

Rensselaer Incubator Company Receives Federal Aviation Administration Certification

Jessica Ottingbe
Media Relations Specialist

VoiceFlight Systems, a company that has been part of the Rensselaer Incubation Program since 2006, has developed a new way for pilots to communicate with their aircraft. Recently, the company received Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) certification for its VFS101 pilot speech recognition system, which allows pilots to control aircraft systems with the sound of their voices.



Scott Merritt '74, VoiceFlight Systems founder

"The VFS101 system represents a breakthrough in airborne speech recognition technology, and provides exceptional accuracy in the challenging conditions found in the aircraft cockpit," said Scott Merritt '74, company founder, who received his bachelor's and master's degrees in computer and systems engineering from Rensselaer.

An avid flyer, Merritt always felt that there had to be an easier way to enter flight plan information into his aircraft's primary GPS navigation system. The conventional method requires pilots to manually enter the information by twisting concentric knobs, which often takes several minutes.

Upon joining the Rensselaer Incubation Program, he embarked on a journey to develop an advanced speech recognition technology that would allow aircraft pilots to enter information into selected aircraft systems much more rapidly and effectively. Merritt also credits their success to advice and encouragement that they received from George Nagy, a professor in the Electrical, Computer, and Systems Engineering department who served as a sounding board throughout the development process.

"The system uses patented technology to provide accurate speech recognition and nearly instantaneous response. Voice entry of complex flight plans is accomplished 10 times faster than is possible with the conventional GPS entry knobs," Merritt said.

Merritt also noted that the system does not require any prior training or adaptation for specific pilot voices. Voice commands can be used to edit flight plans, correct errors, and accommodate routing changes. For safety, an audio read-back of the intended waypoint is presented for confirmation before the new destination is activated. The system does not alter or interfere with manual operation of the GPS units in any way. If the pilot experiences difficulties while utilizing the VFS101, conventional manual operations are readily available.

"The era of voice control in the cockpit has arrived, and the VFS101 is the first, and thus far the only, speech-recognition system to receive certification according to the FAA," said Duncan Pickard '99, who became Merritt's junior business partner following graduation from Rensselaer.

Pickard received his bachelor's degree in computer and systems engineering and an MBA from the Lally School of Management & Technology.

➤ More information and a demo of VFS101 can be found at: <http://www.voiceflight.com>.

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