

## Asterisk Featured Article

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### Leveraging Asterisk to Bring Speech Technology to the SMB



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Eastern Management ([News - Alert](#)) Group recently reported that the open source PBX market has a greater market share than any single proprietary vendor, eclipsing the 18 percent mark last year. That growth is due, of course, to the inexpensive nature of open source, but also largely a result of the open environment it creates, allowing developers to easily (and cost effectively) bring new, innovative solutions to the communications market.

According to Dr. Fakhri Karray (pictured left), co-founder, president and CEO of [Vestec](#), in an interview with TMC's group editorial director Erik Linask ([News - Alert](#)), "Asterisk is a classic open source success story and its success is very much rooted in classic superior product attributes, such as lower cost, greater robustness, greater versatility, better features, faster upgrades, and easier support. Vestec has developed an Asterisk-based speech engine that it believes will compete with higher end proprietary products and help drive speech recognition to the mainstream SMB market. To further leverage the collab-



orative spirit of the Asterisk ([News - Alert](#)) community, Vestec is participating in AstriCon 2009, the annual Asterisk developer conference, to be held October 13-15 in Glendale, Arizona. The full interview, including Karray's thoughts on the future of Asterisk and the benefits of partnering with Digium ([News - Alert](#)), the driving force behind the Asterisk movement follows.

**EL: What is the state of the Asterisk market, from your perspective?**

**FK:** In our opinion, Asterisk has gone from strength to strength over the past several years and is becoming a global phenomenon. You can see this in the high double-digit annual growth rate of Asterisk downloads, the increase in the variety of add-on products for Asterisk, the support for Asterisk from major firms such as Skype, growing penetration of Asterisk in SMB and SME PBX ([News - Alert](#)) markets, and serious consideration of Asterisk by the Enterprise sector as a viable telephony platform.

**EL: Why have you chosen to leverage the Asterisk platform in your speech engine?**

FK: Asterisk provides Vestec with an ideal platform to introduce as well as popularize its powerful, low-cost speech engine. We are impressed with Asterisk's growth rate and market penetration as well as its low-cost and greater versatility value proposition. We believe Asterisk can help us access the vast untapped SMB and SME market for affordable speech recognition, while the creativity of the Asterisk developer community can maximally utilize the potential of our powerful speech engine in creation of unique, low-cost speech-enabled products and services.

**EL: What has driven the growth of Asterisk over the past 10 years?**

FK: Asterisk is a classic open source success story and its success is very much rooted in classic superior product attributes, such as lower cost, greater robustness, greater versatility, better features, faster upgrades, and easier support. As an analogy, you can see Asterisk doing to the proprietary PBX market what Linux has done – and continues to do – to proprietary operating systems in corporate and Web server markets.

**EL: What advantages does an Asterisk-based product offer your customers?**

FK: Asterisk – combined with our speech recognition engine – allows SMB and SME firms to deploy speech-enabled PBX systems at much lower cost than proprietary PBX systems. In addition, the versatility afforded by Asterisk, coupled with the feature-rich development toolkit of our low-cost speech engine, gives SME and SMB firms tremendous flexibility in incorporating speech-enabled applications.

**EL: What are the key differentiators of your product over others on the market?**

FK: The primary differentiator of our speech engine is its value: we offer among the highest recognition accuracy in the industry, provide an easy-to-use powerful API for the speech engine, and yet cost a fraction of competitive offerings. Put differently, with our \$99 per port retail price, we have made speech recognition truly affordable for the first time to the vast majority of the SMB and SME market. In addition, we have empowered the developer to create sophisticated speech applications without the traditional need for expensive third-party professional services.

**EL: Who is your target customer?**

FK: Our target customer is the vast majority of SMB and SME firms along with those enterprise companies that have been put off by the historically high cost and deployment complexity of speech recognition. We firmly believe that speech industry is guilty of mis-marketing speech by creating an aura of mystery around speech recognition in order to charge a premium for its products as well as generate a demand for professional services in use of its products. Current advances in artificial intelligence (AI) are causing a paradigm shift in speech technologies by lowering product development costs, increasing recognition accuracy, and improving recognition interpretation. We intend to leverage these AI advances to de-mystify as well as popularize speech recognition by introducing powerful, low-cost speech recognition and natural language understanding (NLU) engines that can be utilized to create sophisticated speech applications without conventional reliance on third-party professional services.

**EL: How does partnering with Digium help increase the value of your product?**

FK: Digium is the major driver behind the phenomenal growth of Asterisk and we

want to leverage the Asterisk community as well as the Asterisk ecosystem to build awareness of our low-cost, high-accuracy speech recognition engine. In addition, the Web-based sales, marketing, deployment, and support mechanism of Digium helps ensure faster customer reach, while the versatile nature of Asterisk expedites incorporation of powerful speech recognition applications for target markets.

**EL: Does partnering with Digium help create market awareness for your product?**

FK: Absolutely. Digium is the creator of Asterisk and a classic open source success story. In fact, a big part of Asterisk success is due to its leadership. We are proud to have been awarded Digium's seal of approval via its Premier Software Partner designation.

**EL: Why are you participating in AstriCon 2009?**

FK: AstriCon provides an excellent opportunity to get in front of developer and entrepreneurial segments of the Asterisk community. We have a powerful value proposition in the form of a low-cost, high-accuracy speech engine that, for the first time, makes speech recognition truly affordable to the vast majority of the SMB and SME markets. We want to get this message in front of the Asterisk community at AstriCon as well as impress upon it the opportunity to generate new revenue streams and improve caller experience with speech recognition.

**EL: What do you expect to see at the event this year?**

FK: We expect to see exciting new products and services for Asterisk as well as hear statistics of continued stellar growth of Asterisk.

**EL: Why should attendees make sure they visit you at your booth?**

FK: As I said earlier, we have, for the first time, made speech recognition truly affordable to the vast majority of the SMB and SME markets. Our \$99 per port price ensures that speech recognition can be cheaply packaged with Asterisk-based products and services while the ease of use of our engine eliminates the hassle for costly speech recognition application development via expensive third-party professional services. To give you an idea of our value-add, our speech engine costs less than 40 percent – in both one-time licensing fees as well as optional annual maintenance costs – of the previously cheapest option for speech recognition for Asterisk while delivering comparable speech recognition accuracy to the more expensive options. If that is not an exceptional deal, I don't know what is.

We also want Asterisk community to know that we have a comprehensive roadmap for providing robust, affordable speech recognition solutions for Asterisk as well as popularizing use of speech recognition with Asterisk. For instance, we will be introducing larger vocabulary speech recognition and natural language understanding (NLU) engines in the near future at similarly low prices. In addition, we intend to roll out acoustic models for all major European and Asian languages as well as all major English dialects (such as British, Australian, Indian, and Singaporean-accented English) to ensure global reach of our speech products.

Finally, we are planning on releasing powerful speech applications, on a free-of-charge, open-source basis, to expedite deployment and standardization of speech applications while demystifying speech application development process for the uninitiated. One of

our first free speech applications is going to be a name-dialing service, whereby any company can create automated directory assistance for its employees and any individual can experience hands-free dialing for his contacts.

**EL: Where do you see the Asterisk market in five years?**

FK: We expect continued growth in popularity, support, and evolution of Asterisk. In five years time, it would be a still more powerful, robust, versatile, and economical platform with a considerably larger installed base as well as a greater variety of add-on products and services.

*Learn more about Integrics Ltd. at [AstriCon 2009](#), to be held Oct. 13 to 15 in Glendale, Ariz. AtriCon's mission is to expand awareness and knowledge of Asterisk, the world's leading open source PBX, telephony engine, and telephony applications toolkit, over the course of a three-day conference and exhibition. AstriCon includes a wealth of information for every Asterisk user, whether you are getting started or have already discovered the power of Asterisk. [Register now](#).*

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*Original Article:*

<http://asterisk.tmcnet.com/topics/asterisk/articles/65734-leveraging-asterisk-bring-speech-technology-the-smb.htm>