

PODCAST Episode 432


📅 Sat, Jul 12, 2025 12:09PM ⌚ 1:01:51


SUMMARY KEYWORDS


Accessibility, assistive technology, EasySurf, speech recognition, Complex Regional Pain Syndrome, digital accessibility consulting, video game accessibility, WCAG, PDF remediation, AI technology, touch screens, wearables, Accessible BC Act, content management systems, inclusive design.

SPEAKERS


Speaker 1, Noah Senecal-Junkeer, Ryan Fleury, Steve Barclay, Rob Mineault


 Rob Mineault 00:16
Hey and welcome to another episode of AT Banter.











 Ryan Fleury 00:20
Banter, banter.

 Rob Mineault 00:22
hey, this is 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. Flawless himself, Ryan, Fleury.

 Ryan Fleury 00:39
The key to a successful Zoom meeting is turn on original audio.

 Rob Mineault 00:46
There you go, yeah. There's been a lot of learning today already and we just started the show.

 Ryan Fleury 00:54
That's right. Come to AT Banter to learn.

-  Rob Mineault 00:58
That's right. And hey, of course, our regular listeners might notice that it's just me and Ryan today. There's no Lis and no Steve. They're busy. They're doing stuff we don't know what, but they're they're not here, so it's just just me and Ryan together again. Actually, it's been a while.
-  Ryan Fleury 01:16
It has been a while.
-  Rob Mineault 01:18
Yeah, usually it's those 8am shows that we're the only ones that show up for.
-  Ryan Fleury 01:23
That's true. We have one next week.
-  Rob Mineault 01:25
What? Really? We do?
-  Ryan Fleury 01:29
Yep.
-  Rob Mineault 01:30
Oh, man, you bastard.
-  Ryan Fleury 01:31
Yeah. Well, you want to schedule?
-  Rob Mineault 01:33
We'll talk off mic about that. All right. Hi. How are you?
-  Ryan Fleury 01:40

I'm good. I'm getting, you know, used to the heat, and now I guess, I'm told it's supposed to start raining again.

R

Rob Mineault 01:48

It's weird summer so far. But I'm not complaining, because we don't any fires.

R

Ryan Fleury 01:52

We got lots of fires. What are you talking about?

R

Rob Mineault 01:57

See the key to this not watch the news. I did not know that. I'm staying away from everything. I'm just, it's news blackout. I don't care.

R

Ryan Fleury 02:12

GoodNewsNetwork.com, everybody.

R

Rob Mineault 02:14

That's right. All right. Well, enough of that. Oh, hey, one thing I meant to ask you, what are you excited? Because I know, I know it's Amazon - what is it? Amazon Prime Day, right?

R

Ryan Fleury 02:30

Today we are recording on July 8, which is the first day of Amazon Prime Days. And I have a dilemma.

R

Rob Mineault 02:36

Yeah, what's that?

R

Ryan Fleury 02:38

I don't know what to spend my money on.

R

Rob Mineault 02:40

Yeah, I see. Listeners may know, like Ryan's addicted to Amazon. It's actually a problem. We've

Yeah. I see. Listeners may know, like Ryan's addicted to Amazon. It's actually a problem. We've been trying to plan an in from intervention, but he has one of those Ring doorbells. So he always sees us coming, he doesn't answer the door. But no, he loves his Amazon. So I'm actually fairly shocked that you don't you haven't already piled up a bunch of purchases.

R Ryan Fleury 03:05

No, I've been looking on and off throughout the day, and I haven't really seen a lot of deals that haven't been priced where they're currently at earlier in the year. So I'm not seeing really anything Amazon Prime ish worth actually pulling the trigger on, really, not yet we'll see. Maybe Friday will be the day.

R Rob Mineault 03:26

Wait. How long does it last? It is Prime Day or Days?

R Ryan Fleury 03:34

Yeah, it's 8th to the 11th.

R Rob Mineault 03:36

So that was my mistake. Then, there you go. Well, like some Jeff Bezos just got married, so I know he's gonna need some extra dough. There's a 30 carat diamond ring she got or something, so that'll be a nice divorce settlement.

R Ryan Fleury 03:54

I'm sure there's a prenup.

R Rob Mineault 03:57

I suppose so. All right, well.

R Ryan Fleury 04:01

You learned something come to AT Banter. Learn all about marriage and divorce, and there you go.

R Rob Mineault 04:06

All right, enough of that we should get started with the show. Excited to get going. So Hey,

Ryan?

 Ryan Fleury 04:13


Yeah, Rob?

 Rob Mineault 04:14

What the heck are we doing today?

 Rob Mineault 04:17


Today we are speaking with someone we have never had on the show before, nor had we ever heard of before, to our surprise. So we are joined with Noah, who is the Co-founder and Team Lead over at EasySurf. Noah, welcome to AT Banter.

 Noah Senecal-Junkeer 04:35

Hi everyone. Thanks so much for having me. Yeah, really, really looking forward to the show and appreciate the invite.

 Ryan Fleury 04:42

And I was going to try to pronounce your last name, but I wasn't gonna go there. I tried and I tried.

 Noah Senecal-Junkeer 04:49

I was curious to see how you were gonna do it. I don't blame you for not trying. It's, it's a long one.

 Ryan Fleury 05:04

I appreciate that.

 Rob Mineault 05:05

Well, you, we are very excited to have you, but why don't we just to get started, maybe just give us a little bit of background about yourself, and then we'll, we'll dive in and start talking about EasySurf.

S

Speaker 1 05:16

Sure. Yeah, well, well, I mean, since we're on the AT Banter podcast, I'm also a full time user of AT. AT has had an enormous impact on my life. I use speech recognition software, and I've done so for about the last seven years. I typically, I actually typically gloss over this story, because I never really have the time to fully give it. But I have a condition called Complex Regional Pain Syndrome, which is pretty honestly self explanatory. It's pain that for myself, primarily affects my feet and my hands, and it was caused by a sports injury. It progressed over time and eventually really started affecting my hands to the point where I couldn't use my iPhone or laptop for more than, you know, a minute or two without developing quite a bit of pain in my hands. And I at that time, I was actually really not aware of accessibility and all the tools that were out there. So I sort of assumed that I was just not really going to be able to use my computer and my phone. I would be asking friends and family to help me do things like fill out forms and my banking and shop for things and browse and all that stuff, until eventually, I thought about, you know, I'm telling people to do this. Why can't I tell the computer to do this? And that's how I discovered speech recognition software. I was initially really hopeful, because I was like, oh, well, this is going to pretty much solve all of my problems. I'll be able to do everything with a voice. And it's only after, you know, using the software for some time that I realized, okay, it does help a lot, but it is really, really challenging to use this. The tool itself isn't great. The tools out there are good, I wouldn't I would want to disparage them, but they had a lot of room for improvement. And then also realizing that a lot of software and websites and applications are not really built to be used with speech recognition software and other types of at and over time, that is kind of what brought me to the accessibility world. So that's that's kind of my story of how I got into this. I was working in banking, and essentially was unable to really keep up with the demands of that job, doing everything with my voice. So I took a bit of time off, went back to school, improved my skills at using at and then, yeah, helped help start EasySurf.

R

Ryan Fleury 07:37

How are you are you currently using your smartphone? And how are you accessing that?

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 07:41

So actually, right now I'm on my laptop, but if I am on my iPhone, there's a accessibility option called Voice Control. And so that's the one that I'll primarily use for my phone. Well, that is the only one I use for my phone. If I'm doing something on a laptop, I have a few more choices. And really, I kind of go I use all of them. It really depends on what I'm trying to do. So if I'm on my MAC, I could be using Voice Control against the Apple's built in one. If I'm on Windows, Dragon is one that I will probably most often use, which is a paid speech recognition software. And there's also a built in one from Windows called Voice Access. And those are kind of each one has their their their positives and negatives, and that pretty much allows you to do anything you you want to do, as long as you are patient enough. That's really, that's really the limiter when it comes to speech, right?

R

Rob Mineault 08:47

Well I am curious as well because I remember you sort of playing around with with Dragon

Well, I'm curious as well, because I remember you sort of playing around with with Dragon Naturally Speaking, specifically years ago, and it was, it used to be pretty clunky. So I'm kind of curious as to where things are now, especially with with AI technology being so good. And have you noticed that that voice recognition software has really dramatically improved over, say, the past five years?

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 09:13

Unfortunately, it's improved a lot less than I would have expected. So Dragon went through a really long period where there was next to no updates to the software. It recently, well, not that recently, I think, like two or three years ago, it was acquired by Microsoft, and they did release, I think, version 16, which does have improvements. But it does not, I would say, learn from your past behavior as much as you think it was would, and it does not learn from context. Dragon is better than say, Voice Control. Like I always my partner and I actually work together, so I'll always point out the funny Voice Control mishaps. Like just the other day, I was trying to I was writing notes on a document. So I was taking notes about accessibility issues that were on each page. So I was like, page one. When I got to page two, I said it's a page two dash, and what it wrote was page like, the name page, P, A, I, G, E, and then T, O, O, and I was just like, you know, under in what scenario would I have said the name page, you know, after page one, would would page two be that? So it makes these really like mind boggling errors. So that has been a little disappointing. I will say, I think we are on the cusp of things improving. I know there is a lot of people are working on better tools, but I would say I'm often kind of disappointed at the lack of progress when it comes to speech recognition.

R

Ryan Fleury 10:57

Yeah, it seems like there really hasn't been a lot of innovation in that field. Like you said, you know, Dragon and Nuance previously, before Microsoft, have been around for a long, long time, and you know, there really hasn't been anybody else to step into that role. So you're kind of reliant on one company to meet everybody's demands, and that just hasn't happened.

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 11:26

Yeah, I think, you know, I think a lot of people who use Dragon just use the dictation feature. It is actually, I will say it is very good at dictation, and it does learn quite well. So if you are someone who has to type a lot of words out, you can actually dictate way faster than you could type. And I think that my guess, I don't, I don't have any data or anything, but my guess is that a lot of people using Dragon were just using it to be faster at typing. And so I think that they really like optimized around that. I don't think there's that many people who use Dragon The way I do, which is like to do everything, including clicking on programs, dragging sliders, all of that stuff. So it, I don't think a whole lot of attention was, was there was really more, like a dictation software, which it is good at. It's just not when you're trying to use it for everything.

R

Rob Mineault 12:13

Yeah, that's interesting. Well, you know, you know, we, we've been talking about AI a lot on the show, and I do think that, you know, AI could be the great equalizer, especially in in the AT

world, I think that there's, there's definitely a lot of potential there for at to really sort of smooth out some of the edges of of this assistive technology that's been around for many years and has been doing things a certain way and that and usually, which usually means it's, clunky as hell. So hopefully we do start to see some, some improvement in some of this at but, yeah, time will tell. I guess it just depends on whether AI, you know, kills us all first before it actually makes the world more accessible.

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 12:56

I agree. Like putting aside because I think AI is a complex topic, and I don't think I have anything that nuanced to say that hasn't already been said. So putting aside the obvious negatives, and for someone like myself, things take me so much longer to do than someone who's using a computer with their hands. And so for someone like me, it really does help, like if I'm able to do things faster and just give commands that are just everyday language like that is that is such an equalizer, and is something that would help me so much. So I'm always kind of conflicted, because I understand the negative parts, but it's also, you know, I also feel like I've been waiting so long for these tools to improve, and they never really do, and I have so much hope that AI specifically for speech recognition can make such difference. So I'm kind of conflicted, because I do feel that it is an equalizer, and it would allow me to participate on more of a level playing field, but understanding there are negatives, and yes, so I'm conflicted on that one. I'm actually, like, quite hopeful, personally, for my tools.

R

Ryan Fleury 14:02

Yeah, and it's interesting, because Rob is probably in the same boat as me, but I can sit on the couch and have a half hour to 45 minute conversation with ChatGPT or Co-pilot, just back and forth, back and forth, using my microphone. It's hearing me. I'm hearing him or her having this conversation. So if the technology is there that it understands every word that I am telling it, asking it, you know, it, how hard can it be for AI to step into that role and really incorporate, you know, more, better, stronger, efficient word prediction when you are dictating.

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 14:44

For sure. And I, you know, I've also thought that people who use other types of assistive tech, screen readers or magnification, I see a huge potential for those people to mix in speech recognition if it works better. I mean, if we could just talk to our computer, use it without all the fancy commands and just say, like, hey, can you open up my email and send an email to Ryan and put Rob on CC and the subject is this, and type out an email about this? And it just kind of all happens. I didn't have to, like, click a button by button by button. That's something that would help me. I also think that's something that could help someone using a screen reader. I think that the way the AT works now is those two technologies tend to clash, at least, that's what I've seen from people trying to use them together. But, yeah, I feel like there is just so much in the way of productivity to be gained by the tool just understanding what you're trying to do and doing those actions all as one in plain language. There's so much potential for that and and similar to the way that people today might choose to dictate versus typing, I do think just talking to your computer is a much, much faster than you know, to have even click on everything, even if you are using a mouse. So I see a lot of potential.

R

Ryan Fleury 16:01

Yeah, you know, we, I work for an assistive technology company, and for years, we've sold a product called J-Say from Hartgen Consultancy, which basically marries your screen reader, Jaws and Dragon Naturally Speaking together. So it's a set of scripts that bridge the two programs together so that somebody totally blind like myself, using a screen reader, can do exactly what you're saying. I can talk to my computer, ask it to click on this open that dictate this, compose the email, so on and so forth. The real downside to it, though, is you have to have the right version of JAWS with the right version of Dragon with the right version of J-Say, and then you got to spend hours training people. And it's, it's very involved, because, as you know, there are a lot of commands to do. What it is that you are able to do right now, and that's not including the J-Say commands or the JAWS commands, right? So you throw J-Say and jaws into the mix. Now you've got three programs, applications, commands you need to get comfortable with just to shut down your computer or open Outlook or browse the web, right? It gets very complex. So once we can get to a natural language which we're getting there, there are AI agents that are already allowing you to look at your screen, or they will look at your screen and they can action an item, they can action a button. So we're getting there. We're not far.

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 17:32

Yeah, no, totally. And I actually was not aware of that, and that's really interesting. And I'm happy to hear that people are actually using them together. I think, I mean, it's a bit off topic. One of the things I wish it would also be better at is understanding - when am I speaking to the computer, or when am I speaking to people that are just in the room? Because the amount of times that, you know, I'm trying to talk to someone, and then I realize, like, everything I'm saying is being typed out, or a bunch of things are being clicked on, and, you know, I mean, it's kind of risky, and sometimes I'm working on a document that, you know, I'm planning to send to someone, and I'm editing it, and I'm adding stuff and and then I don't realize it just in the middle of the document, in the middle of nowhere. It's something like, you know, what are we gonna have for dinner? Is just written there randomly. And then I'm always so nervous and trying to reread things, because it's so easy. So I've always thought like it should know. I mean, if what you are saying has no relation to what is in your document, it's probably not, not what you're actually trying to type. So that's like one that I'm really waiting for them to do better with.

R

Ryan Fleury 18:35

Well. And again, there are commands right there, stop listening or go to sleep. And I don't know if those were J-Say commands or if those were Dragon commands, but yeah, control of the microphone is like lesson one.

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 18:47

No, yeah, for sure. If you the problem I ran into is I forget to shut it off. I forget it's even on, like, I have it on and I'm doing other things, and then I'm not even aware that it's on, and I say something and then I didn't don't notice that it wrote something

something, and then I didn't, don't notice that it wrote something.

R

Ryan Fleury 18:59

Yeah, yeah, fun times.

R

Rob Mineault 19:07

Okay, well, let's, let's shift topics, and let's talk a little bit about EasySurf. So tell us a little bit about about what you guys do over there, and sort of how, how it all came about.

S

Speaker 1 19:20

Okay, so we're we're a Digital Accessibility Consulting company, and we work on websites, software, apps. We also work on video games, helping make them more accessible. And we do this through a couple of methods, primarily auditing and also testing with people with disabilities. I think what makes our team unique is nearly everyone on the team has a disability. Our audits are 100% completed by people with disabilities, including screen reader testing done by people who use screen readers. I think what we've tried to do is find a way to include people with disabilities as we test, as we uncover problems, and go a little bit beyond the standards, but in a cost effective way. And what we've found is that by conducting audits with people who actually use assistive technology, you kind of get a bit of a two for one, you get the standards, but you also get real feedback from people who actually encounter accessibility barriers. So that's a little bit on the website, software, app side of our business, which is a bit more audit focused, and on the video game side, this is more of the testing thing, so we will work with studios to have their games tested by people with different types of disabilities and just provide feedback about the barriers that people are encountering and help them design games that can be played by more people.

R

Rob Mineault 20:44

You know, it's interesting. You know, we've been, we've been sort of in this, in this space for quite a while, and I know that early on, we always really felt that one of the big hurdles with accessibility is just trying to explain to businesses and companies just what the hell accessibility is, what does it mean to for, you know, for your product, for your website, or whatever, to be accessible. So there was, there was always this big education component. Is that what you guys are finding, or do you find that it's gotten a lot better in the past, say, few years?

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 21:17

I would say there's improvements. I think, you know, I think a lot of what we do is about educating people on what accessibility is. And, you know, I think a lot of people still are like, if I say screen reader, don't actually, really know what that is, or that. I'm actually kind of, I'm often surprised, but I know I live in a bit of a bubble, but I think a lot of people are unaware of

how people with disabilities use websites. And I used to think that the reason why accessibility just isn't where we wish it was was an education thing. But the more work I do, and the more people I speak and the more projects I'm involved in, it is more than that. There's a lot. It's not just about awareness of the problem. There's also an understanding of what to do. And there's complication about getting everyone in an organization on the same page to actually make changes. And I think there's a lot of misconceptions like you say, about what accessibility is. I do think people picture, you know, a very, very boring website and a very boring product that's doesn't have a lot of flexibility to for like expression and creativity, which is just not the case. So I know I'm not exactly answering your question. I think that in BC, where, which is a lot of our work, is in BC. I do think the Accessible BC Act, has done a ton, I think much more often, we have customers who come to us sort of knowing what they want and need, understanding where their gaps are, and understanding what they need to help them. It's a little bit less of us, you know, really explaining things from scratch. So I would say things are moving. I feel like I will probably always be a little bit disappointed with the pace of things moving, but I'm, I'm, I'm pretty proud of BC and the things that are happening, albeit slowly. I think, I think things are improving.

R

Rob Mineault 23:16

Yeah, I would think that, you know, sort of the frustrating thing that comes to mind for me, is just that - and this is why the I think the education component is so important - it's so much easier to build in accessibility into that, into your development process, like when you're when you're whatever, you're developing your product, your app, your website, and thinking about accessibility there, rather than building the damn thing and then trying to figure out how you can bolt on some sort of accessibility solution. Do you sort of talk to a lot of companies about that, in that sense, to and, you know, stress the importance of of thinking about accessibility early?

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 24:00

That is what, that is what I always try to do. And I think that is really, really challenging to actually do in practice, I you know. And I think that is maybe where some regulation comes into, into into play very often, like when we get to actually work on something, it's, it's already built. And I will always throw in, by the way, this would have been a lot easier had we been involved sooner. But I think that it's, it's often, you know, people don't reach out to us when they're conceiving of building a website. They reach out to us when it's already built. And so it's really hard to actually explain to people and be able to speak to them in time for things to get done early. So I'm always trying to push that message out there. And it couldn't be more true. The difficulty is there are so many people in an organization who all need to be on the same page, and especially when we're talking about early development. I. Um, that I have only seen very mature companies who have gone through a few rounds of having to, as you say, bolt things on and under. And that's kind of the way that they understand, Oh, wow. This would have been a lot easier had we done it sooner. The next time they come around, development comes around like they're a little bit more aware to start doing it earlier. And I think the longer that goes on, the better it gets. But I think that that is the huge missed opportunity. And I think that, you know, a lot of people see accessibility as being expensive, and it is neither expensive nor cheap. It really depends on, you know, how you try to implement it, and if you are

implementing it at the end. It is probably not going to be cheap, but if you do it early, it's not expensive. But unfortunately, I see it very, very often that, you know, it's just not thought of, unfortunately, as of now during that development stage.

R

Rob Mineault 27:18

Yeah, you know. And we, it's funny. We've talked about this on the podcast quite a bit. And what we've kind of landed on is education in the sense of, you know, that that's why the notion of accessibility needs to be being taught at whatever, web developer school. You know, some of the engineers, you know, in terms of the build environment, for example, you know, architecture, that type of things. I don't know if accessibility just isn't, isn't being pushed enough on that level so that you get this, this sort of, this generation of coders and builders that understand the importance of accessibility and how to implement it from the ground up. Because a lot of businesses, you know that they're clueless.

R

Ryan Fleury 28:08

And I'm going to also say, you know, they teach coding in school, and so assistive technology could be a component of that coding program as well. But not to just throw mainstream companies under the bus we have at companies that aren't following best practices when it comes to accessibility as well. PowerPoint presentations that aren't accessible to those of us with screen readers like this is right across the board, right? There's definitely an opportunity for more education, whether that's from the ground up in K to 12 or services like yours.

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 28:45

Yeah, no, I would love to see that being taught in school. And I think you bring up a good point, which I think, you know, I'm kind of, I'm someone who was not at all involved in accessibility, and now I am. So I can kind of think back to the way I thought about this stuff, you know, prior to my self understanding. And I also think I do wish a lot of the bigger companies, and you're saying even, even the accessibility firms and the AT providers, I do wish they would lead a bit more by example, because I can see people being a bit confused if they see, you know, Microsoft or Apple or Google or Amazon doing something, and they do the same thing, and then they find out, you know, that's actually, that's actually an issue. And it's kind of like, well, what you know? Because I think people are often surprised, because you sort of think, you know, how could it be that, like, accessibility is so far behind in so many websites? But that kind of is the case, and I think that is why people don't really consider it during development, because they just sort of assume, if we make a website like the other ones that are already out there, there can't be a huge issue, and then we can kind of come in after and clean up whatever problems are there. I don't think there's an appreciation for, like, just how prevalent a lot of issues are.

R

Ryan Fleury 29:58

Well, it's difficult to fight. Because you have companies like in the past couple of years, Accessibee, who started overlays on everybody's websites, and that was their one plug in solution right for accessibility. [Click here](#) and are sites accessible and there was a huge outcry

solution, right for accessibility. Click here and are sites accessible, and there was a huge outcry from the disability community. Those of us are screen readers anyway, because it disabled our screen readers so it wasn't accessible in the first place. Right? Overlays are not the end all be, all for accessibility of websites anyway,

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 30:33

For sure. Now, like, I think that's another one that is really hard for us to fight back against, and fortunately, I have so many, you know, examples and like, little clips that I can use to actually just show people, because I think it's another one where I think a lot of those overlays, like, when you look at the customers that are using them, it's a little bit hard for us to say, you know, like, really, like all these big companies are using them, and you're and you're saying that it actually makes it worse for people with using screen reader, and it's like, it actually does like, so yeah, I think it's, it's, yeah, it's a bit of a battle of information out there. And I think I find it kind of surprising, yeah, just just how many issues are still out there. And I think because of that, they tend to persist. Because I think most people just just could not believe that things are so far behind.

R

Ryan Fleury 31:25

Well and Rob will always fall back on enforcement, right? Go, Rob.

R

Rob Mineault 31:32

Well, sure. I mean, that's why, you know, again, this is something that that our audience has heard from us ad nauseum. But you know, we're always talking about the fact that, you know, part of the part of the problem is that that is that a lot of these, this disability legislation, whether it be provincial or federal, just doesn't have a great enforcement mechanism. What are the consequences for somebody not bringing their website up to code in terms of accessibility wise, and that's, I think, that that's certainly part of the problem as well.

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 32:03

No, I'm, I completely agree. And I think, like, we really, we need regulation, we need enforcement. I think that that can be viewed as, like, a negative thing, you know, that that people are doing it out of fear, but, and the reality is, I think that, you know, I've often thought about trying to, I really try to understand, like, what is so challenging here. Like, if we are doing an audit of a website, and we provide you with a spreadsheet with all of the issues, like, what is so challenging to go and fix those things and any future website that's built, what's so challenging about just not making those same errors again? And I think about, actually, back when I was working in banking, and I was I was a kind of really junior level, and we would make a lot of presentations, and the style, like the colors and things that you use, was extremely important. There was really strict rules about, you know, color combinations and not saying that accessibility was part of that. This is more for marketing and brand consistency. And one day, they updated the style guide. And I just remember, like, we had a two hour meeting with marketing. They showed us, this is all the rules. Here's this big book. Read it. All of your presentations are now in the new style. And we just had to do it. And it wasn't like it wasn't

really debatable. And I think with regulation and stuff, I think it's just a way to get everyone on the same page, because otherwise, I think people are nobody really wants to be the person in an organization to slow things down, or or or kind of call out errors. But I think if it was just, if there was regulation, then I think people would feel more comfortable just saying, Hey, by the way, like we have to do this, and it would just be a lot easier to get everyone on the same page. And I think it's less about maybe fear of repercussion or punishment or fine, and more, just a common way for everyone to be on the same page about what we're doing and what the requirement is. Otherwise, it's a little bit. There's just so many possibilities. But if it was just these are the specific requirements and you have to do them, I think people would just do them, and it wouldn't be so complicated. I think sometimes it does seem like we spend so much time talking about improving things that if we just improved it, it would take like half the time that we spend kind of deliberating. So I think a regulation can just be that push to do it. And it's not so much about trying to punish companies or come after them. It's just about giving them clear guidelines on what to do and by when to do it, and then they can go and do it, and it's not really that onerous.

R

Ryan Fleury 34:25

So, and I want you to swap the word guidelines with requirements, because we have, we have WCAG, right? We have the ADA, we've got guidelines that some follow and some don't. But I think, like you mentioned, we need requirements, right? These are required. These are the standards. This is the minimum standard that you are required to meet.

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 34:47

No exactly, you know, I see, you know, I think about Apple, how they were recently forced to switch their their chargers to USB C, you know, like, I feel like the. Was being talked about for like, five years, and and then all of a sudden they had to do it, and they just did it. And nobody, and now nobody really thinks about it's just done. This is the requirement. And so it's like sometimes, I think we just spend so much time worrying about how to do things and what can go wrong and this complication and that complication. But if we just had to do it, we would just had to do it, we would just do it, and it really wouldn't be that bad.

R

Rob Mineault 35:24

Well, especially with web design, because, you know, web design has changed a lot over the last whatever, 10 years or whatever, you know, especially with, with the development of all these, these, you know, content management systems, right? Like, in terms of small to medium sized businesses, everybody uses one of these platforms, whether it's, you know, Shopify, or it's Squarespace or Wix or, you know, and these are all you know, builders, web builders that are very easy and intuitive to use. As a novice web builder, you can throw your website together pretty easily. But part of the problem is that if that, if that process, if in that process, it builds something that's that's not accessible, and that doesn't come to code in terms of accessibility standards, you're kind of hooped because, because you can't really, you're kind of locked into that as a as a builder. I mean, yes, you can throw some custom code here and there, but for the most part, it's building something that's that's inaccessible. I mean, that is a negative, but it doesn't have to be, because if those content management systems were better

about spitting out something that was accessible right from the get go, then we have a lot, we'd have a lot more accessible sites. So I guess my question is, what's, what's been your experience in that, in that realm, and in terms of web accessibility, and what are some of the hurdles that you run up against for, say, smaller or medium sized companies that are using these content management systems?

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 36:58

Well, I think that's, that's such a big one that you bring up, because I think they do, you know, like WordPress and Shopify, they do an alright job. Like, I wouldn't say they're terrible, but you can't really buy you can't really use just an out of the box theme from Shopify or WordPress and put it together, even if you know the basics about color contrast and button size and that type of stuff, put it together, and it won't actually meet the standards, because there are just some components that, like menus and things that are just not built properly in those templates. And it's really frustrating because, you know, we have tried, it's one of our newer services that we're trying to build. But it is challenging, which is just actually building websites for people like, rather than trying to audit and fix it after it's done. Us just coming in to do it, and I really wanted to do it, you know, for people who are just a solopreneur or a really small business who just want to have a really simple template website, just to get some information up and have a form. And what we found is like to truly, actually make it meet the standards, we always have needed custom code, which has been really challenging to make it affordable. And so that's been disappointing, because I, I don't see any reason why you shouldn't be able to out of the box, drag and drop with a Website Builder, something simple, and have it, you know, meet the standards. So I would love, I know that's another one where I think we're moving in the right direction. I wish we were further. I think that would help a ton. Because I do feel like for every one website we audit, there's probably 100 new ones that come out that are not done properly. It's I think the other problem is, the person putting it together does also need to understand a little bit, but I think that's where AI and tools can come in to check and notify you that, hey, that color combination doesn't work, or the way you put this in is not going to work. But I you know longer term, I would love to see our business be more of a business that helped people develop accessible products from products, rather than one that came in at the end and reviewed them.

R

Rob Mineault 39:06

Yeah. I mean, really, all that, all that really would need to happen is that some of these platforms, they just need to offer some templates that are actually accessible, and then, boom, problem solved. You know, even if it's two or three or four, you know, I would think that that would go a long way in in terms of solving the problem.

R

Ryan Fleury 39:25

It'd be just as good as the Microsoft Office Accessibility Checker.

R

Rob Mineault 39:31

I don't know. I mean, maybe I'm oversimplifying it, but, but I mean, again, like, I also think that

I don't know. I mean, maybe I'm oversimplifying it, but, but I mean, again, like, I also think that a little bit that, that maybe this is something where AI eventually is, can step in and be a solution. You know, I've often thought in the back of my head I'm, I'm no web developer or app developer, or know anything about, you know, developing using AI, but I would think that, you know, what if, what if there was, like an AI powered browser that basically its job was to go in. Uh, and look at the code, and on the fly, make that code come up to standards. You know, just just by looking at the code. I don't know if it's something like that as possible, but I don't know. Who knows?

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 40:17

Yeah, I don't have enough of a developer background on that. But what I've hoped, you know, whether that would be, that would be great, what I've hoped is that the AI can help you fix your code without needing someone to tell you what to do. So, you know, maybe, maybe you use that website builder, or you build something from scratch, but you can run it through and it can identify errors, but also just tell you what to fix. I think sometimes there are accessibility issues that are more than just the code. I think a lot of them are the code, but sometimes it really is just the way that you structured your website. It's a little bit more than just changing things in the code. But yeah, yeah. Like, I think that. I think with a lot of the AI solutions, it allows us to do things, you know, captions or alt text, audio description. It's just we cannot do like we don't have enough capacity as consultants to fix every website out there. It's not realistic. So if AI could come in there and help, and then maybe we use, we use people for what I would like, what I wish our business could be, is where we would work on websites that were already quite accessible, and we would help bring them to the next level. So it's not worrying about the guidelines. It's really thinking about, how can we make a great experience for someone using a screen reader? Like, how do we lay out information? And how do we what's the hierarchy of our menu? How many images should we have, like that type of stuff? I think would be much more interesting to work on and have things tested, rather than just the basics of this. This button state needs to be announced, which I think, I think AI could do that. Yeah.

R

Rob Mineault 42:00

So now you guys also do a lot of work in in the video game accessibility field. I'm curious to sort of know, you know what? Why that pairing and what are some of the similarities and sort of contrasts when you're when you're looking at accessibility for, say, websites and accessibility for video games?

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 42:22

Yeah, so this really came about because a lot of the people on our team. I'm not a huge gamer myself, admittedly, but so many people on our team were so passionate about games, and there were so few games they were able to play. And as I just started looking at the industry and what was out there, I saw that there weren't really many people offering solutions, especially around testing and including people with disabilities. And I also realized just how important games are for people with disabilities. I think there's probably a lot of people that would would give up, you know, their banking app, if they could have an accessible video game. And so I felt that there was a really big unaddressed need out there. What we do so we

partner with another team, so really easy surf. We don't have the expertise to actually review games at a technical level the way we do with websites. But what we do is we have a group of expert players on our team who have disabilities and use assistive technology or hardware or software that helps them game, and we connect them with studios to have them review games at any stage of development. And we also partner with another firm called games accessibility hub, and they're kind of more like the auditing team. They're able to more systematically go through games and provide feedback in gaming, we combine a few of the different standards out there, primarily the Xbox Accessibility Guidelines. That's what we base a lot of our feedback on. So what we'll do is we organize play tests of games with people with different disabilities. We record everything, we extract all of the feedback, and we map that onto the guidelines, and we provide recommendations of for what to do if you wanted to fix that. And, yeah, I mean, how does it differ? One, I mean, the biggest difference is there is no agreed upon standard the way that we have WCAG games, it's just, it's, it's, it's way, way behind where websites and stuff are for that you also have, you know, I think when it comes to websites and apps, when we test we are trying to make the experience as easy and seamless as possible. When it comes to games, it's more challenging because you're not just trying to make the game as easy as possible. You really want the player to actually enjoy themselves, and that becomes a lot more subjective. And then there's certain games that are naturally more, you know, naturally going to be more accessible for some players, and naturally less. Accessible for other players. Like, how do we, you know, like, how do we kind of work with all of this? It's, it's a much more challenging area to provide recommendations than and then a website or an app where it's pretty we're giving the same recommendations over and over again. But it's, it's a space that has been also more challenging to actually grow in, but a lot more fulfilling. Like the amount of excitement and passion that we have from when we run tests and video games is like so much more like people get so excited about being able to test out a video game and provide feedback than a website. So I think that's how like fuels me to keep going in that space.

R

Rob Mineault 45:41

Yeah, we've talked on the show about accessible video gaming. And I think for for certainly, some people out there, they might kind of roll their eyes a little bit at the idea of accessibility video games. And, you know, kind of wonder why anyone's wasting time trying to make video games accessible. But I would say that you know, for people outside the gaming sphere that maybe, you know, haven't played video games in the past. You know, 10, 20 years, video games have have changed a lot. They're they're much more part of the sort of the cultural conversation. And you know, especially, especially in the younger generations, it can be their, their entire social ecosystem. So I really do see that space as very being very important to to look at accessibility and try to include folks with disabilities into that space. And really, at the end of the day, that accessibility portion is going to improve the experience for for all gamers, not just those with disabilities.

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 46:45

Absolutely. And I think a really big misconception with gaming is that, is that people with disabilities can't play them, or can't play like the triple A, you know, big sellers. But I think, I think people are totally unaware of that, that that game, like Forza Motorsport, which is a racing game, can be played by people who are blind, same thing with The Last of Us. So I think that there is a big misconception out there. And we talk about, you know, trying to get things,

trying to think about accessibility earlier in development. I mean, that's, like, extremely important when it comes to games, and I think that a lot of people start, you know, building a game and just assuming that this is not going to be playable by people with disabilities, so we're not going to think about it. And what I've always tried to encourage people is to just have conversations with gamers who have disabilities, understand the types of games that they play and what their Yeah, the types of games they enjoy. And then I think you might realize that actually, any game can be made more accessible. I don't know if I would go as far as saying every game is necessarily playable by everybody, but every game can be made a lot more accessible to a wider audience. And yeah, so I think it's for sure. I think people underestimate the importance. I think when we think about accessibility, like we often think about the essentials, like I said, banking and transportation and which are all, of course, very important, but I think people discount the importance of actually just having fun and being able to connect with people. I'd say it's, it's pretty much as important as being able to bank. So that's what we try to do by connecting people with Studios is to just help them understand, like what is possible and the market that I think they're missing out on. There are so many video games out there, especially in the more indie space, the smaller games, it's tough to differentiate yourself, and there's a lot of like myself included. There's not that many games you can really play well with speech. If you have a game that is kind of a niche game with a relatively small audience, I mean, making that game blind accessible, or speech accessible, it's going to unlock it to a lot of a larger audience. And there's a lot of people out there that will specifically buy your game because it's accessible, and there's places where people share this stuff on social media that it's just like free advertising. So I think, you know, I always hesitate to, like to bring the business case in because I don't like, I think you should make your stuff accessible because it's the right thing to do. But hey, I mean, if people need a financial reason to do it. I think there's quite a strong one in gaming.

R

Ryan Fleury 49:24

Well, I think that point has to be driven home over and over and over again, as Rob has mentioned. You know, we've talked about this on the show where, you know, the spending of the disability community is in the billions of dollars. And if you want our money, build it and we will come

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 49:41

A big part of the reason why I also think we're kind of stuck in this rut is because people with disabilities often are kept out of being developers and working at these studios. And part of the thought with EasySurf is trying to help. I would love to see people with disabilities be more than just people who test and provide feedback. I want to see developers have disabilities and CEOs and people who are in the positions to make decisions. And I think that will also shift. Like, you know, if there were actually people working in these organizations, I think there are so many barriers to get in there that that's also kind of why this stuff persists. But, yeah, I think it's really, it's really tough, because I'll see studios that will make a really accessible game with a lot of great features, and then I'll see them release another game that doesn't have those features. And it's, you know, I don't have an in depth knowledge of, like, why this stuff happens, but it is confusing. I I'm doubtful that we will see actual regulation when it comes to video games. I know the EAA, which just came out, there is some amount of regulation that could affect video games. I know CVAA in the US, there's elements of it that can impact video games,

and that that actually has improved things, but, yeah, I think, I think it all ties together with, like, just a lot of the points we've been making as to, yeah, why? Why things always just kind of feel a little bit stagnant.

R

Rob Mineault 51:14

As we start to wrap up, I'm just kind of curious right now - we're sort of on the edge of some fairly exciting emerging technologies, especially especially when you consider them being married to assistive technology. I'm just curious to hear your perspective and sort of easy service perspective about some of these emerging technologies we've already talked a little bit about AI, but you know, the the wearables, is something else that sort of pops into my head about something that's really starting to get some traction. We're starting to see some some pretty cool products. Is there anything sort of up and coming? Any, any emerging technology that that you guys are sort of staying attuned to, that you're excited about, that might change the face of accessibility going forward?

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 52:03

Well, I'm not, I'm not sure how exciting this one is, but you I, I think, I think Rob mentioned PowerPoints and document accessibility is just one that really, really frustrates me, especially when it comes to PDFs, and it's something that it is really like, it's really, really challenging. We help businesses fix their PDFs. It takes a lot of time, and I think the money spent on fixing a PDF could be spent so much better in other places. So like, there's a few companies out there that I've been following, and I don't think they're where we need to be yet, but who have solutions to convert PDF to HTML pretty much on demand. I say I don't think it's where we need it to be. I'm hopeful about that, just because I know there's organizations out there that just have hundreds of PDFs that are just not accessible, and I see no solution for that. I think people are, for whatever reason, very, very attached to their PDFs, and realistically, there's not enough money or resources to go and fix those. I'm some cautiously optimistic about that. Specifically you mentioned wearables. I haven't thought too deeply about that. You know, one thing that I always think about is the prevalence of touch screens in in electronics and appliances and vehicles. And I've thought about, yeah, I mean, what are like? Touch screens are just, most of them are very inaccessible. But I've thought about, you know, could, what is the solution for that? And I've wondered whether it is in wearable or through your phone, like, you know, maybe, if these, if you could control, like the radio station and the heating and stuff on your car through your phone. I don't know if either of you have thoughts on that, if we're talking about wearables, that's, that's the only one that, like, kind of crossed my mind is like, all these touch screens, like, I don't think they're going anywhere. I think they're staying so I think we have to think about, how do we maybe connect them into our own devices, so that we could control them more easily? Those are the two that come to mind. I don't know if I'm missing some, some, some interesting tech that's on the horizon?

R

Ryan Fleury 54:22

Well, you missed the boat on one, and I'm gonna bring you up to speed on a product by a company called Pneuma Solutions. Okay, they have a product, couple products. One is called Scribe for Documents, which is cloud document remediation, or if you need nine, if you need

100% remediation, then you can pay for human to do it. But it's like 97% automatically done for you in the cloud. And they also have Scribe for Meetings to make PowerPoint presentations accessible.

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 54:49

I'll definitely check it out. And like that was where I mean the solutions that I had looked at, I felt like they did well when it came to you. Text and headings. But it was, it was, you know, what happens when someone has created a visual graphic with, like, maybe it's a really complex chart or something like that, like, how does it handle the alt text? Or, what is it doing with that? I found that they did sort of convert things in a way that information was coming out, but in a way that was very challenging to actually understand, right, what it related to. Because I like what I'm thinking of like, I know with with EAA, and a lot of the regular with the EA like, you have to have accessible PDFs, sure as of now, basically, and, yeah, like, I would just love to see all that PDF remediation money honestly going towards other things, because I just think that, I think so much money can be spent on that, and I just don't think you get a whole lot. It's like a one time document, and that's all that you've made accessible. Is just one document. It's not that helpful. I want to see money go towards, like we talked about, making a website builder more accessible, like things that that will will, it's an investment, but it's going to pay off, and it's going to continue to benefit not just a one time static document. So it's the document thing. Is the one that has always kind of bothered me that we don't have a better option. I would, I'd love to check it out, though.

R

Ryan Fleury 56:21

Yeah, definitely do that. I think they even have free trial. So give it a shot. And you know, if you want to give, give them feedback, tell them we sent you. You know, like I said, they're friends of the show. We've known them for years.

R

Rob Mineault 56:34

So actually, before we wrap up, Noah, was there anything, anything else you wanted to talk about, anything we would we miss we didn't get to the we're happy to have you on again, of course. But yeah, anything, anything you want to, you want to chat about, before we let you go?

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 56:49

No, I appreciate that. I'd love to come back anytime. No, I think we hit on it. You know, you won't. Why accessibility is where it is. AI, cool tech. I think that's, I think that's everything I know. I really appreciate you having me on and really enjoyed the conversation.

R

Rob Mineault 57:03

Before you go, where can people find EasySurf? How can they track you guys down and contact you if they're interested in learning more?

you it, if they're interested in learning more?

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 57:11

Sure, well, there's our website. It's easysurf.ca. I'm also, I mean, I'm not really big on social media. LinkedIn, unfortunately, I know it's boring, but that's, that's the social media platform I'm most active in. I post there quite often. Our company page posts there, but we're not really on any of the other things. So sorry, LinkedIn is what you got to go with.

R

Rob Mineault 57:30

Well, listen, sir, thank you again for making the time for us. Please come back anytime.

N

Noah Senecal-Junkeer 57:37

Yeah, absolutely. Bye.

R

Ryan Fleury 57:40

Well, there you go. There you go. Another guy doing great work.

R

Rob Mineault 57:45

Yeah, I know it's it always amazes me when I see one of these companies pop up and it's like, hey, they're in Vancouver. Why don't, why don't we know any of these people?

R

Ryan Fleury 57:54

And I'm finding that more and more is these people are either coming out of the woodwork or I just am coming across them randomly now, but it seems to be more and more so this year, more than any other year, I'm finding people that have been a part of the community that we've never known before.

R

Rob Mineault 58:14

Yeah, for sure, but I mean in terms of, you know, accessibility, I mean it's, it's very nice to see more and more companies that are that are taking up the fight - I shouldn't say taking the fight just puts it in a negative light, but they're, you know, they're offering these services because that's a sign that there are more companies out there that are that need these services and are demanding these services. And that's always going to be good news.

R

Ryan Fleury 58:28

 Ryan Fleury 58:58

Yeah. And I think, you know, having the Accessible BC Act and other Acts, provincially, that are coming into play or being looked at, being implemented, is forcing companies to take a look, or some companies, anyway, take a look at the way they do business and procurement and so on, and realize, Oh, hmm, okay, we're gonna have to change some things here going forward.

 Rob Mineault 59:00

Yeah, listen, I Hey, I'm thrilled. I'm thrilled to hear that some companies are actually taking the BC Accessibility Act here. I didn't, I, you know, when we, when we first, you know, looked at it and and talked about it, you know, just didn't seem like it had much teeth, and we didn't really know if anybody was going to really take it seriously. So it's nice to hear that there are companies out there that definitely, definitely taking it seriously. So there you go.

 Ryan Fleury 59:24

Good work, companies that are looking at accessibility. We applaud you, and cowbell you.

 Rob Mineault 59:32

We salute you. Well, I think we successfully navigated another week.

 Ryan Fleury 59:39

We did. Look at us, look at us, going, just the two of us.

 Rob Mineault 59:40

So we gotta do this more often.

 Ryan Fleury 59:41

Yeah, right. Maybe we'll throw in an extra show every month, just the two of us.

 Rob Mineault 59:47

Get rid of that dead weight out of the podcast.

 Ryan Fleury 59:54

That's right.

R

Rob Mineault 59:56

Oh, maybe not Steve. I'm sure he's weighty.

R

Rob Mineault 59:58

He's pretty weighty. Saw him a couple weeks ago. He's looking like a little more weighty than he used. But then so are we, aren't we? All right, let's get out of here and gain some weight and eat dinner. Where can people find us?

R

Ryan Fleury 1:00:23

They can find us online www.atbanter.com

R

Rob Mineault 1:00:26

Hey. They can also drop us an email if they so desire, at cowbell@atbanter.com

R

Ryan Fleury 1:00:33

And they can find us online at Facebook and Instagram and Mastodon, if you're on Mastodon, send us an invite follow us, and I'll follow you back. I promise.

R

Rob Mineault 1:00:46

All right, so that is going to go do it for us this week. Big thanks to Noah for joining us, and we will see everybody next week.

S

Steve Barclay 1:01:04

This podcast has been brought to you by Canadian Assistive Technology, providing Low Vision and Blindness Solutions as well as Physical Access Solutions and Augmentative Communication Aids across Canada. Find us online@www.canasstech.com or if you're in the Vancouver Lower Mainland, visit our storefront at #106-828 West Eighth Avenue in Vancouver. That's one block off Broadway at Willow you can reach us by phone toll free, at 1-844-795-8324, or by email at sales@canasstech.com.