

I-Pod-Based Translator Provides Words, Dialects, Gestures

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VCom3D's VCommunicator

A company from Orlando, Florida, is hoping that its new i-Pod-based translator will be easier to use and more practical compared with more sophisticated translators, especially for soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

VCom3D signed its first contract with the US Army last summer to provide 260 of the "VCommunicator" gadgets for US troops in Iraq. The devices were deployed last month.

The military is hoping that the devices will help to improve communication between soldiers and locals in the midst of a shortage of interpreters in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The VCommunicator is kind of a "hacked" i-Pod; its "playlists" are different military scenarios, and its "songs" are phrases in MP3 format. The device contains several megabytes of Middle Eastern voice files, including a menu of languages such as Iraqi Arabic, Pashtu and Dari.

Choosing a phrase involves two steps: first, soldiers click on the type of mission, such as vehicle checkpoint, interrogation, patrol, or raid. Then, each mission program displays numerous phrases relevant to the situation. When soldiers click on a phrase, the device displays an animated figure that repeats the phrase in accents and demonstrates gestures that are specific to the culture.

Soldiers can use the VCommunicator both as a learning device and to actually conduct operations. For example, at a security checkpoint, it can be connected to a megaphone and a large TV screen to communicate to oncoming vehicles. In urban search missions, it can be hooked up to a small mobile speaker to talk to individual people.

To ensure the accuracy of the device, Vcom3D consulted with a large network of linguists and other cultural experts when writing and testing the content. The company double-checked the pronunciation, idiom, context, meaning and other nuances of the various languages.

Vcom3D explains that, while the translator can't substitute for real interpreters and doesn't provide the sophistication of real-time voice-recognition translation systems by companies such as IBM, the VCommunicator may have a practical advantage. It's lightweight, simple to use, and can be learned in just a few hours.

After trying "cumbersome and ineffective" translation devices, the Army sees the potential of the new commercial gadget, and hopes that it will help overcome a major communication barrier.

Via: [Orlando Sentinel](#)

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