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SPEAKERS


Rob Mineault, Luke Scriven, Ryan Fleury, Lis Malone, Cory Ballard


-  **Rob Mineault** 00:21
Hey and welcome to another episode of AT Banter. Hey this is of course the podcast where we talk with advocates and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. Hey, my name is Rob Mineault, and joining me today - Mr. Fleury comma Ryan.
-  **Ryan Fleury** 00:56
I wasn't really sure for a second.
-  **Rob Mineault** 01:06
And in the opposite corner, weighing in at - I don't know, however many pounds .. it's Ms. Lis Malone
-  **Lis Malone** 01:24
Why thank you, Robert.
-  **Rob Mineault** 01:25
You're very welcome. See, wasn't that a lovely intro?
-  **Lis Malone** 01:28
Very lovely. Thank you for leaving a blank spot for my weight. Insert number under 100.


 Rob Mineault 01:41
Yeah, so anyways, hey, how the heck are you guys?


 Ryan Fleury 02:12
I'm fabulous. Rob. How are you?


 Rob Mineault 02:15
I'm warm. We're in the middle of a heatwave here. we are. Yeah, what's it doing down there Lis?


 Lis Malone 02:23
It's definitely pretty warm. But I had a weekend in the mountains. So I got a little bit of cool air.

 Rob Mineault 02:30
What mountains did you go to this time?

 Lis Malone 02:33
It's uh..

 Rob Mineault 02:34
Okay, forget it.


 Ryan Fleury 02:35
So it's another mystery location.


 Rob Mineault 02:38
I tried. I tried everybody. She will not tell us where she goes. It's just top secret.


 Lis Malone 02:46


It's in North Carolina. There was a there was some mountaineering and some some sleeping in a tent and some trailing.


 **Ryan Fleury** 02:59
Yeah, we need to put an air tag in one of your bags.


 **Rob Mineault** 03:02
That's a great idea.


 **Lis Malone** 03:05
Instead of lowjack can be a Lisjack.


 **Rob Mineault** 03:07
Yeah. Yeah. Well, I think that at some point, maybe we'll have like some sort of a contest for the audience. See if people can hunt you down. Well, that's good. So did you have a nice time?

 **Lis Malone** 03:25
Oh, no, it was amazing. It was really great. And then then you drive down the mountain obviously it's is hot.Yeah. Was like 15 degrees difference.

 **Rob Mineault** 03:37
It's a lot. Yeah, no kidding. And so were you there for a while?

 **Lis Malone** 03:41
Just a long weekend. Then back to the real world.

 **Rob Mineault** 03:49
Yeah, yeah. Well, that's always the tough one. Although you know having having an actual toilet is definitely a pro coming back to civilization.

 **Lis Malone** 04:02
Oh. no. no. no. no. I don't do the I wander into the woods with a shovel kind of camping. No. no.

Oh, no, no, no, no, no, I don't do that. I wander into the woods with a shovel kind of camping. No, no, it's a camp. It's a campsite you get your own little designated area with designated men's and women's rooms.

R Ryan Fleury 04:18
She was in a two story motor home. She's glamping.

L Lis Malone 04:21
No, there was no glamping.

C Cory Ballard 04:24
I've always been nervous to go into the forest camping with someone who was coming with a shovel.

R Rob Mineault 04:32
Yeah, that's true.

C Cory Ballard 04:33
There's no guarantee you're coming back.

L Lis Malone 04:36
We actually had it we had a little bit of a scare because apparently there was a mama bear with her cubs that wandered into the campsite a couple of times. And so the Rangers were coming around and they were being extra strict about the things that you left out on your campsite. I mean, yeah, we got a warning slip on our campsite. We came up we're like why? What did we do? I'm like, really? beer bottles attract bears? Oh these are very modern bears, I guess.

R Rob Mineault 05:07
You know ever since cocaine bear came out, they are careful about spirits too. Beer bear. Just falls asleep on you. All right, well, good. Well, I think that clears that up. I think we are ready to proceed. Hey, Ryan.

R Ryan Fleury 05:28
Yeah, Rob?

R Rob Mineault 05:30
What the heck are we doing today?

R Ryan Fleury 05:32
Today we are talking to Cory Ballard and Luke Scriven from Vision Forward all about their Tech Connect Live YouTube channel and so much more. So thanks for joining us.

L Luke Scriven 05:44
Hello. Thank you for having us. I wasn't told that we were doing more than the Tech Connect lives.

C Cory Ballard 05:50
We do so much more.

R Rob Mineault 05:51
Well, listen, yeah, we're we are excited to have you on. For a show that's called AT Banter, we don't often get a chance to dive in and be really super geeky about assistive technology. Long story. But we're always excited to have both other content creators as well as other people who are sort of steeped in the in the AT world like we were. Maybe we can just start in just giving us a little bit of background on on each of you.

C Cory Ballard 06:35
So I'm Cory Ballard. And I am blind myself, I lost my vision over 30 years ago due to detached retinas. I've been with Vision Forward coming on 19 years now, a number of different roles throughout the all those years. But right now, I'm the Director of Adult Vision Rehabilitation Services. So I oversee a number of our non medical programs here. So orientation, mobility, braille, social, emotional, and then assistive technology. And so I still do assistive technology instruction, kind of on a daily basis as well.

L Luke Scriven 07:21
And I have been in America since 2011, I think. Yeah, living in Chicago. First, I actually got into the field through volunteering at the Chicago Lighthouse, a nonprofit in Chicago there. And I kind of enjoyed working with the people and with the technology. So I did a graduate degree and then did my move to Vision Forward in 2019.

C Cory Ballard 07:46

Yeah, four years, just a couple of days ago. Oh, no, actually coming up.

L Luke Scriven 07:50

Yeah. Working under Cory. And it's been a lot of a lot of fun. One of the things we wanted to do was build up the YouTube channel, just because that type of content is so important, you know, these days everybody's looking for, you know, for videos on stuff that can help them and if you're not doing it, then you're kind of missing out. So that's one of the things we wanted to do. So at the Lighthouse we were making started making videos 12 years ago. And then when I came here, then we continued to do so. And we've kind of expanded offerings.

C Cory Ballard 08:24

I mean, Vision Forward was doing some before you came, but I mean, just they were one take, blast through something.

L Luke Scriven 08:34

I feel like that's what we still do.

C Cory Ballard 08:38

Sure, yeah. We're just about editing now. We brought on an editor, so the YouTube channel and that started four years ago, is when we started doing more produced videos. Yeah. And then when COVID hit in 2020, we were working remotely, working from home. And Luke and I were doing as much as we could remotely, which, for anyone who does at training, it's, you know, it's not very easy to do it remotely, depending on the client. And so we wanted a way to continue kind of keeping ourselves busy and connecting with people. So then we started our live show. So we've been doing that for almost four years now. And then, you know, just as time has gone on, it's sort of evolved. We received a two year grant. So we were able to bring on a full time, part time editor. So that helped our produced videos. And then we did some podcasts. And so there's a lot going on.

R Ryan Fleury 09:42

So are you guys also Assistive Technology dealers. Where are you getting all your technology from?

L Luke Scriven 09:42

Just to be clear, though, our day job is still train. So that's what we're actually doing most of the time. The rest of the content is kind of, you know, is a bit more of a side gig. So one that we

time. The rest of the content is kind of, you know, is a bit more of a side gig. So one that we very much enjoy.

C Cory Ballard 10:06

Yeah, so we can, yes. And yes. We do have a retail store. So I guess maybe to take a step back. Vision Forward is a nonprofit here in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, we've been here for over 100 years. And we started out as a boarding home. And then as the needs in time evolved, we turned into a vision rehabilitation center. And so part of the program, one of the programs that we have here is a retail store. So we do sell a number of different at devices. And one of the things that we always try to do is we just carry all brands. So a lot of times people can connect with the local dealers, but you know, they're usually only then seeing whatever that dealer kind of provides. So we're a place where they can come and see all the different brands and there's really not a lot of sales pressure going on. So that's one part of it. The other part then is, we had built a what we call our tech or Technology and Education Center. And we opened that maybe eight or nine years ago. And when we opened it, I really pushed it ensured that we were going to continue to fund new technology because there's really nothing worse than building a state of the art technology center and then not having money, and year 2, 3, 4 and so on to buy any new technology gets old really fast. So every year, we get some really good funding and grants to buy - I don't want to say anything and everything we want - but it's not too often where we don't have funds to get something. So like, you know, wearables or obviously wearable magnifiers are obviously a big, big category right now. And we have, I don't know if we can say we have all of them, but we have good six or seven, at least of those. So, yeah, so those are the ways that we typically get our hands on the technology.

L Luke Scriven 12:06

Every time somebody says Assistive Technology dealer, just like, give me like a back alley like dealings, you know?

C Cory Ballard 12:13

Like it fell off the back of a truck.

L Luke Scriven 12:16

Somebody with a trench coat, and they open it and they have some CCTVs hanging there.

C Cory Ballard 12:21

If you ever see the movie, Child's Play. Oh, yeah. You know, isn't that how they get Chucky is through a back alley?

L Luke Scriven 12:28

Well, it's all tricky. So he starts off and he's like an actual guy, he's a criminal, he's running well, he goes into a toy store and then he gets killed. And then his soul goes into the -

C

Cory Ballard 12:37

Alright, this getting a little weird. The AT that we bought, it's not from a back alley and not from a serial killer.

R

Rob Mineault 12:53

Make sure to include that on all the marketing materials.

C

Cory Ballard 13:00

The refund policy, it gets a little rough.

R

Rob Mineault 13:08

Well, so yeah. And you know, it's interesting that Assistive Technology is such a, it can be a really hard thing to market. What we always used to find is that nobody really knows anything about Assistive Technology until the day they actually need to use it. You know, for the mainstream public. I mean, they don't you have no clue what's out there. So it makes it hard, especially in a rehab situation where you have somebody who's maybe just recently lost their vision, they don't even know what's available to them. And that's why I really find the content, like you guys are creating is really valuable, because it's getting the word out there that these devices are out there. I mean, for some people, like they don't even realize that, you know, they can use a computer after say they lose their vision.

L

Luke Scriven 14:04

Yeah, I would definitely agree with that assessment. I mean, some of the stuff that we've done is more cross purpose. So like, we have tried to make some videos that would appeal to a general user, as well as somebody with a vision impairment. But a lot of the stuff like you say you wouldn't necessarily find unless you actually need it. And I think that is a big challenge. Because in a place as big as North America, there's a lot of people who aren't going to have access to a facility, like we have here in Milwaukee and stuff. And so like that whole educational piece is just is just so important.

C

Cory Ballard 14:42

And even if they do have access to it, a lot of times people don't want to admit that they need it and make that first steps. Sometimes I do presentations, where I'll say "who here has vision loss?" and no one raises their hand and then you say who can't read the newspaper and

everyone puts up their hand. There's something about vision loss people just don't want talk about. So YouTube is a great place to do you know, the search for those kinds of products. And I also think what's really helped to is the inclusion of accessibility and mainstream products. Now, with Apple and Microsoft and Amazon and Samsung, and everybody, it's much easier to accept accessibility, especially because you're buying and a lot of times you're buying the official product.

L

Luke Scriven 15:35

I will say that with the with YouTube, it is a bit of a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, anybody who has access to the internet, and who can get onto YouTube, can find out all of you know about all of these wonderful things, but then it's very easy, I think, especially if you're somebody who was recently experiencing vision loss, it's very easy to look at some of these things and think they can do something that they actually can't. That's especially the case, I think, with wearables. It's like the magic glasses syndrome, you know, somebody looks at, you know, an ESight promotional video, and then all they think that it's gonna, be a magic cure.

R

Rob Mineault 16:17

Yes, that you're gonna be doing archery and driving your car to the grocery store.

L

Luke Scriven 16:25

And, you know, maybe some people might be able to do that. But the reality is that for a lot of people, they might get some improvement in visual acuity, but there's going to be compromises and there's going to be things that it's not good for, and so on and so forth.

R

Rob Mineault 16:40

Do you guys find that that's kind of the tricky part too, because especially when when vision is involved in there's so many gradients? One device might work for, for one person. And that same device with somebody who has the same condition, but whose vision is a little bit either farther down the road or not as far down the road, it might not work as well. And so it really, a lot of these devices, they really need to sit down in front of them, and try them out before they're, they really know whether it's going to work for them

C

Cory Ballard 17:12

in a place that they feel comfortable, they don't feel pressured, they can take their time. And that's kind of what we do as a nonprofit is that we are not pressuring, we're not pushing one brand. And you're right. I mean, I think one of the things that always jumps out to me, that is, you know, when when iPhone became accessible, I can't count how many times and I still get it even now 10 years later, 13 years later, however, it's long, it's been where you get the people who person who calls and says, well, I have a friend or family member who is visually impaired,

and they said, get an iPhone, because it's the best thing. And it's just I mean, it's not the best thing for everybody. So many people struggle with the gestures. So it's that just assuming that the device works for one person, it's going to work for everybody.

L Luke Scriven 18:00

And that's not even related specifically to vision. I mean, there's so many different factors that can affect somebody's acceptance of a device, you know? Like, what is their general skill with technology? What is their attitude towards learning new things that might be difficult? What other what other comorbidities might there be?

C Cory Ballard 18:18

Yeah and what access do they have to training? Yeah, because I mean, technology gets abandoned, because their recommendations are made and then no one teaches them how to use it.

R Rob Mineault 18:29

Just talking in general, in terms of assistive technology trends that you guys are seeing right now, what is sort of the hot item or hot product group right now?

L Luke Scriven 18:42

Well, that's a wonderful question. I mean, as far as I can see, it is still wearables. But like, I don't know, there just doesn't seem to be that much exciting stuff going on in the space. The only exciting thing, and maybe it's just me, maybe I'm just jaded, because I've been working in the field for too long. But the only thing that's really exciting to me recently has been the integration of, you know, Chat-GPT into some devices, because that does seem to really be a pretty powerful tool. But, you know, I don't know, just the wearable market seems to be the most. That's the most room for improvement there.

C Cory Ballard 19:19

I think it's the newest market still. So it's fresh. There's, you know, I think when you look at like mobile technology phones, I think we've sort of plateaued, right? I mean, it's the same thing every I loved I can remember staying up late to order the iPhone at midnight, and when taking off a work to watch the announcement. And now, I'll be like a week later, and I like oh, I didn't even realize the new iPhone is out. I'll still stay on top of it because we need to, but it just I feel like the technology has sort of plateaued.

L Luke Scriven 19:56

And the same with CCTVs as well I think. On the Braille side, though, there is also the multi-lane

Braille displays, the Graphing displays, and the ones that can do graphing and also display text as well. So I mean, that's probably pretty exciting to, to Braille users.

C

Cory Ballard 19:59

And screen readers. So I think wearable electronic magnification, just we're not even, it's just a wearable in general. So that could either be electronic magnification, or it could be something like the Envision glasses where it's doing more of not really magnification, but it's doing other the OCR or Chat-GP AI type stuff. I think that's to me, where there's the most of ability for stuff for new stuff to come out. I agree, but I tend to, I wonder, and I don't know if we are just if we are just an outlier, but I, you know, our adults coming in with for technology training, it's very, it's very rare that they are getting connected with a Braille display.

L

Luke Scriven 21:08

That's true. But I mean, this is a thing like call you and I both both work in the Adult education sector. And a lot of the stuff that you see is actually in the kind of school sector. So like, we did a course recently on Cortical Vision impairment, and everybody there except for us was school age side of things. And, you know, I think they're very different markets in terms of what you're thinking about with the technology. So there is definitely bias on our side toward, you know, what's going to be helping our, our clients who, a lot of the time, they're not really doing anything Braille wise.

R

Rob Mineault 21:49

And is that just because from a rehabilitation standpoint, for somebody who's lost their vision later in life, there's they just don't want to learn braille, or it's not really realistic for them to learn braille?

C

Cory Ballard 22:02

I think it's a combination of that, like, I'm a firm believer, I mean, we have a Braille instructor on staff, and we absolutely, as part of our full assessment, do a Braille assessment. But you know, I think what, where we typically see the most Braille being taught is what we kind of call like Life Skills Braille, right? Where you can read the elevator, men's women's, that kind of stuff versus, you know, typically somebody who's lost their vision, in their 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, aren't really going to be sitting down and reading a novel in Braille. It's just not really feasible. That's not something they're really interested in. There's other alternatives for them to to consume that information now. You know, as we were talking about the younger kids, that's where absolutely no question that Braille is so important, especially for the young ones just coming into school. There's really no better way to learn sentence structure and grammar and spelling and all that than Braille.

L

Luke Scriven 23:10

So I think the motivation that that particular aspect is really important because when you're

So I think the motivation and that particular aspect is really important, because when you're teaching adults, they have to have the motivation and the motivation that they have is, is this going to be useful to me?

C Cory Ballard 23:21

They can say no and not feel bad.

L Luke Scriven 23:23

With kids, it has to do what they're told. But with an adult, like they need to know like, what is this? How's it going to benefit me? And how hard is it going to be to learn and then they can weigh up those different bits of information.

C Cory Ballard 23:38

For me, I lost my vision, it started in seventh grade and by the end of eighth grade is really when it was kind of gone. And so starting freshman year and ninth grade for me, I didn't want to really learn Braille but my instructor at the time brailled up a deck of cards and and I learned how to play poker with M&Ms. And like that was an for me that was a motivator to get me into starting to learn braille. Really for any of the stuff that we teach, if the student isn't motivated, it's sort of it's almost somewhat of a waste of time because it's there's just no there's gonna be no follow through. They're not really retaining anything.

L Luke Scriven 24:23

Is gambling normally on the core curriculum in the States?

R Rob Mineault 24:29

Yeah, you need to afford to buy that braille display somehow. But actually, let's let's talk a little bit about that because I feel like one of the things that would be a really great leap forward technology-wise would be for them to really figure out a way to bring the price point of some of these refreshable electronic braille displays and Braille devices down. I mean, 3500 bucks and up, I mean, that's probably a cheap one. That's a chunk of change for a lot of people. How are we doing there? Are we seeing any sort of any sort of leaps in technology on how to build these things a little bit cheaper? I mean, I think we saw, you know, Orbit Research come out with their - something 40? What was their big device?

R Ryan Fleury 25:28

They had the Orbit 40. That was the reader. And then there was the Orbit 20 Plus.



C Cory Ballard 25:36

They were using what I believe was a different pin technology that allowed them to bring their 40 down and sell it for under 1000, right? 599 or 699, or something like that. But my understanding, I never got hands on with it, but my understanding is that it was very, very, loud. And most people didn't like it.

L Luke Scriven 25:58

Yeah, really unreliable. It seemed to be like everyone was trying to send them back for repair.

C Cory Ballard 26:05

I think that was part of it. But what I will say, though, is that we I think part of that. One of the the positive outcomes of that, though, is that we saw companies like Humanware and Freedom Scientific, Vispero, bringing the cost of their traditional Braille displays down because of it. So I mean, I think now you can pick up a 40 cell Focus 40, for what \$3295, if I remember correctly? Which that used to be, you know, \$5500. So we really saw a drop there. But I think a lot of people, a lot of companies are focusing more now on these on these multi line displays and the graphical display. So what we saw Monarch through - that through APH and Humanware. And then orbit had their big one, too - Graffiti. So I don't know if that's sort of where - and I've got to assume that they've got to be working on cheaper technology in order to be able to get some of those multi line -

L Luke Scriven 27:24

Well the Monarch is I think is like 15 or 20 Grand I think.

C Cory Ballard 27:29

And that's the problem. It becomes a whole big argument, right? The supply and demand and who's paying for it? Voc Rehab is in schools, if people are paying, why would you bring the cost down to a small market? I don't know.

L Luke Scriven 27:49

It's a very, it's a very difficult situation. When it comes to the money side of things. It's, it's a real tricky one.

R Ryan Fleury 27:57

Yeah. But there's also discussion happening - in the US anyway, probably even here in Canada too - where Braille instruction is dropping year over year over year. So you know, how much incentive is going to be for manufacturers to innovate when those Braille users are dropping?

C Cory Ballard 28:15

That's a very fair question. Yeah. And that's kind of scary to think. You know, I, I had vision throughout most of my grade school. So by the time I lost my vision, I was able to transition to audio only, and it worked for me. But I can't imagine, you know, I've got two kids, and I can't imagine them learning to read only by audio. I just I just don't understand how that's possible.

L Luke Scriven 28:47

I mean, so with Braille literacy, I mean, the idea of Braille is because you are able to see how words are spelled and, you know, grammar and things like that. I mean, you can do that with touchscreen devices. You can use an iPhone, and, you know, you can navigate character by character, you can use a computer, you know what I mean?

C Cory Ballard 29:06

But you won't, though, if you're reading, if you're reading a book, you're not going to stop every word and see how it's spelled.

L Luke Scriven 29:14

But if you do in school, though, then the teacher is making you do it. You know what I'm saying?

C Cory Ballard 29:19

Yeah, I just can't see how efficient and then making sure your punctuation is turned to all so that you're not, you know, that's part of the issue too. And most people turn their punctuation to some or none. And so you don't even see where commas are. But I would I would be pretty disappointed and sad if if Braille instruction came to a stop. I could see it decreasing year over year for adults, but man, I'd really be scared to think of our future.

L Luke Scriven 29:52

I mean, think about this, this this might sound dystopian, but I mean, is anybody actually going to be typing anything in the future? I mean, number one, like voice recognition, So yeah, dictation is getting better and better. So number one, like, you know, didn't need to know how to spell if you can just dictate something. And number two Chat-GPT can just write everything you need anyway.

C Cory Ballard 30:01

Put braille right into their head? So here we go. Here's a question then can use. Okay, this is

this is gonna sound weird, but can you properly speak then? If you've never learned how to read and learn grammar?

L Luke Scriven 30:35

Yes, because people had spoken language before written language.

R Ryan Fleury 30:39

Have you not seen these kids on Facebook and seen their lack of punctuation and grammar? And like everything is short form now. It's all emojis.

L Luke Scriven 30:56

Yeah. But on the other hand, though, I mean, language is very flexible. It's always changing. And obviously, you get used to things being done a certain way. But if they're done a different way, it doesn't mean it's wrong or bad. You know?

C Cory Ballard 31:06

We're turning into at old timers.

R Rob Mineault 31:08

You can rename the podcast AT Boomers. Let's switch gears a little bit and talk a little bit about AI. Because, I've been having mixed feelings about it for a while now. I think that there's a lot to be excited about, especially in the AT realm. You know, I think it mainstream wise, I fear for our civilization. But in terms of AT, I think, this is great. I mean, I think that we're really on the edge of really seeing some really amazing changes because of it. But give me your thoughts on on AI and what you're sort of seeing seep into some of the product lines and, and how it's used.

C Cory Ballard 32:10

Where I don't like AI is the like, write a paragraph for me. I think is a bad use of AI. What I like about AI is when we can start to have environments and situations evaluated so that you can walk into a room, AI can immediately have access to your camera, see where chairs are, telling you how far away the chair is in relation to where you are, and not only can tell you where the chair is, but if there's someone sitting in it or not. And that's part of like, right now, we can use AI to take a picture of a room, and it'll tell you, you know if there's a chair or a table, but it doesn't tell you if there's somebody sitting in the chair, and again, for me, that's the information that I want. I want useful information. And so for me, that's where AI is interesting, or the ability to maybe replace AIRA or Be My Eyes with an AI where you can say what color is this and it's smart enough to hear what you said, see the camera, see that you're pointing at

something and put two and two together and know that you're asking the color of the item in the camera. To me, that's another really cool future of AI. I don't want to put in there, write me a paragraph about World War Two in the style of a vampire.

L Luke Scriven 33:58

Yeah, I've seen the AI being integrated into the Envision AI classes and we just did a video on the OrCam Read 3.0. And that one is using Chat-GPT on the back end as well to do stuff like, summarize a page of text that it's taken a picture of. And I think I think that stuff is really neat. I, I can imagine a CCTV where you have a button and you press the button, and you ask a question with your voice about the text that is under the CCTV, and it's able to, you know, tell you answer questions and stuff. I think that would be fantastic. You know, tell me the phone numbers on this page. Tell me what this page is about. And tell me something about this guy who was in this page of text, you know, all of that type of stuff would be great from an educational standpoint, but also just a general user standpoint, I think.

C Cory Ballard 34:51

That's what we lose as some as somebody who's visually impaired. What I miss the most is being able to just take a piece of paper and visually scan and summarize it really quickly, or just scan down to the bottom and get the total or whatever it is. With OCR, you have to take a picture, you got to pretty much go through the whole thing. So you're absolutely right. Like, that was what's so cool about the OrCams, both its summary capability and its smart reading capability to be able to have that summarize or say, read me the dollar amount, and then it just so it reads it out loud to you. So you're basically being able to do that visually scanning again without being able to visually scan.

L Luke Scriven 35:34

Yeah, that's actually happening offline, right on the device. But the summarizing that is, the better be connected to the internet, using Chat-GPT. But I think there's a lot of possibilities there that have not been even thought of yet that could be super helpful.

C Cory Ballard 35:49

Yeah, I think it's a cool, I think there's, you know, I think with, with Apple's Vision Pro, you know, what it what it's going to be doing with its AI processing, again, being able to just process what the camera sees and feed that back to is going to be amazing.

R Rob Mineault 35:49

Yeah. Yeah, the Vision Pro, it's really interesting, you know, I thought when it when I first watched the video about that - and just for anybody in the audience that doesn't know it's Apple's VR headset. And they released a developer video about, you know, what it can do, and it's a very, they're very core features. There's really not much there for in terms of apps and

stuff that the general public would be all that interested in. There's no games, it's really just for developers. But ironically, I thought as a mainstream device, the video really kind of falls flat, because I think somebody who's just interested in a VR headset that wants to play games, or do a bunch of stuff at home, they're gonna look at that and go well, this is a \$3,500 VR headset, that's, that's a way out of my budget. And I'm not going to pay that for something that essentially I can, you know, check my email in virtual reality space. But for a piece of AT, I thought, this is this is an incredible device, just based on even just the eye tracking system alone. And 3500 bucks for an AT device is actually a pretty good deal.

L

Luke Scriven 37:29

Oh, yeah. Well, I think you're missing something here, because in the developer video, they did have a game where they were making clouds smile. They were making sad clouds happy. I think that's a selling point to anyone. Yeah, we did a video on the on the headset, just because we had the same thoughts in terms of potential for for low vision users was my thought, you know, Apple has the purchasing clout to make a headset for 3500. It's a lot better specs wise than any of the low vision wearables that you would get. And so the question then becomes, are they gonna integrate any low vision wearable features into it? And you know, iPhones have the magnifier app, right, which is basically what you would need on a low vision wearable, to turn it into a Low Vision wearable. So is that going to be integrated? And if so, how will it work? I think that's gonna be interesting.

C

Cory Ballard 38:29

We won't know and nobody will know, but it's coming with VoiceOver, it's coming with magnification. They're calling it - what are they calling it - VisionOS, but it's again, it's basically iOS. But I would be shocked if they don't do that, and allow individuals to basically replace a lot of the wearable electronic magnifiers that are out there and do so much more than what those do. Having the youth, having YouTube, having all that stuff tied right in and I can only assume the optics would be a lot better.

L

Luke Scriven 39:06

It's gonna be dangerous though. Okay, so you're looking at this Vision Pro for 3500 bucks. And then you look at the IrisVision for 3000. So as a consumer, you're like, well, obviously, I'm gonna go for the Vision Pro because it is a lot sleeker. It's made by Apple, it can do all of this other stuff. So then everybody starts buying the Vision Pro, and then, you know, down the line, Apple's like, hey, you know what, we're not gonna actually we're not going to do this anymore. We're not going to make any more Vision Pros. And now, all of the other wearable companies in the low vision market have gone out of business. So like what's left, you know? So that mean there is danger when you have a monopoly like that, if it comes to pass.

C

Cory Ballard 39:45

There's a whole term and I can't think of it now it's gonna drive me nuts. But there's a whole term when other companies develop something or an app and then Apple releases the exact same thing. And then it's just pretty much instantaneous. But yeah, I forget there's a term for it

same thing. And then it's just pretty much instantaneous. But yeah, I forget there's a term for it now that when that happens, but I think the Vision Pro, I think I think it'd be, you know, not only just from a Low Vision but from a Blindness perspective to again, coming back to the AIRA to the Be My Eyes, having hands free again, could be really cool. Depending on what the AI kind of develops into. You know, the iPhone does a pretty good job with LIDAR. Seeing AI tied in with the LIDAR, well, how does that look like on the Vision Pro? Can we start to come into a room and get real information to deal with versus just "chair"?

R

Ryan Fleury 40:47

I think you're right. Like, you talked about the Irisvision, the OrCam Read, you all these different third party companies out there developing products, it would be pretty easy for them to convert those apps to run on the Vision Pro, but I think one of the things we're missing is, what's the battery life gonna be like as Vision Pro? What's the heat gonna be like? How long can you wear one of these devices?

L

Luke Scriven 41:10

You know, it's really good with the low vision wearables at the moment.

C

Cory Ballard 41:19

According to Apple, you can use it all day plugged in. Yeah. Like, most devices can't be used all day plugged in.

L

Luke Scriven 41:30

You can use this braided cable cable, you can plug it in all day.

C

Cory Ballard 41:35

I will say and again, none of us know this. But I bet you from a heat perspective, it's going to be pretty good. Apple's usually pretty good about comfort and heat. You know, we tested and did some video on the ArcVision and we liked it. But man by maybe 30 minutes in like, I literally felt like the side of my head was on fire. Now hopefully that was that was maybe six months ago when we did it. Yeah.

R

Ryan Fleury 42:08

I think that, you know, we need to watch for is the timing of a mainstream release. Google Glasses, you know, came out and didn't really get adopted by anybody anywhere, maybe in manufacturing for a short time, but you never hear about it anymore.



L Luke Scriven 42:36

And that's very true. I find I think the VR market is so weird, because it's been around for like 10 years now. I mean, in its current form, and it hasn't really caught on that much even in the gaming community, which you would have thought would be the natural adopters. It just really hasn't caught on that much. And it's because you're wearing this big thing. And now you're actually from everybody.

C Cory Ballard 42:57

And it's gotta be the AARP. So the augmentative augmented reality. Yeah, that's where I think maybe why this this might take it. Not just a straight VR, I mean, they're not even calling it VR. They're calling it Spatial Computing, because they don't even they don't even want to be associated with VR. But being able to do both VR and AR, I think could. And let's be honest, Apple, if anybody, Apple's got the clout. I mean, we all say who's going to spend \$3,500, but I guarantee there's going to be a line around the building, and it's going to be impossible to get them day one. I mean, we saw that when the iPhone jumped to \$1,000. That did not stop people from buying them.

L Luke Scriven 43:47

Let's face it, Apple has solved all the problems that VR has, because they are projecting your eyes on the outside of the headset.

C Cory Ballard 43:58

I mean, it's all metal and glass, wait until the Vision Mini or whatever - who knows what naming scheme when it comes out - that's, you know, \$1599

L Luke Scriven 44:08

Yeah, that's true.

R Rob Mineault 44:10

Yeah, well, I think that that's, that's really what they have to get to. I mean, because you're absolutely right, the VR market is very fickle, and, you know, it's really, really struggled over the past 10 years. And I think that's again, I think it's partly because of the price point, but it's also partly just, there's a novelty factor there. You know, I know several people that you know, ran out and got, Oculus Quests and loved them for like two months, and then they're just like, Yeah, I'm selling mine on on marketplace.

C Cory Ballard 44:40

Like my son, he's 12 he bought one and he doesn't use it anymore. You know, I think he doesn't

and why I think people haven't really adopted it is because the general population playing video games, they are doing it because they don't want to be super mobile and moving around and jumping. They literally want to sit down and hit controllers because they're relaxing, right? Like my son, I watched him play it for 30 minutes, 25 minutes and he's exhausted, he's got to jump around. You know what I mean? And I think like people don't, they don't want to do that, they want to sit. If they want to work out, they're gonna go to the gym. So I don't know, maybe I'm wondering if that's from the gaming sphere, if that's why we haven't seen big adoption.

R

Rob Mineault 45:39

I'm sure. But it's, but it's also part of having something strapped to your head like that. We're just we're not at a place where the technology is going to be lightweight enough and not intrusive enough to really make it comfortable to wear something for more than an hour, maybe two hours if it's really comfortable. But outside of that, like, you know, they talk about the spatial computing. And you know, in the video, they're showing somebody at a workstation wearing the Vision Pro, and they're doing all their work, you know, checking their email and doing all this stuff. And I'm just like, God, that that would be hell having to go to work and wear one of these goddamn things for like, eight hours. I couldn't imagine that. So and even like, the stuff like, oh, you can watch, you can watch a movie with somebody. And, you know, the screen is huge. And I'm like, really? You're gonna invite somebody over with their headset, and both be wearing them?

C

Cory Ballard 46:32

Especially because they're all watching movies on their phones anyways, they don't care about a big screen

L

Luke Scriven 46:39

They have 70, 75 inch TVs at home already.

C

Cory Ballard 46:47

We have a huge TV, we've got 100 inch cinema down in the basement, and they literally just sit on the phone and watch. Like, they just don't care. You know, I would say when the iPod video came out, Steve Jobs, famously said, nobody's gonna want to watch video on these things on the small screen. And he was 100% wrong. People don't seem to mind, you know?

R

Rob Mineault 47:08

That's right. What scares me about all of this is the fact that I think is the mainstream reception to this is kind of what's going to dictate whether or not as this is successful or not. I just don't know if the mainstream public is ready for something like a VR platform yet. I think we're just not there yet.

- C** Cory Ballard 47:28
Well, we will be buying a Vision Pro as soon as they release, we have funds already. so everyone can watch the Tech Connect YouTube channel and we will absolutely have a video on it from an accessibility standpoint. Perfect. We can bring you guys back on the show.
- L** Luke Scriven 47:47
And we you can both be wearing one.
- C** Cory Ballard 47:52
You can have it on a big screen.
- R** Rob Mineault 47:55
Spatial computing, spatial podcasting. Hey, you never know. Well, so let's talk a little bit about anything new that's come down the line, say in the past couple years that you guys have really found has been really innovative or surprised you guys.
- L** Luke Scriven 48:18
Oh, that's a hard question.
- C** Cory Ballard 48:21
Don't be jaded.
- L** Luke Scriven 48:22
Yeah, I just come back to the innovation side. I mean, just feels very, like the last, the last innovative thing that I thought to myself, this is very innovative, was like the IrisVision. I got it when it was when it hadn't even released. Somehow I got connected with IrisVision. And we, this is when I was still at the Chicago Lighthouse. And they came and demoed and I was like, okay, this is big, like this is really gonna do well. And it has it's been fantastic.
- C** Cory Ballard 48:57
In my opinion, I think Luke would tend to agree, the OCR engine that the OrCam uses is really second to none. I mean, it is probably the fastest and most accurate OCR that I've seen. Even putting it against, you know, old school Kurzweil with a flatbed scanner, which we did a video

on the Reading Edge. Somebody donated a super old Reading Edge to us. And we did a whole video on the Kurzweil Reading Edge versus OrCam as sort of as a joke. And one of the categories is, which was a better doorstep? Yeah, so I would agree OrCam I think for me. And I suppose this is some of the personal bias but Smart Home for me is super interesting. I have rolled out a bunch of Smart Home stuff in my house and I'm always trying to see ways to make get easier for my family. One of those things that that keeps happening, you know that I can fix my kids leaving their lights on all the time or leaving the lights on in the living room or whatever, how can I use smart home technology to, to fix that. And then from an accessibility standpoint, though to be able to if somebody doesn't have any usable vision, being able to quickly tell if lights are on or off, or use some scheduling so that lights can come on. From a safety perspective, if you want to ensure that people know that your home, garage door, doorbell, all those kinds of things. So for me, I think smart home is really an area that's grown a lot, but there's still a lot of potential there. And again, I think there's some really cool potential for individuals with vision loss.

L

Luke Scriven 50:53

I got a couple of other things as well. Improvements in dictation. And we talked about it before, but when I first started, I was running support for a program called See Desk, which was kind of similar idea to Dolphin guide - it was a simplified computer interface for doing the the main stuff that you'd want to do on a computer. And one of its features was speech recognition, it was utilizing the windows speech recognition service. And at the time, that was, that would have been Windows 7 at the time, that was pretty much a total nightmare. I mean, you had to try and train and this was it wasn't accessible to do this as well, you had to train the system to create a voice profile. And then you had to keep on talking to it, the more you talked the larger the profile became, the more accurate it became. But most of the time it was just a nightmare. Now, I mean, that stuff is so much so much smoother than we looked at.

C

Cory Ballard 51:54

We did a video on some of the speech recognition stuff, control, and dictation built in Windows 11. And that stuff is just so much better now that they're utilizing the internet and building up, you know, big profiles on the servers. And I think that's really cool. Now the problem is people still can't use it properly. So even though the technology is so much better now, like people just can't use it. I mean, I think still people assume they can just sit down and be like, I want to send an email to Jim Hey, how you doing? Send it. Like, there are still steps you have to follow. But I bet if you look back at what speech recognition on Windows y was compared to 11, compared to Siri, you know, we are starting to get closer and closer and closer to natural language. And I bet you if you start to incorporate AI into those, I bet you at some point, it will be sort of like you saw what you see in the future, you know, where you're talking your house or your computer, it is pretty just natural.

L

Luke Scriven 53:01

Language back natural language processing is already getting good. So I mean, we're like taking steps more and more steps toward toward that future.

R Ryan Fleury 53:11

When you talked about the Smart Home, you know, I think that's a realm of products that a lot of companies don't even think about relating to AT. You know, I'm totally by myself and like, most people are a lot of people, I have Amazon Echoes throughout my house to turn lights on and off, set timers to do all sorts of stuff. And I I don't think, while maybe Seeing AI would tell me, but there's not a lot of other products out there that I can use to tell me if the if I left the lights on. So I think that's an area that I think we need to focus more on. The downside to is you know that it's totally reliant on your internet connection and the product itself.

C Cory Ballard 53:57

The setup process can be tough, but it's cool. One of the things that I like to do, I have all my outdoor lights are all Smart, and they're all different colors. Well, they're all normal bulbs, but I can change colors and one of the ways I use it a lot which I always think is kind of makes my life easier is when I take an Uber or Lyft home at night a lot of times the drivers are like which one's your house? It's like I have no idea. So I change the lights of my house blue outside. So then it's just simply saying I'm the house with the blue lights. So just little things like that, to me are those really cool ways where we can make mainstream technology assistive technology.

R Ryan Fleury 54:46

I sense another video coming.

R Rob Mineault 54:50

Well listen fellas, I know that we could sit and talk to you guys for hours about AT and geek out but and we really appreciate you coming on.

R Ryan Fleury 54:59

its great we had a chance to geek out again, because I miss talking about AT. I'm still in assistive technology selling and supporting products for blindness and low vision. And Rob, you know, worked with us as well. So we've been in the industry for over 20 years ourselves. So we're familiar with all that stuff that you guys review and talk about. So it's like you said, it's fun to get back to it.

L Luke Scriven 55:24

Always fun to talk about technology.

R Rob Mineault 55:27

Absolutely. Well, on that note, then tell the fine folks at home where they can find the YouTube Channel, tell us a little bit more about Vision Forward, where they can find that, and plug anything that you would like.

C

Cory Ballard 55:40

So we've got a few different things. First, we'll start with Vision Forward. If you're in the Wisconsin area, you can always find us at vision-forward.org. As I mentioned, we're a nonprofit, we serve all individuals at all stages of life of all stages of vision loss. So we work with birth to three, we have a daycare here on site. And then we move over to our adult side and do all the vision rehab services you would expect. To learn more about Vision Forward, our YouTube channel is youtube.com/VisionForwardTechConnect. That's where you're going to find a couple different things. First, you'll find our produced videos, we release two a month. And then those are usually when we try to keep them the 10 and 15 minute long. But Luke and I have never, we're not very good at that. The last one was 30 minutes. But it needed to be at least. So those are our produced videos. And then on the opposite weeks, we do our Tech Connect live show that we talked about that we started four years ago, then that is also streamed live on YouTube. And then obviously our archived episodes are up on our channel. That's where we spend a full hour well, not a full hour, usually 45 minutes or so talking about a specific piece of technology. Recently, we did one on screen reader with Microsoft Teams, we did one on the LVI magnet links. We've done one on the Vision Pro talking about all different kinds of smart home we did, went off to my house tour of smart homes, all the kinds of different ones there. And then we also have a two other things. We have a podcast, you can search for Vision Forward Tech Connect live in your podcast app of choice. And that's just the audio only version of those live sessions we do. We don't do podcasts of our produced videos because not everything translates perfectly over to audio. Although we try to when we create our videos, we really try to do a very good job making sure that no matter who's watching it, you know what's going on. But right now we're just podcasting those those 45 minute live sessions that we do. So you can ask your your voice assistant to play Vision Forward Tech Connect or search for it in any of your pod catch pod cast apps. And then last thing really quick is a online assistive technology resource that we launched a few months ago. This is at techconnect.vision-forward.org. You can create an account completely free you're going to have access to you'll see all of our Tech Connect live sessions. You can actually just watch them right from that page. If you want to see all of our older ones, you can also have access to all of our professional webinars - that's where Luke and I wear a shirt and tie and we act a little bit more professional. Those are a CVR EP credit eligible for on demand. And then if anyone struggles with YouTube a little bit and finding videos on our on our online resource, there's a link to search all of our video content. And all of our videos are listed. You can search you can look at categories so if you just type in iPhone, it'll go through and just show you any of our YouTube videos that are specific to the iPhone. That was a lot. Did you practice that? I do it at all the end of our videos. I think most people tune out by the end.

R

Rob Mineault 1:00:27

Guys, thanks again. Please, please come back anytime. We'd love to have you back and geek out some more about AT.

L Luke Scriven 1:00:36
That would be great. Thanks for a great time.

C Cory Ballard 1:00:39
Appreciate it, sounds great.

R Rob Mineault 1:00:40
Thanks, guys. Take it easy. Oh, there you go.

L Lis Malone 1:00:46
Oh, there you go. No, I was listening, I very politely muted my microphone, so I could just kind of soak it all in and not interrupt anybody. And there was just always a lot of information.

R Rob Mineault 1:00:58
I know, you put you put a bunch of guys that used to work in AT and are working in AT together and they just lose time just babbling.

L Lis Malone 1:01:07
Yeah, there was there were there were definitely some geeky moments. But you know, it's fine.

R Ryan Fleury 1:01:12
But it's true. It's you know, AT is such an important field, but it is it's such a it's very fickle. It's very fickle. It's it's tough to to get people educated in all the different options. All the lines are being blurred now to right, because there's mainstream tech that is at so, you know, does it even mean anything anymore?

R Rob Mineault 1:01:35
Well, you know what, in a perfect world, it wouldn't right? We shouldn't need it. Everything should just work accessibly, right out of the box. It's just it's these price points, right? It's so frustrating that, that there isn't necessarily a lot of innovation going on. Because really, that's what we need.

R Ryan Fleury 1:02:01
It's just things aren't working out and coming to fruition. So makes not seeing them. I guess. So

it's just things aren't working out and coming to fruition. So we're not seeing them, I guess. So. You know, like, some, you know, the Braille cell technology, we've we've had a couple of different manufacturers release different Braille technology, that has failed, right? But they are working on it. And that's why I think some of the manufacturers, even though they're trying things behind the scenes that tried and true, is still the tried and true. But well, but I mean, in their defense, so you know, when you're, when you're breaking out a new type of technology, the first generation is always going to be rocky. So we don't want to necessarily see those die off, we want to see them improve and figure out where they went wrong and generally improve. The goal is to, to, you know, be able to have, you know, electronic refreshable Braille devices that don't cost as much as a used car.

R

Rob Mineault 1:05:07

Okay, hey Lis.

L

Lis Malone 1:05:08

Hey Rob?

R

Rob Mineault 1:05:10

Where can people find us?

L

Lis Malone 1:05:12

They can find us www.atbanter.com

R

Rob Mineault 1:05:27

They can also drop us an email if they so desire at cowbell@atbanter.com Big thanks, of course, to Cory and Luke for joining us and we will see everybody next week.