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Using the PowerMic II with Dragon Dictate

Control the Dragon Dictate microphone with a PowerMic and include push-to-talk operation

The Problem: although Dragon Dictate shares the same speech engine as its Windows-based cousin (Dragon NaturallySpeaking) and provides high levels of accuracy when dictating, it lacks some of the functionality seen in the Windows version. Two issues we have encountered include:

1. The inability to program any of the keys on the PowerMic II microphone to control the microphone with Dragon Dictate
2. The inability to use any microphone (PowerMic II and others) in a “push-to-talk manner.

The Solution: thankfully, there is a simple way to get around these two limitations, although it requires purchase of two third-party applications. One allows assignment of PowerMic keys to emulate keystrokes. The other allows keystrokes to control the default microphone in a push-to-talk manner. Here’s what you need:

1. USB Overdrive: this is a software utility that detects the buttons on most USB devices, including the PowerMic and allows you to program a variety of functions to a button depression. This application is “shareware” and can be used for free, but you will be forced to live through a short count-down every time you launch it. We suggest you buy it for \$20 and support the programmer. It can be seen and downloaded from www.usboverdrive.com . Once downloaded and installed, USB Overdrive will show up as a system utility is accessed through the Finder at Applications > Utilities. If the only thing you want is to control Dragon Dictate with a PowerMic in a push-on/push-off method, USB Overdrive is all you need.

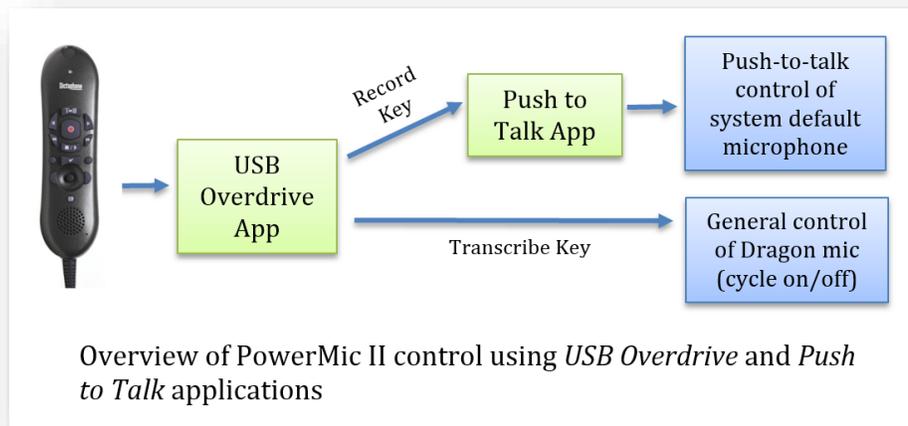


2. Press to Talk: this is a very inexpensive (\$.99) application that is available from the Mac App Store and which will allow you to assign any key combination to control the assigned system default microphone in a push to talk method. To be clear, Push to Talk does not interact with Dragon or any other program but, rather, controls the *default* microphone at the system level, activating it while a key or key combination is depressed and inactivating it when the key or key-combination is released. If the default microphone is the PowerMic, then it can be controlled in a push to talk method. Find Push to Talk by searching on the Mac App Store. Once installed, Push to Talk is seen as a small microphone icon on the top of your screen. It provides a visual indication of whether your microphone is active or not and by clicking on the icon you can open its simple menu. You'll need push to talk if you want to control the Dragon Dictate microphone in a push-to-talk manner.



Combining the two: here's the key thing, if you have used USB Overdrive to assign a button on the PowerMic to emulate a key or key combination and this is the same key combination Push to Talk is using to control the default microphone in a push to talk manner, this provides you with the ability to control microphone input to Dragon Dictate in a push-to-talk method from a PowerMic II.

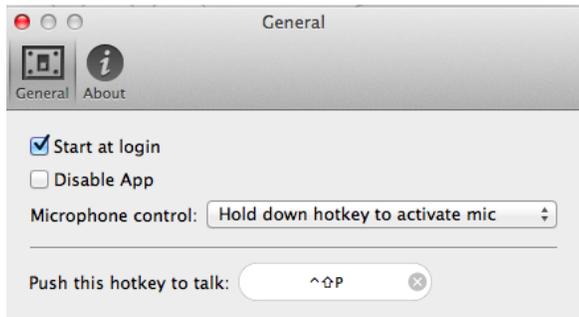
Overview of the Process:



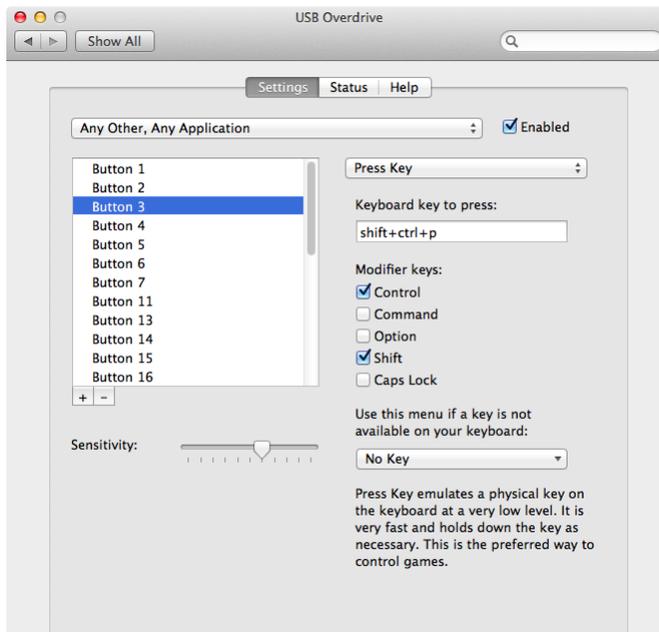
The Set-up

1. Download/Install USB Overdrive
2. Download/Install Push to Talk

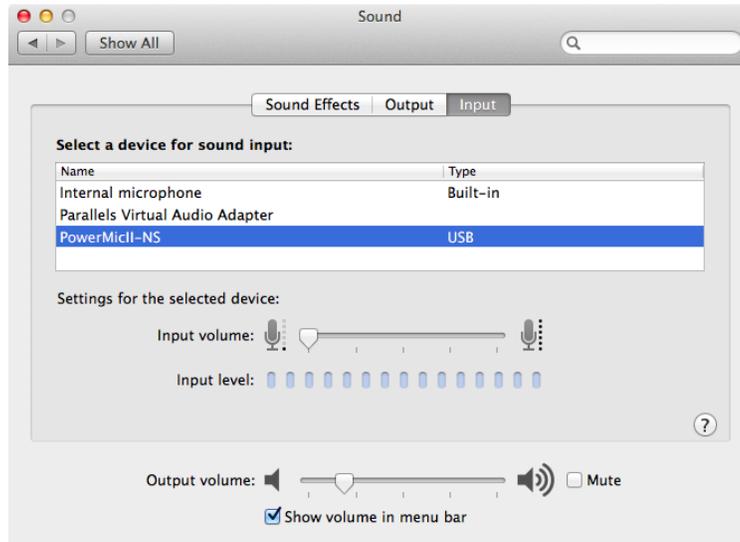
3. Open the Push to Talk Preferences menu as shown below (if it isn't obvious, the application is viewable from the small microphone icon at the top of your screen)
4. On the Microphone control drop-down be sure "Hold down hotkey to activate mic" is selected – see below



5. Assign your desired hotkey by clicking in the clear area near the bottom of the Preferences window and select your key combination (shown above is the combination of Ctrl+Shift+P.)
6. If you are using a USB microphone, open USB overdrive and program the button on your mic to the key to you want to assign push-to-talk behavior. Program this button on your device to the same key or key-combination assigned to the Press to Talk application. Shown below the "button 3" on a PowerMic II (the central record button) is assigned the same key combination assigned by the Press to Talk application to control the microphone.



7. In order to have Push to Talk control the PowerMic II it is necessary to select the PowerMic as your default microphone from the Mac sound control panel (see below). If you are using the built-in microphone on your computer, this step will not be necessary.



8. If you want to be slick, use USB Overdrive to program one button to correspond with the key-combination assigned in Push to Talk, and another button to emulate the key combination set in the Dragon Dictate preferences menu to cycle the microphone on and off. In this scenario, you can use one button (the “transcribe” button) to turn on the microphone in Dragon Dictate, and then another button (the “Record” button”) to control the microphone in the operating system in a push-to-talk method.

Key Point: the “Push to talk” application actually controls whether the microphone is providing input to Dragon Dictate (or any application) on your Mac. Even if Dragon Dictate shows the microphone as green and “On” the signal won’t be getting through to Dragon until you have activated the key combination (either on the keyboard or via the PowerMic through USB Overdrive) required by Push to Talk. To use the two effectively, you will need to turn on the Dragon Dictate microphone with one mechanism and then actually control the microphone input via Push to Talk.

Putting it in Action

1. With everything set up as shown above, check the set-up by depressing your chosen keyboard key/key combination or the appropriate button on your USB microphone. If programmed properly, you will see depression of your chosen key/button lead to the Press to Talk icon turning blue during a depression and return to fully black with a release.
2. Launch Dragon Dictate

3. If you have assigned a separate key on the PowerMic to activate the Dragon Dictate microphone, be sure this key combination is assigned in the Dictate Preferences menu.
4. Turn on the Dragon Dictate microphone using whatever method you choose (clicking on it, using a key combination, or using a PowerMic key assigned via USB Overdrive). Even though you will see the microphone status indicator turn green, the microphone will not be hot.
5. Activate your microphone with the PowerMic button assigned to the Push to Talk key combination. You will see the Push to Talk icon in the upper tray change color and your microphone will be hot as long as you are holding the button down.

Not entirely simple, but once set up, it works like a charm!

Notes:

1. This exact set-up can also work with other USB microphones. Unfortunately the Philips microphones do not work with a Mac except in the context of the Philips Control Application. If you program the record button on a Philips mic to emulate a key combination, rather than directly control the Dragon Dictate microphone, you can use this button in a push-to-talk method as described above.
2. If you are using the cloud-based speech recognition program built into your Mac, this same system (Press to Talk, with or without USB Overdrive) will work just as easily. Simply apply the same key or key-combination to activate speech recognition in both the speech recognition software and in Push to Talk.