

FEATURE

MicroStrategy embraces voice technology

By Dan Verton

Computerworld |

16 OCTOBER 2000 9:00 CET

Business-intelligence software vendor MicroStrategy Inc. today announced an agreement with PriceInteractive to use that company's speech-recognition technology to deliver customized business intelligence to customers over any telephone, mobile phone or voice-mail system.

As part of Vienna, Va.-based MicroStrategy's new focus on the Web, it will use Reston, Va.-based PriceInteractive's SpeechPort platform to deliver personalized information to customers through interactive voice portals. SpeechPort will allow customers to tap into any MicroStrategy data warehouse and retrieve information using the basic features of a telephone or cell phone.

Mark Plakias, vice president of voice and wireless commerce at The Kelsey Group, a consultancy in Princeton, N.J., said voice-portal technology is developing rapidly and that the MicroStrategy/PriceInteractive deal is an important development for the market.

"Although in one way it is business as usual, since these two companies already had a relationship, this is one of the early examples of high value-added content being pumped through the voice-portal infrastructure," said Plakias. "The business case for applying voice technologies to mobile knowledge workers is a lot stronger than it is on the consumer side. At the end of the day, it's what people need out in the field."

SpeechPort is delivered through a Java-based service infrastructure that pairs a speech-recognition engine with a carrier-grade telecommunications and wireless hosting facility. PriceInteractive will also expand its VoiceXML support by integrating

MicroStrategy's proprietary TML voice browser in the SpeechPort platform. This will allow MicroStrategy customers to easily design and rapidly deploy new applications in a self-service environment, according to MicroStrategy.

"The telephone serves as a key component in our mission to provide information whenever and wherever a person needs it," said MicroStrategy spokeswoman Ivy Eckerman. "Speech technology has the potential to make our technology useful and relevant for anyone with a telephone."

The deal with PriceInteractive comes only a few weeks after MicroStrategy launched a new Web store and e-commerce initiative that will allow the company to automate the bulk of its sales operations and give customers what CEO Michael Saylor called the "self-service" option. The Web store offers video product demonstrations, free software trials and detailed product and pricing information that customers can use to make purchasing decisions.

MicroStrategy recently watched its stock price drop from \$333 per share in March to \$27.50 by early this month. Although the company's business-intelligence products remain strong players in the market, new federal revenue-reporting guidelines forced the firm earlier this year to restate its earnings from 1997 to last year.

The restatements lowered the company's revenue figures for the past three years, pushing its stock price into a nosedive. In June, however, MicroStrategy announced it had received \$125 million in new financing, which allayed concerns on Wall Street.

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