Voice banking with SpeakUnique

What is voice banking?

Voice banking uses state-of-the-art technology to create a synthetic version of someone's voice, based on a recording of their speech. This personalised synthetic voice can then be used on a device (such as a phone, tablet, iPad, or specialist communication aid) using “text-to-speech” software. This means people can type, tap or use their eyes to create messages for the synthetic voice to speak aloud.

Voice banking can benefit people who are at risk of speech loss due to a medical condition, or who already have difficulties with speaking. The idea behind SpeakUnique's technology is to let people who are losing their voice still sound like themselves, even if they can't speak "naturally".

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Our voice banking services

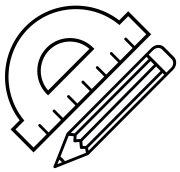
We offer three distinct voice banking services, designed for people with a range of different speech needs:



Voice Build, for people who have not yet experienced changes in their speech and wish to create a synthetic version of their voice.



Voice Repair, for people who have already noticed a deterioration in their speech, such as slowness, slurring or a change in vocal quality; we can repair this damage in the synthetic voice. **Voice Repair** works best for users with mild-to-moderate speech impairment.



Voice Design, for people who wouldn't be able to complete the recording process. We can either create a synthetic voice from old recordings or we can use voice "donors" to create a unique synthetic voice that matches someone's desired regional accent, age and gender.

Our process at a glance

There are three stages to our voice banking process: **submitting recordings**, **listening to samples**, and **payment**. One important thing to note is that recording your voice and hearing samples are completely **free** - we only need payment after you're happy with the voice and want to start using it.



First, you'll need to **submit your recordings** to us. For Voice Build and Voice Repair, this will mean reading around 150 sentences from a script of your choosing. For Voice Design, this means either getting donors to record for you or uploading any old recordings you might have which fit our criteria.



The next step is to **listen to your samples** - once we've finished working on them, we'll send them directly to your account. You can let us know what you think, and if you're not happy with your voice, we'll work with you to make improvements.

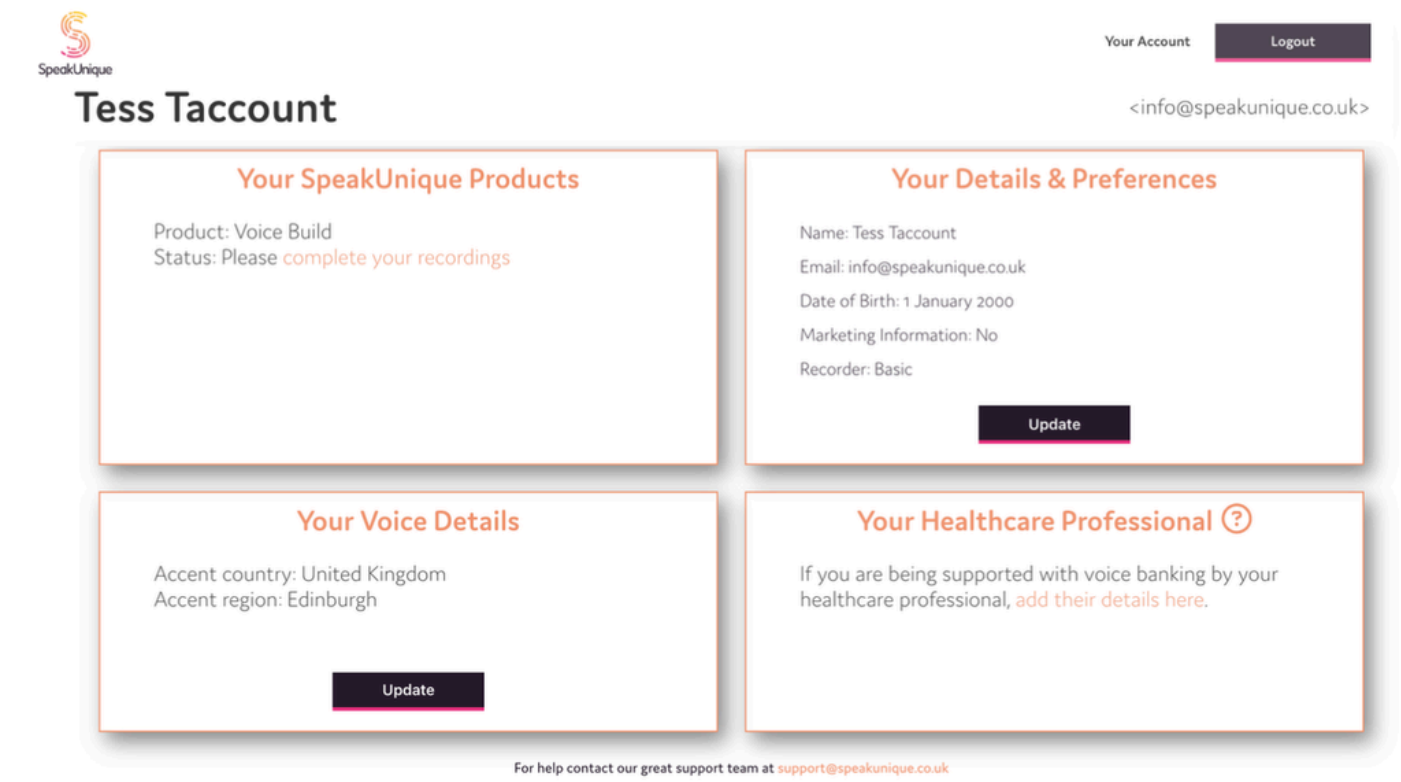


The last step is **payment** - we have funding partnerships in place with a number of organisations which will pay the full price of a voice, provided you're eligible. All you'll need to do is fill in a simple form on your account. Alternatively, you can pay yourself, also straight through your account.

Your SpeakUnique account

Your account on the SpeakUnique website is where you can manage the whole voice banking process, from sign-up to funding. It's completely free to register for a SpeakUnique account and record your voice.

You can also add contact details for a healthcare professional to allow them to liaise with us on your behalf, in order to support you with voice banking. Typically, this would be your speech and language therapist.



After you've made your recordings, you'll be able to use your account to check your voice status, listen to samples, apply for funding, and to get instructions about how to use your voice with a range of different devices.

Keeping your account safe

It's very important that you keep your account details up to date, so please make sure to note down your password and the email for your account. You can update your email address as needed in the **Your Details & Preferences** section of your account. If you forget your password, you can change it by entering your email address into our password reset page.

Recording your voice for Voice Build or Voice Repair

Your Voice Build or Voice Repair is made using recordings of your voice. The quality of these recordings can affect the quality of the final synthetic voice - so follow the guidelines on this page to find out how to make your recordings as good as they can be!

You'll need to read out between 125 and 150 sentences, which can take as little as half an hour - and you can choose which script you'd like to read, from a range of options.

There are two key factors which go into making top-quality recordings: your equipment and your recording conditions.

The equipment you'll need:

- A laptop or computer - that's what our website works best on
- Google Chrome or Mozilla Firefox for your browser (please **don't** use Microsoft Edge or Safari)
- An external headset microphone - this doesn't need to be anything too fancy. While we don't recommend any specific microphones, we have found that those made by Logitech, Plantronics, and Jabra tend to be reliable.

The conditions you'll need:

- A quiet environment with no background noise
- Soft furnishings in the room - this helps to reduce echo

Top tips:

- **If you make a mistake, don't worry - just press record again to have another go!**
- **You can listen back to your recordings as you go by pressing the green play button**
- **You don't need to do all the recordings in one sitting - you can take a break whenever you want by clicking Save and Log out**
- **When you're finished, make sure to confirm your details and submit your recordings so we can get started on your voice!**

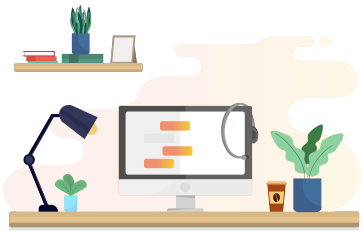
The recordings you make are what our system uses to learn how you sound - so if your recordings are very muffled, then it'll think your voice should sound very muffled, too! We have technology which can adjust for recording quality, but having good quality recordings in the first place does make a difference.

If you're having any trouble with the recording process, please get in touch with us at support@speakunique.co.uk and we'll see what we can do to help.

Creating a Voice Design

Voice Design is our service for people who wouldn't be able to create suitable recordings for Voice Build or Voice Repair.

There are two ways to create a Voice Design: using old recordings, or using voice donors.



Voice Design using old recordings

We can take old recordings of your voice and turn them into a synthetic voice which you can use. Our typical requirements are:

- At least 5 minutes of speech - but highest quality voices will use 15-20 minutes
- Files in a digital format, (e.g. .wav, .mp3, .mp4, .mov...)
- No loud background noises or people speaking over each other
- It needs to be clear whose voice we should create if the file has multiple people talking - you can email us any clarifications at support@speakunique.co.uk

You can upload your audio for review by signing up for a Voice Design account on the SpeakUnique website. Feel free to make an account and upload your audio, even if you're not sure whether it will meet our requirements. If we think we can make a voice from it, we will work closely with you to make a voice you'd like to use.

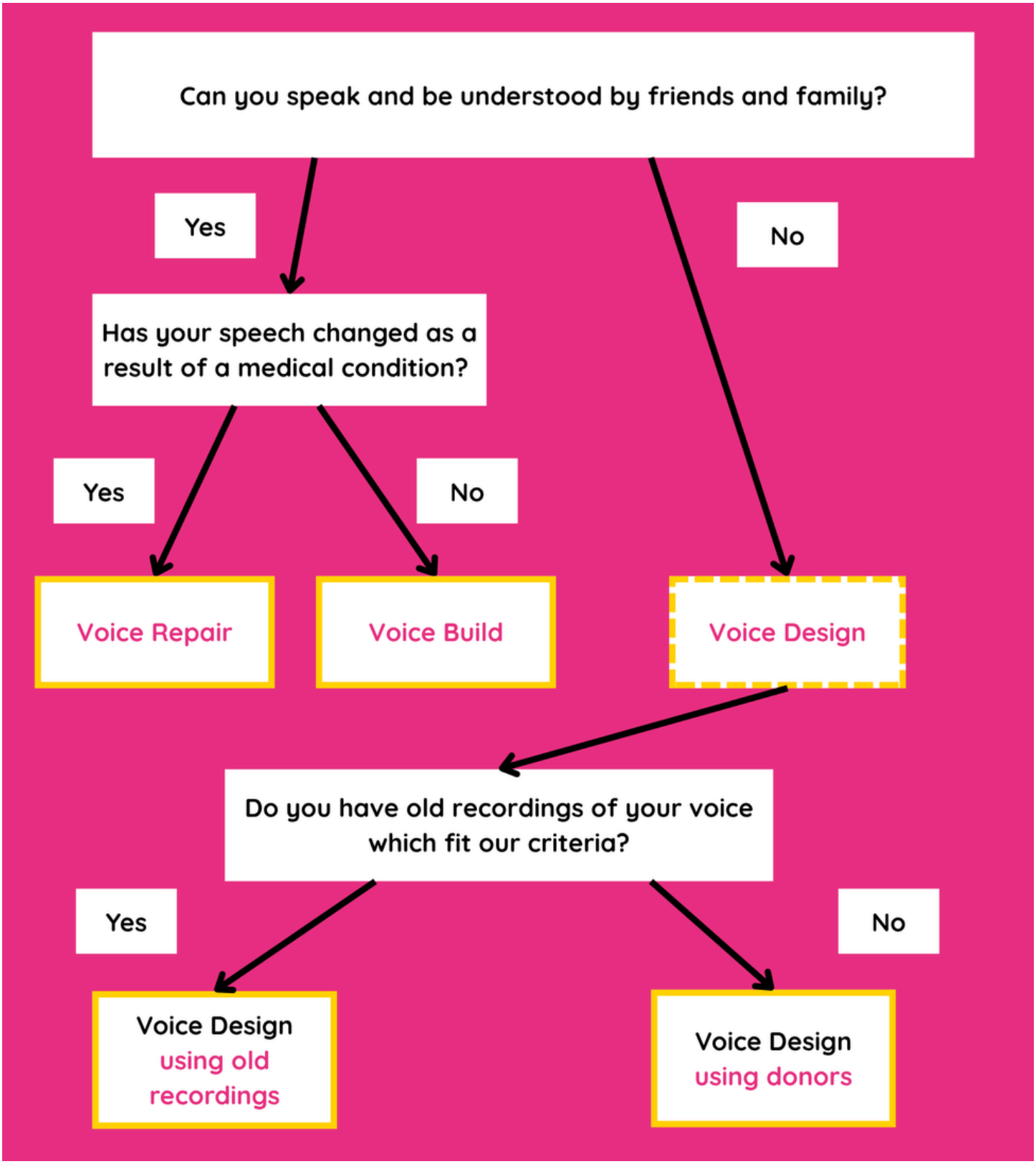
Voice Design using voice donors

Alternatively, we can create a bespoke voice for you by blending two donor voices together. Your donors could be family members, or friends who sound similar to you.

To donate their voices, your donors will need to sign up for donor accounts on the SpeakUnique website, and go through the recording process. If you don't have a suitable donor in mind, don't worry - we can match you with voices from our database. Please get in touch with us if this is your preferred option. Once we have recordings of both your voice donors, we will create a few different voice options for you.

For more information and dedicated guides to Voice Design and being a voice donor, please see our Support Documents.

Which service should you use? A quick guide:

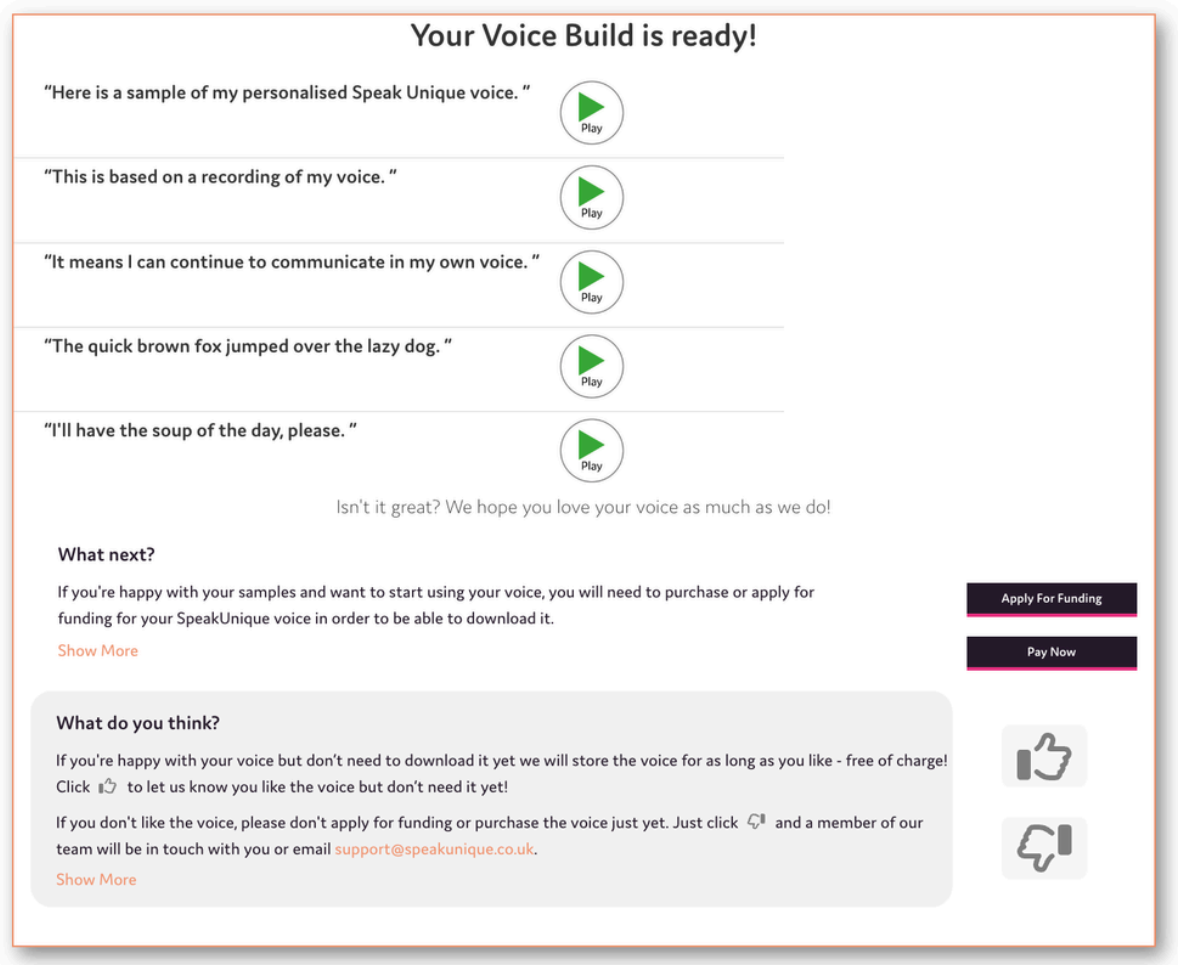


Not sure?

We'd recommend asking your speech and language therapist for their opinion as to what might work best for you. Starting with a Voice Build will also never be a problem - we're always happy to switch a Voice Build to a Voice Repair if needed.

Listening to samples

Once we've created a voice for you, we will send you samples which you can listen to by logging into your SpeakUnique account and clicking **Listen to your samples**. Then, you'll see a variant of the page below:



If you're not happy with your voice, click the thumbs down button and we'll send you an email asking for some more details. The more information you can give us about what sounds "off" about the voice, the easier it will be for us to make improvements. You know your voice best - and we want to make something you're happy to use!

Some things which are worth considering:

- Pitch - does the voice sound too high-pitched, or too low-pitched?
- Speed - does the voice sound too fast, or too slow?
- Accent - does the voice have the right accent?
- Synthetic quality - does the voice sound "too robotic" or "unnatural"?
- Identity - does the voice sound "like you"?

If you are happy with the voice we've made, but don't need it for the minute, just press the thumbs up button and log back in to apply for funding whenever you're ready. We will store your voice indefinitely, free of charge, so there's no rush.

Apply for funding or self-fund

Funding is the final step in the voice banking process; once your synthetic voice has been funded, you will be able to download it as many times as you like, onto as many different devices as you need.

You can either self-fund or apply for funding from one of our charity partners. All of our voices will be charged in GBP: a Voice Build is £175; a Voice Repair is £250; and a Voice Design is £300.

If self-funding, you can pay via online, secure card payment by clicking the **Pay now** button on the samples page.

If you would like to apply for funding, our current partnerships are with:

- Ataxia Foundation Ireland
- Ataxia UK
- Irish Motor Neurone Disease Association
- MND & Me (Queensland, Australia)
- Motor Neurone Disease Association
- Motor Neurone Disease Scotland
- Mouth Cancer Foundation
- The MSA Trust
- Progressive Supranuclear Palsy Association

Full eligibility details can be found on the funding page of our website - in general, it will depend on the reason why you need a synthetic voice, and your address.

You may also be eligible for funding through your local health service provider, such as the NHS or HSE, but this will vary depending on your local authority - please ask your SLT to get in touch if they'd like to fund your voice in this way.

We are happy to work on an ad hoc basis with other charities and organisations which would like to fund someone's voice. Please get in touch with any enquiries.



Using your voice

SpeakUnique synthetic voices can be used on a range of different devices. Once purchased, you'll find instructions on your SpeakUnique account about how to install your voice onto any of the apps or devices below. You can download your voice as many times as you like, onto as many different devices as you need.

The SpeakUnique app

We maintain our own free text-to-speech app, the SpeakUnique app, which is compatible with most smartphones and tablets. You can check whether an Android device is compatible with the SpeakUnique app here. The app is also compatible with iPads and iPhones running iOS 15 or above.

Grid for iPad

We have a partnership with Smartbox to make it possible to use SpeakUnique voices on Grid for iPad, a specialised communication app they develop. Grid for iPad must be purchased separately from your voice.

Predictable for iOS

We also have a partnership with Therapy Box to integrate our personalised voices into Predictable for iOS (iPads and iPhones). Please note that SpeakUnique voices cannot be used through Predictable on Android devices. Predictable must be purchased separately from your voice.

Specialist communication aids



SpeakUnique voices are compatible with a range of specialist communication aids which run on Windows. Specialist devices are designed specifically for people who may struggle to type. For instance, they could be designed for access via a switch, a computer mouse you control with your head, or using eye gaze technology.

Your SLT will be able to help you work out which device and access method is most suitable for your needs. You can find the list of confirmed compatible devices on our website. If we have not included a device you intend to use the voice on, please get in touch.

Please note that at present SpeakUnique voices are not available as Apple system voices.

Stay in touch!

We're always working to improve our voices and our services, so if you have feedback, ideas, or stories about using your SpeakUnique voice we'd love to hear them - and if you'd like to be featured on our blog, let us know!

You can reach our support team at support@speakunique.co.uk, or follow us on Instagram @speakuniquevb and Linkedin to see what we've been up to...



Have another question? Need help?

Our other support documents and our FAQ both provide more information about a range of aspects of the voice banking process and our voices.

It can take some time to adjust to using a synthetic voice for day-to-day communication, but we want to make the experience as smooth as it can be. If you're having any issues with your synthetic voice, just get in touch with us at support@speakunique.co.uk and we'll be happy to help.