talking," comments Smith, "so it was a rather rude irony that my ALS affected speech first and limbs second."

Smith soon discovered *NextUp Talker*, which allowed him to supplement his speech loss with the program's lifelike and human-sounding voices, using the program not only to assist him in teaching his classes, but even to speak on the phone. "I still type quite well, so to speak on the phone, I simply position my computer speaker next to the phone and type away."

Smith also writes lectures, which he posts online, and plays in his classes as well, using his laptop. *NextUp Talker* also allows him to respond to class questions, and to maintain spontaneity throughout each class. "*NextUp Talker*, along with the internet, has extended my teaching career, without question. The software is simple and powerful, and the excellent TTS voices are absolutely fantastic. Teachers can still insert their personalities, charisma, and enthusiasm into presentations using *NextUp Talker*, and can do so a lot better than simply sending out a Word document for people to read."

Smith is also dedicated to helping educate others to learn about living with ALS: "People need to remember that cognitive ability and the drive to communicate do not decline with ALS," he adds. "I was truly surprised to experience a strong feeling of helplessness when trying to continue with my profession and being unable to maintain my usual level of communication. The drive to maintain involvement is powerful and, thanks to *NextUp Talker*, I'm able to remain involved."

Like many others with ALS, Smith also uses a headset/microphone and small amplifier at his waist, called a Chattervox, which allows the amplification of even a whisper so that others can hear him. However, as his voice has declined, the device's usefulness has also declined, making tools like *NextUp Talker* more and more necessary.

Smith is just one of many ALS sufferers to have discovered *NextUp Talker*, and all have noted different aspects of the software's usefulness to them in dealing with their conditions:

<u>**Stephen Smith**</u>: "*NextUp Talker* gives me confidence. It's a terrifying feeling to try to speak and not be understood. The other day I had to write my name and address for a clerk at the pharmacy because she simply could not understand me. With *NextUp Talker*, I'm confident that if people are patient, I can communicate clearly. The confidence-shattering feeling is absolutely devastating, especially after having taught in college for 30 years. So, for less than $100, and with a good laptop with speakers, ALS patients can communicate with confidence, and their

dignity and independence can be raised." He adds, "Thanks to *NextUp Talker*, I'll be able to 'say' something at my daughter's wedding."

   B. Hughes, also an ALS sufferer, is another *NextUp Talker* user who has been vocal about his experiences: "Most people don't realize how frustrating it is when you have lost your voice and can't get your point across. My voice has gone due to ALS, and I use the *NextUp Talker* program to communicate my wants and needs at home, as well as with a variety of caregivers. More importantly, I can talk with my granddaughter again! I can tell my wife I love her. It's simple to use, and the voices are incredible. I would recommend *NextUp Talker* to anyone who has lost their voice."

   Unlike other technology products that are too often prohibitively expensive for many users, *NextUp Talker* offers an affordable solution to the voiceless – and with a free 30-day trial that anyone can download and evaluate immediately. If users then decide to purchase *NextUp Talker,* natural-sounding voices are available in a wide range of genders, ages, accents, and approaches for a truly "conversational" Text to Speech solution. *NextUp Talker* was specifically designed for use in conversation, is pleasant and "conversational" in sound, works easily with either mouse or keyboard, offers easy-to-use shortcuts for common words or phrases, and adapts to the user's own style and speech. The program can even insert actual sound files along with speech, helping to make kids more comfortable in talking with an adult using a computer to speak.

   NextUp Talker is priced at just $99.95, and is compatible with Windows® 98, NT, 2000 and XP, or Tablet PCs. The program is available for fast, safe and secure purchase via **http://www.talkforme.com/**. *NextUp Talker* comes with a pair of male and female premium voices from either **AT&T Natural Voices™** or **NeoSpeech®** for the most natural-sounding computer speech anywhere. Additional premium voices offered optionally by NextUp.com include *RealSpeak®* and **Cepstral®.**

About NextUp.com

NextUp.com, a division of NextUp Technologies, LLC, provides award-winning Text to Speech software for consumers, business customers, educators, and those with visual or vocal impairment, or learning disabilities.

In addition to *NextUp Talker*, NextUp.com markets other innovative Windows software designed to save time and deliver vital information. *TextAloud*™ converts text into spoken audio for listening on a PC or laptop, or lets you save text to audio files for playback on portables like the iPod®, PocketPC®, and a wide range of other players and devices. *NewsAloud*™ is a talking personal "news agent" that finds the stories users want, and then reads them aloud or to portable audio files. *WeatherAloud*™ is a weather application that lets users select and listen to personalized weather forecasts, while *StocksAloud*™ reads stock updates and related news headlines aloud for specific companies of interest. Most recently, NextUp introduced a new text reader, *AbleReader*™, available with the AT&T Natural Voices™ for use on Mac computers. Information on *AbleReader*™ is available at **http://www.AbleReader.com**.

Note to Editors:

Evaluation copies of *NextUp Talker* are currently available upon request, along with background materials, images, and a host of highly positive and informative user testimonials. To receive a review copy, or for more information on NextUp.com or *TextAloud*, please contact publicist Angela Mitchell at **(904) 982-8043** or via *Admitchell@Nextup.com*.

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