

My Schpiel on *Wired for Speech*

by Michael K. Madison



W*ired for Speech* chronicles a journey through a variety of experiments concerning human response to different voice attributes. The book begins by establishing voice as the communication medium with which humans are most in tune, citing research results that include a report on the minimal brain mass required to communicate effectively. The authors then proceed to use each chapter to tackle a different attribute of voice and to establish a general reaction to that attribute through an experimental sample.

It is very fitting that Clifford Nass and Scott Brave, two experts in human-computer interaction have come together to design a book that is easily navigated in multiple resolutions. Each chapter is relatively self-contained, allowing one to skip around to other chapters and read on other experiments. It's magic! It is therefore not surprising that the authors' expertise cover a breadth of knowledge that include communication, sociology, human computer interaction and magic (Dr. Clifford Nass is also a professional magician).

From voice gender to voice personality and emotion, Nass and Brave explore means of connecting with a

user via voice. The manuscript reads very easily—a reader gets the sense that the authors realize the impact of their discoveries on the VoiceXML application business world, as many of the experiments link user reaction to consumer trust of a product. Brand management for today's voice applications should involve many of the research activities that are mentioned in the book and should apply many of the findings.

This book is perfect for anyone who designs voice applications, as well as any researcher who performs any product usability tests. Not only are the specific experiment results important, but also the processes employed to test a user's response to an interface. While I do not believe that there is enough information in the content of this book to design the perfect voice application, *Wired for Speech* is definitely a good starting place and will hopefully be followed by subsequent volumes.

This book gets me thinking: In the future, it may be interesting to contrast different human-computer interaction mediums, perhaps even combining them to get a sense for what the ultimate user interface may include.

Wired for Speech, by Clifford Nass and Scott Brave. (August 2005). MIT Press; 296 pages. ISBN 0262140926. List \$32.50.