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SPEAKERS

Steve Barclay, Speaker 1, Lis Malone, Joe Jorgensen, Rob Mineault



Rob Mineault 00:17

Hey, and welcome to another episode of AT Banter.



Steve Barclay 00:22

Banter banter.



Rob Mineault 00:27

See, you don't get that type of shit in the first take. Okay. 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. Steve Barclay.



Steve Barclay 00:48

That is me. Although on the first take, you said it was the lovely and talented Mr. Steve Barclay, and I like that intro better.

 Rob Mineault 00:55
Yeah, yeah. And hey, look who else it is. It's Miss Lis Malone. Also lovely.

 Lis Malone 01:03
Yes.

 Steve Barclay 01:04
No, no, she's she's rugged.

 Rob Mineault 01:06
Oh, sorry, rugged and handsome.

 Steve Barclay 01:08
That's right.

 Lis Malone 01:08
Rugged and handsome. Wow. You know what? I feel like I'm watching the movie Groundhog Day.

 Rob Mineault 01:14
I know, I know.

 Steve Barclay 01:15
Yeah, it's almost as if somebody forgot to hit record before.

R

Rob Mineault 01:17

Okay. Okay. So finally. Okay. Well, I guess we're letting the the cat out of the bag right off the top. Yes, it's true. This is take number two, audience. Rob, for the second time in show history, did forget to hit record, and so we're we're kind of doing this again. So if we sound like we're kind of rehearsed, there there might be a reason why. Or maybe will we sound even more unrehearsed? Who even knows? Who even knows how this is going to go? Can

L

Lis Malone 01:46

We're going to start calling you Punxsutawney Phil instead of Rob. There we go.

R

Rob Mineault 01:50

You have my full permission.

L

Lis Malone 01:55

You're like the groundhog. You have to do the rest of this podcast with like little rat like groundhog sounds.

S

Steve Barclay 02:04

But a little less bitey.

R

Rob Mineault 02:08

Yeah I heard they do bite. They're nasty little critters.

S

Steve Barclay 02:11

Yeah, they don't like being manhandled. That's why.

R

Rob Mineault 02:17

It's like he just once a year, some weirdo pulls me out of the ground and hoists me up, I'd be bitey too. Anyways, I don't know why we're talking about that. Let's talk about something else. Let's talk about hey, we have not been together for for a while. Like 15 minutes.

S

Steve Barclay 02:35

Yeah, right.

R

Rob Mineault 02:43

Yeah, right. Lis, how how how have you been?

L

Lis Malone 02:49

I've been busy because listen, girlfriend here has a life.

R

Rob Mineault 02:54

Yeah, go figure.

L

Lis Malone 02:56

Yeah.

R

Rob Mineault 02:57

I hear it's nice.

S

Steve Barclay 02:59

What what kind of stuff you doing?

L Lis Malone 03:01
Um, trying not to be out in the heat.

S Steve Barclay 03:05
Oh, is it warm there?

L Lis Malone 03:06
Oh yeah. Well, I mean, it's still a little on the a little warmer than I think it should be. I I'm ready for sweater weather. Yeah,

S Steve Barclay 03:15
We've got plenty of that.

L Lis Malone 03:17
Yeah, no.

S Steve Barclay 03:18
You just have to get a rain slicker over top of it.

L Lis Malone 03:21
Yeah, no, listen. Boob sweat is is a real thing. So I'm so over the boob sweat.

S Steve Barclay 03:30
I don't understand why they don't call that humid-i-titties.

 Rob Mineault 03:35
Wow, see we would have missed this gold had we just went on with take one. That's all I have to say.

 Rob Mineault 03:45
We would have lost humid-i-titties.

 Lis Malone 03:47
humid-i-titties. There you go.

 Rob Mineault 03:50
So, okay.

 Lis Malone 03:52
It was all worth it just for that.

 Rob Mineault 03:54
You brought it up. You started it.

 Lis Malone 03:56
Oh, I'm not offended by humid-i-titties.

 Rob Mineault 04:00
Good. Anything else?

L Lis Malone 04:02
No.

R Rob Mineault 04:03
No. So you've been good. Well, it's nice to it's nice to have you back.

L Lis Malone 04:08
Thank you. Nice to be here.

R Rob Mineault 04:11
Yeah. Well, we we're gonna get on a on a regular schedule again. We took the summer off and it's been a little bit chaotic, but we're we're we're still around. We're coming back, and yeah,

S Steve Barclay 04:23
We're picking it up. We've been slacking. We know it.

R Rob Mineault 04:25
Yeah, exactly. But all right, you guys want to talk? No, you don't. You guys want to talk hockey? There's nothing interesting happening yet on hockey. But apparently, hockey season started, and these guys are excited. It's starting tonight.

L Lis Malone 04:39
We'll let the yeah. It's starting today, but we'll we'll let the season starts and we can start talking like some smack.

S Steve Barclay 04:46
There you go.

 Rob Mineault 04:47
Exactly.

 Lis Malone 04:47
There we go.

 Rob Mineault 04:48
There you go. Something to look forward to.

 Steve Barclay 04:49
Let's see if we suck out of the gate first.

 Lis Malone 04:51
Yeah. This is true.

 Rob Mineault 04:55
I have my theories. Well, all right. Well, I think. It's enough. It's enough banter before the show. So why don't we get things started? Hey, Steve.

 Steve Barclay 05:07
Hey, Rob.

 Rob Mineault 05:10
What the heck are we doing today?

-  Steve Barclay 05:13
Well, that's a that's a great question, and I almost would have forgotten were it not for the fact that we'd just been over it, you know, 15 minutes ago. Today, we. we have from Accessabyte, the software company, Joe Jorgensen. Welcome to the show, Joe.
-  Joe Jorgensen 05:32
Hey, Steve. Thanks for having me.
-  Rob Mineault 05:35
Welcome back.
-  Joe Jorgensen 05:38
It's my second time on the show ..
-  Steve Barclay 05:41
... in as many minutes.
-  Rob Mineault 05:42
That's right, Joe. Why don't we get started by giving us a little bit of background about yourself and a little bit of background about Accessabyte and what you guys do and and how how it all started?

S

Speaker 1 05:57

Sure. So my name is Joe Jorgensen, and I run Accessabyte. Accessibite started while I was working in the field, working with blind and visually impaired adults, teaching assistive technology. I was working at Heinz VA Hospital for 10 years. While I was there, I did some O&M did some some VRT or living skills, and then ultimately landed in doing assistive tech. During my time in assistive tech, you know, I worked with all sorts of technologies, all sorts of all sorts of users, and saw all sorts of different needs that would come up, and started building out some tools to meet needs that I felt there were some gaps in that weren't quite doing what I wanted to do. That started off with Typio, which has led into what Accessibyte is. The quick front end of that is Accessibyte covers typing with Typio, Typio Pro, and Braillio. We have an online learning platform that introduces flashcards, math practice, and Accessibyte Logic, which is a set of games that also serve as like a background for pre-coding, doing AT assessments, and actually teaching AT skills. And then we have Accessibyte Studio, which is our Windows desktop productivity app. So AccessiByte has a wide range of things that it covers.

R

Rob Mineault 07:24

What general age range are a lot of the products aimed at, or is it sort of you know all all ages?

J

Joe Jorgensen 07:31

The age range Accessibyte covers is truly everybody. It's a pretty even split between a younger audience, kids working in schools, and an older audience, which would be you know adults of any age - maybe they're going through a training program, or maybe they're just working at home. And I think both audiences are served very well by a very similar navigation style across all these apps, but the content itself kind of leans different directions. A great example is Typio. So the standard version of Typio runs in the browser. It's got all the included accessibility across across any device, any browser that you're working with. A younger student may raise a typing pet. So while they're learning to type, the pet can voice out the keys. You earn coins to feed the pet, customize the way it sounds and looks, play games with it. Just you know, good way to incentivize learning to type. An adult user may not want to use a typing pet, or they might. But if they don't, there's Typio Pro. It replaces the pet with vocational lessons, professional lessons. So we're talking writing resumes, professional emails, things that literally came from what different adult users were doing with Typio. So we kind of push it in in the different directions fairly well to cover a little bit of everybody.

R

Rob Mineault 08:57

See, that's really interesting to me because I feel like a lot of a lot of developers would would probably go after a specific age range if they if they were going to develop a a typing tutor or whatever. They would they they would go after the kids. I feel like your your experience in in both teaching and in things like rehab that must have informed that decision.

J Joe Jorgensen 09:20

Oh, without a doubt. So my background instructing really led to a lot of listening, and I think that's really the throughline with with all of AccessiByte and what these apps have become. I never set out to start a business. I never set out to even create a bunch of apps that other people were using. It just started happening, and the way that happened was when I was at the VA, I'd created Typio because there wasn't a typing tutor that was doing exactly what I wanted it to do. In creating Typio, I had this really really bare bones early version that wasn't very exciting to use, but I was excited to present on it at the Illinois AER conference, and this is going back more than 10 years at this point. So while I was presenting, somebody in the in the room had shared that they had used that application with their student, and I thought surely they didn't because this isn't like a publicly available app. Well, come to find out, they had colleagues that I had shared it with shared it with their colleagues and shared it with their friends, and before you know it, the app somehow made a loop and met me in that room at AER, which was kind of an interesting experience because I had been working with adults, but this was a teacher with a very young student, and just then and there, I kind of switched gears on what that presentation was, and just started asking, like, all right, what do you guys need? Like, what do teachers need? What do people with, you know, working in like VOC rehab? What do you guys need? I just took a lot of notes, and that is what really pushed things into into what they become. So my background really is just listening to the instructors, listening to the teachers, and also listening to the users. I sat down with a whole lot of people, hundreds of people, and went over a computer. Some of them for the first time, some of them for the first time since their vision had changed, and some who were very, very adept and better at technology than I'll ever be, and across all of it, there was just a lot of of similarity. A new device is a new device to anybody. If you're learning assistive tech for the first time, maybe what you know doesn't apply any longer, or maybe you just need to take those skills and hit them with something different and change it up a little bit. So even listening to to those needs of of the different users is a big part of what shapes AccessiByte and just makes things easy and approachable and comfortable. One of the big things that I would do with everybody that I learned tech with was before we would ever turn a device on we would just handle it, hold it, touch the keyboard, you know, touch the front, back, upside down of the of the computer, see where all the ports were at, put the thing together together, and just really get comfortable with that tech. And I think that phase was so so important at getting everybody over the the fear of approaching technology or thinking that it's going to be difficult. You know, it's just another hunk of plastic and electronics like everything else. So there's nothing to be worried about. I want the accessible apps to bring that sort of feeling to people who are learning for the first time, like how to type, with really easy introduction of you launch Typeo and it tells you right off the bat, welcome to Typio. Press the arrow keys to navigate, enter to make a selection. That's it. Three keys: up, down, enter. Somebody can get up and running independently in like two minutes, maybe even less than that. And with that, we already have our first quick win. Somebody feels comfortable. They feel like this is already familiar to them. They get into the first typing tutorial, and just a nice message about "welcome to Typio. we're going to learn our first lesson". It talks the users through how to type every step of the way. and gives users an exploratory period to touch the keys, hear what each key is, and then get into the lesson where they start going through the more guided parts of the application, but that ramp right there of just a quick win with the menus, and already feeling like all right, I know what I'm doing. Getting some guidance into the lessons that include some exploration, so you know, all right, it's okay to like feel the edges on this thing. I'm not going to like go off of them, and then you start getting into like the real guided instruction where a wrong key is an error, or your speed is actually being being counted. But I just think that that comfort is really a big part of my my background working at the VA.

R**Rob Mineault 14:16**

And it's interesting. I like how you you've framed it as as wins, because you know we've we've heard stories about people and their experiences in things like rehab. You know when they're relearning skills because of say vision loss, for example, it it can seem very overwhelming, and especially assistive technology in and of itself. A lot of these a lot of the technology is very niche, and it can be very complicated, and it can feel very overwhelming to people who are sort of at the beginning of their journey or their their young children, and and really, if you think about it, those two experiences aren't all that different. It's sort of you need those little ways. And you need to feel like you have a really comfortable base with a piece of of assistive technology to build on to build these skills that that are really going to you know really be essential to you later on.

J**Joe Jorgensen 15:13**

Yeah, I definitely will agree with that, and you know I employ that in my own life, left and right. The simplest is just having like, I may have like so many things to do in a day. I wear a lot of hats with Accessibyte, but sometimes it's nice to have this quick little list that I can check off like three things, even if they're small, to feel like I accomplished something and I completed a task, when in reality everything is still going. But those wins, they're just they're very important. So yeah, I agree with you.

R**Rob Mineault 15:42**

I'm also sort of curious, and and I I'm sure that your experience is is not unique. I'm sure there there's a lot of teachers out there. There are a lot of you know rehab specialists that pull their hair out every day when they think of oh I just I really wish this type of product existed. My client could really use it. So I'm really curious about you yourself. You're like this thing that that would be really incredibly useful to this community doesn't exist. I'm just going to go out and create a company and and make it myself. What kind of drove you to do that?

J

Joe Jorgensen 16:23

Oh, a little bit of fire getting underneath me. So, I I saw what I saw some gaps of what what I could use, what my clients could use, what could make things move a little smoother, and I reach out to other people and companies and whatnot, and you know they're all doing their own thing. I get it. I respect it, but at a certain point, I was also a little frustrated that I couldn't get this stuff into the world. I don't know why I hadn't thought about it initially, but I have experience coding, and I did then. I just made really goofy apps for like the App Store or games that I would play with my friends when I was a kid, so I thought, well, I can probably bring these skills into creating this other thing. And there's versions of it, but there's not this version. So that's really where that part of it started. Was just, just you know, getting a little heated up that what I wanted didn't exist, and wanting to bring it into the world, that is part of the day-to-day of accessible is building out things that my own apps don't have, or that our field doesn't have and needs. I had mentioned, you know, just listening to to users and teachers and instructors, that's a huge part of it. The other side of that is a lot scarier. involves just building this stuff quietly, you know, without even sharing that it's going to exist until you get it to a certain point, and then you can share it, and then seeing how it's received. You know, in the early days, there was a few apps that didn't quite take off. They were very small, and that's where I learned very quickly to focus on more instructional-based tools, but still keep them very open-ended and and pliable for whoever's got their hands on them. Within within that, I think the best example is Brailio. So when Typio had been out for a while, it made the move from Windows to the Cloud, and it's about to make the move to Windows again in a new form. But I had this idea to make a Braille typing tutor, and you know I couldn't find any other examples of it, so there's a lot that goes into Braille that doesn't carry over easily into a typing tutor, and it was really hard to like discover that and figure it out. And talked to a few teachers, a few people that I knew, so I wasn't going entirely on my own knowledge. I had no idea if anybody would even care this app existed, and I spent literally an entire year working on it, and when I released it, I was so nervous. And luckily, the reception was great. Brailio has like its own little community and its own following, and it really feels like it has its own life separate from Typio. So I was really glad that I listened to my gut on that one and just let myself build that weird little app and let it grow into its own thing.

R

Rob Mineault 19:28

So, Typio was sort of the first, and it was sort of the foundational app. Are all the all the other apps and software kind of built on the same foundation, in the sense that really the the idea is that users can sort of you know start with whatever they need and then they can expand out into some of the other apps as they want and it's it still feels the same it's still these sort of the same user experience.

J Joe Jorgensen 19:57

Yeah, without a doubt. So a big. Part of Accessibyte is the ecosystem, and that's something that's really coming into focus now. Though it's been the target for a long time, but I think some of the recent releases are putting this right out in front of people. So, with Accessibyte, we're covering people who are maybe using tech for the first time and learning how to type, or maybe they learn how to type, whether using our app or pre-existing skills, and then get onto the Accessibyte learning platform and start going through like study materials and playing games and things, and within that they're learning how to navigate like deeper menus and things and and interact with technology in a way that's a little different than just being told what to type. Not that Typio is just that, and then from there we can go into like Accessibyte Studio, our Windows app that does everything from email to podcasts and YouTube and documents, you name it. Through all of it, the first instruction they got with Typio was "Welcome to Typio. Use the arrow keys to navigate. Press Enter to make a selection. They're doing that the whole time. That simple navigation is really all somebody needs, and that will carry through and be the throughline with all of these different apps. They expand from there. They build on that concept, but it really just keeps coming back to that. A huge part of Accessibyte is the thought that goes into layouts and menus and what's presented when, where, and why. Like so much more than I think people would realize, and it's all because of the presentation. I want somebody to have a mental map of navigating an accessible app, and then that can apply to the next app without it being a restriction. The next app can be more expansive and go into new territory, but none of the old skills are falling off. They're not going to be intimidated. It's going to be just as easy as it was every step of the way, so it's kind of like a path that people can get on at any point, can get off at any point, and access byte hopefully serves them, you know, every step of the way.

S Steve Barclay 22:12

I want to talk a little bit too about the Teachers' Dashboard that you developed and what what kind of information you can get off of that that dashboard. We we have a lot of teachers who who you know work in well it's Canada so huge huge school districts, you know they can't see their kid every day but through the teacher dashboard they can they can pay attention to what the kid's been doing, and can can you just talk a little bit about that and what all you can get out of that Dashboard?

J Joe Jorgensen 22:41

Yeah, you can get a ton out of that Dashboard, and we got the the Dashboard Relaunch project wrapping up very soon. So anyone who is familiar with it is going to get some very nice upgrades quickly. So the Teacher Dashboard allows teachers, instructors to go on manage their student roster, so you can create usernames and passwords for your students. You can create a link that logs them in without that information, or you can go on and just kind of track what they've been up to. You know, see their recent lessons, their progress, set goals, change the settings remotely, which can be huge with AT. If there's a TVI and they're not going to see their kid until Friday, and they're telling telling them, "Hey, the voice turned off in in Typio. Well, the teacher can just go into the dashboard, go to their settings, and flip it back on, and then also lock them out of changing the settings going forward. That's an option too. So it's all about managing students and also providing good, useful data for like reporting, documentation, all the stuff that justifies the work that we're all doing.

S Steve Barclay 23:49

I want to ask you too, because we're starting to see some of the refreshable Braille Notetakers move over to the Windows platform. Have you done any work about making sure that Braillio will work with those interfaces, the Braille interfaces on those devices?

J Joe Jorgensen 24:11

Yeah, that's work that's you know always ongoing, is keeping up with with the whole ecosystem. So AccessPlay has its own integrated accessibility, which means it's self-voicing. There's visual enhancements. It's like simplified and easy to use while still feeling robust. But there's a whole AT world out there, and I don't want anybody going into Accessibyte and feeling like, great, now I'm in a bubble I can't get out of. You can use screen readers. You can use braille devices of of any type of any type, and navigate within the Accessibyte applications, and that carries over both in our web platform and the Windows apps.

R Rob Mineault 24:54

How important is it to maintaining your relationship with things like teachers, TVIs, students. You know, how dialed into the community are you as you continue to develop and add new features?

J Joe Jorgensen 25:11

You know, what's really interesting about that question is just the other day I was talking to another road warrior out this way who I see all the conferences. We bump into each other in every State except our own, and I was mentioning how, you know, kind of where I work remotely. The access of my team, everyone works remote, but these conferences that feels like my colleagues because I'm going to see a lot of the same people at at in any State that I travel to to go present about Accessibyte to go you know give a talk or or do like a table event you name it so it is like an essential part of things I think we're in an age of technology shifting very rapidly. We've got AI coding apps in an afternoon doesn't mean they're always going to be great apps. You know, there's still a lot of thought. There's still a lot of thought that must go into them, and that really is going to come from listening to everybody who's out there interfacing with teachers, asking them how things work, throwing ideas at them, and you know, does this seem good? It doesn't. Okay. Well, what if we change it to that? Like right now, there's a new version of Typio, Typio Pro, and Brailio just about to be released, and it went into beta testing. And those teachers have so much good feedback. Sometimes it's like the smallest little thing that you wouldn't think to add. It's not always just troubleshooting or technical issues, but again, it just it just feeds that idea that all the good ideas come from the users at the end of the day.

R Rob Mineault 26:49

And so, really, you know, with being 10 years old, which is let's be honest, it's fairly young for for an assistive technology company, and to have the scope of the products that you do, I think really says something to that as well. Was that always the plan, or did you just kind of start out and really thought, okay, you know what, I'm going to develop Typio. It's going to be great. It's a product that that's much needed. Did you have any idea that you'd sort of continue to build and and sort of build out everything else?

J Joe Jorgensen 27:22

I had no idea whatsoever. I assumed I'd be retiring from my job at the VA eventually, but at a certain point, I you know couldn't couldn't do both, so ended up you know just focusing on Accessibyte. That has shifted over time. You know what was initially just kind of following some momentum of an idea has become like strategically planning for things. So it's kind of like a a strange mix of not setting out to start a business, finding yourself where now all of a sudden there's people who rely on these tools that I need to make sure that I continue to support getting more ideas. It's such a problem having too many ideas sometimes, and like building on them and then trying to scope it. So right now, school year, you know, the start isn't right behind us, but you know we're still fresh. This is the busiest time of year for Accessibyte. A lot of teachers onboarding, a lot of like orders coming through, all that good stuff. But I have been struck with ideas lately, and it is a problem. So, just so many, so many things that I want to build out, and it's nice to have those options ahead of me, it's going to depend on you know on where the the users steer the ship. But there's there's a lot of branching paths ahead.

R**Rob Mineault 28:50**

The other big advantage of having students as you know as a demographic is that if anyone's going to find bugs or come up with crazy new ideas for new features, it's going to be a bunch of 12-year-olds.

J**Joe Jorgensen 29:01**

Oh, for sure. You know, I get emails from teachers, and they, you know, their students will find things for sure. And it's like, oh yeah, whoever would have, you know, been putting a penny under the T key like that. Well, I guess a kid. And at the same time, too, the other side of that is like the the stability that often comes with like older users, and making sure that I hit that balance just right, where any of these apps can be like fun and flexible and a little bit of a sandbox, but also good productive steady tools, and I think between those two groups of users, they kind of both pull on that in slightly different ways, and that works really well. I think it creates a really good end product and good mindset for for this technology.

R**Rob Mineault 29:51**

It must be challenging sometimes to to maintain that balance to make sure something is going to be fun and engaging, but also instructive. Can you speak to that a little bit on on on how how you try to maintain that balance?

J**Joe Jorgensen 30:07**

You know that is an interesting balance that's always being maintained with these applications. Is just like who's who's the user going to be for this? Well, usually somebody is in mind there, but when it comes to like the assistive qualities, that can be anybody. It can be anybody of any age, any skill level, any needs on the device. So it's going to be very, very broad. Even though these sometimes feel like they're very specific things, the usability, the voice of the app-not the little voice, but just you know the way that it feels. You don't want to feel childish to an adult, and you don't want to feel old and stuffy to a younger user. So sometimes you just put some clear paths in the way, like Typio going towards typing pets. If you're a younger student, you raise your pet, or Typio Pro as an older student, maybe you're instead typing up emails within the application. So that can be like a very obvious way that those things get split. But a lot of it is creating applications that users and their instructors can apply in different ways to different scenarios. Just creating a strong backend that you know my instruction back when I was at at the VA versus my colleagues. You know we may approach it two different ways, but we're landing at the same place, and that you know that expands across across the community of all people.

R**Rob Mineault 33:05**

One of the products that that I want to talk about on that note is is Accessible Studio because I feel like this is something that really has its foot in two different demographics. Could you - I guess first of all, could you could you just talk a little bit about Accessible Studio and tell us a little bit about it?

J**Joe Jorgensen 33:25**

Yeah, so Accessible Studio is a Windows desktop application. Does a little bit of everything from email to podcast, YouTube, getting on the internet, sending documents, scanning things, you know, all of it. It all operates with just up, down, or enter. Or if you're using outside assistive tech like JAWS or NVDA, you can navigate however you would with those tools as well. So we have just like a very strong productivity application. When somebody's on that road that Accessible can put them on, where they hop on with some early typing skills, they build up some more skills in Accessible Learning, and then ultimately, what do they do with them? Where do you put it to use? And that can be in Accessible Studio. So Accessible Studio, from from this side of things, it opens up a whole new branch of Accessible where it's not purely instruction. All the other apps they center around instruction, but Studio centers around productivity. It can be like a daily driver, which you know actually there's Typio users who have been sticking with Typio for many years, and these are people who definitely know how to type, but they just like the app. They like to continue training with it, and you know something about it speaks to them. And I think that's great because I've been with it for years too. Then Studio can come in and be maybe a different way of providing something there. You know, people are going to do all these things to access media, to. Communicate with others to to manage their lives digitally, and I think Accessible Studio can be a very powerful tool to do that. You can employ that easy integrated accessibility. You can start learning advanced screen readers while in this familiar environment of Studio. One of the cool features in Accessible Studio is while it's a single application with an easy menu to get to all of these apps, you can also split them off so the Studio apps can be installed independently on the desktop. So let's say, you know, I'm I'm learning the computer, or I just want something simpler, even if I already know it, so I get into Accessible Studio, and while I'm in there, I realize, oh yeah, email in Studio is great. It's it's simple, it's easy. I don't have to worry about all these other complicated things that I'm not using. But I want to go into the Windows environment, and I'm you know now using a screen reader like JAWS. You can still use Studio Mail. Just run it from the desktop. It opens up as its own application, so it's a kind of a splintering into that mainstream application path that you know most people are on.

S**Steve Barclay 36:13**

I'm just on the Accessible Studio page here, and at one point on the page, you've got a series of different icons for which I assume represent different different aspects or different tools that are inside Accessible Studio, and I'm counting 28 of them here. Are are those all the the tools that are built into it?



Joe Jorgensen 36:33

You know what? I'd have to pull it up myself too because I do think it's something like that.



Steve Barclay 36:39

There is a lot of stuff in there.



Joe Jorgensen 36:40

Yeah, kind of like it just kind of got its own momentum and started spinning out, and now you know there's so much more even coming. But yeah, those that sounds like the right count for the amount of tools that are in it. So you know it ranges from media to connectivity to getting on the internet to managing documents and things, and there's some really cool stuff coming. So yeah, what Studio is coming up on its one-year anniversary? It was released last fall, very quietly. I just wanted to let it into the world, let it kind of find a place to settle, and then once I knew where that was, start building from there. And with that, just some again, so much good feedback comes from users. I love hearing from people and letting and them letting me know what they want, and so that the next wave of Accessible as a whole, but man, Studio in particular, there's just some really cool stuff coming. So there's a lot in there, but it ain't done yet.



Rob Mineault 37:37

You know, in the past, it's just been oh here we're going to develop a - take Jaws for example - we're going to develop a screen reader. It's called JAWS and it's you know incredibly incredibly complicated, and can do everything. And it was either you either had nothing or you had JAWS, and or you know maybe NVDA came along after a while. I guess my point is, is that there wasn't, there didn't really seem to be much attention in the sense of let's build a pathway for people, sort of simpler apps to more complicated apps, and really give users sort of a a more natural progression and a more natural skill building.

J Joe Jorgensen 38:20

Oh yeah, that is like absolutely like a great summation of like the the Accessibyte system, like the the learning system, the way that people interact for sure. You know, one thing that I saw as I was developing Accessibyte was I felt like I was setting people off to see, and I was like, "All right, here's your map, and here's your compass. You now know how to type. Good luck. And it's like, I don't know what they're gonna do out there, but you know, I think Accessibyte could see them through more of that and kind of, kind of stick with them with all these assistive techs that exist, which are all great. You know, I I love JAWS. I love all these applications, as I know we all do. But we don't have like a unifying productivity platform. We're reliant, as you know, it's not a bad thing. I don't say this with any negativity, but you know, I'm like like Microsoft Office. You know, it's it's very powerful. It's necessary software. I use all those apps every single day, but it's hard and it can be complicated and it changes. Well, there's not a lot of alternatives there in that regard, and if somebody is doing this with like a magnification app, a screen reader, you know, it can be like a very different approach, and sometimes one thing's accessible or one thing isn't, and you know it's very complicated. Accessible Studio, I see as being like a glue. If there was like a hardware company out there, Accessible Studio could run on as the front end and be like an OS of everything somebody needs, and they would never need to leave it. It can follow somebody as they're learning JAWS, or if they switch to NVDA, they don't have to like relearn everything. They still have this like simple backing application, and you know as as time goes on, we're going to see Accessible Studio branch into even even more paths and maybe unite AT users across ecosystems even broader than just like Windows-based stuff. So, so yeah, I think like unifying these things, simplifying these things, and seeing the path from start to finish being productive from those first key presses of up, down, enter, all the way through somebody being like a pro user who still taps into these apps just for a simpler way of doing stuff because who doesn't want that?

R Rob Mineault 40:47

Yeah, it's just more choice. You know, I hear Steve say all the time - it's all about the the right tool for the right person. And great JAWS is is absolutely great for a working professional or maybe a very techie student, or you know who knows. But I guess my point is that it's it's not necessarily the right tool for everybody. And so the more the more tools that are out there for for the different skill levels, or for the different place that they may be at in their you know assistive technology skills or journey, the better the better it is going to be for everybody.

J Joe Jorgensen 41:25

Oh yeah, definitely. I think you just in what you said you hit on so many things. One is journey in Typio for the younger users, for the younger students, they have their typing journey that they go on. I just think that phrasing is you know it's really at the start of something that you're going to be learning the keyboard. It's going to take you places, as all this technology does, and a big part. You know, kind of going back to Studio. Some users are going to benefit from simplified versions of software. They don't need all the bells and whistles in my professional life. You know, I'm developing software. I need some pretty advanced tools to do all that. In my personal life, I want a phone that does nothing. I want it to be like just dead easy to use and don't bother me. Because you know, you just want to take the edge off. But I would never want to be stuck in either one of those lanes. I would like to be able to switch between them. So going back to like my instructor days, I may have to sit down and make a decision with somebody within a day of meeting them of what are we going to spend years learning or weeks in person together, and sometimes you know I wouldn't be correct, or I would think we needed to lean simpler. But somebody actually was very capable, and we got stuck, and so sometimes we'd have to backtrack to learn something else, and that felt like I wasn't being good steward of other people's time and effort. So with Studio, you know, it's not a totally encapsulated experience. It can turn on with the computer and turn the computer off, and somebody never leaves it. I think that's going to be a lot of users, but others are just going to launch it from the desktop and poke around, and then go back to using Windows again, and you're kind of never stuck in either lane. Every year, I do a presentation, and I get to talk with Dave Pinto, Fun with Typeability, and we get to talk about our two applications together. And I always say in that I see us our products as complementary, not competitive. I think the more choice everybody can be offering end users, the better off everyone's going to be. If there's people that hop on with Accessibyte and they find a different tool is better, I want them to use it. There's times I'll get an email from somebody and they'll recommend, you know, a competing application because it sounds like it's a better approach for that person, so yeah, I'm behind you. Choice is a very powerful thing.

R Rob Mineault 44:08

We want to talk about AI. Where do you fall as a developer? Where's where does AI sort of fall into your roadmap, or where is it on your radar in terms of developing something for users?

J Joe Jorgensen 44:27

Yeah, that's a good question, and it's something that is it's such an interesting thing because it's moving so quickly right now, and we have kind of like competing allotments for it or desire. So a lot of like government agencies or schools they don't want any AI in the software, so gotta be careful with that. But it's a great tool and it makes things move very smoothly for people. So some integration of that is necessary. I can say the Accessibyte. Learning and online apps, they do not integrate with AI in any way. No user data touches AI at all, and that is a choice. And it's probably going to remain that way forever because these specific apps-they don't need it. They are-they're very good at what they do as being like an instructional tool. But let's look at something like Accessibyte Studio, where somebody might be reading and writing emails. AI can certainly help with that. That's where there is a path forward with Accessibyte integrating AI. Got some interesting ideas coming with that. AI is not yet in Studio, but it is actively being worked on, and I don't want to speak to it too specifically because, like I said, with all these things, there's some decisions coming, and I got it in the hands of enough people to kind of really let it let it let it come together naturally. But I can say there will definitely be some some ways that AI will ease some of the some of the processes within within Accessibite Studio, while also Accessibite is making sure is is good with user data and and policies and things like schools by not incorporating it incorporating it into the apps that the younger students are using,

R Rob Mineault 46:23

Well, and I feel like AI in terms of sort of the broader assistive technology field. I mean, I think that there's there's a lot of potential there. I I think that within assistive technology in general, I think AI is is probably the most exciting thing to happen for quite a while.

J Joe Jorgensen 46:44

Yeah, I think AI is going to be like a reckoning when it comes to technology, and I think we're in it because now all of a sudden it's very approachable to far more people than before. The barrier of entry is is very low now. You can like vibe code an app and make a custom tool that's going to do what you need it to do. Applying that to like accessibility, like there's so many so many things that we're going to find. I also think being able to to wrangle that and manage that on like a scalable level, and ensure there's like different like protections and things in place as where some of the existing companies will will find a lot of their work being is kind of ushering some of this stuff along. You know, it's like it's like the App Store on iPhone. Like when the App Store first launched, it was like hard to get an app into the App Store. Like it had to be approved. They still got to be approved, but back then it was a little more difficult. Nowadays, I don't know what sort of approval process other than like making sure it's like secure, meet some bare standards. But there's like a billion of everything. Well, I don't know. There's probably even there's a couple people using some of these billion things. It's useful to them. It's good that it exists. I think AI is going to give us a whole lot of that because people will be building the app that they need for themselves and getting it to other people that use it too.

R

Rob Mineault 48:15

Yeah, I would agree with that. That barrier to to actually build a product that that you or people that around you really need, yeah, that barrier is getting real low, and and I think that you know the potential there is that yeah we're we're actually going to see hopefully a huge influx of of new products, actually made for the community instead of, you know, waiting for for somebody out there, some startup somewhere to decide that you know they're gonna they're gonna develop new like whatever screen reader. Yeah, I'm excited to to see where where things go in that sense.

J

Joe Jorgensen 48:59

Yeah, me too. I think there's going to be an upward flow from a lot of that, where a lot of these like unique niche needs that get covered or just ideas will like exist in like the small individual spaces. But you know, big players are going to see that and be like, oh, well, here's how we can apply a slightly different version of that to help you know a million different people, so that's going to be like a good thing. Like, even look at this podcast. What would it have taken for us to have this conversation 50 years ago?

R

Rob Mineault 49:29

Yeah, we would need,

J

Joe Jorgensen 49:30

We need a big old radio tower and all sorts of things.

R

Rob Mineault 49:34

That's right.

J

Joe Jorgensen 49:35

You know, I'm in my home office right now with a pair of headphones on. It's not too difficult.

 Rob Mineault 49:41
Right.

 Joe Jorgensen 49:42
So yeah, I think ease ease of tech, ease of use with all this stuff, and lower barrier of entry, we're all going to benefit.

 Rob Mineault 49:48
Yep. Hopefully, if if they don't wipe out humanity, which please don't. Please don't.

 Joe Jorgensen 49:54
That's why I'm very polite whenever I'm talking to AI.

 Rob Mineault 49:58
Yeah, me too. Exactly.

 Joe Jorgensen 49:59
They'll remember us.

 Lis Malone 50:01
They're gonna take out the weak ones first. Bye, Rob.

 Rob Mineault 50:04
Yo, doh. Hey, listen. I'm very nice to my to ChatGPT. It's gonna it's gonna have mercy.

 Joe Jorgensen 50:14
A merciful being.

 Rob Mineault 50:15
Yeah. Although you know, it's funny. Not going too much in the weeds, and I know we're running late, anyways. But I watched a very interesting YouTube interview with one of these AI guys, and they were saying that I guess the general consensus is that if if AI does wipe out humanity, it's not really because they're angry at us. It's more just going to be we're just going to be like sort of collateral damage.

 Steve Barclay 50:38
They're need a lot of cooling, and we're we're warming the globe.

 Rob Mineault 50:41
Yeah, exactly. They don't really care about us one way or the other.

 Lis Malone 50:46
We're using up all the water they need to cool off their data centers. That's

 Rob Mineault 50:50
Right. Especially you, Lis with all your boob sweat.

 Lis Malone 50:54
Well, well, listen. I'm the one who's supplying it. I'm recycling the water, so

 Rob Mineault 51:00
And there we go..

 Lis Malone 51:03
Listen, my humidity titty. My can't even say it now.

 Steve Barclay 51:09
Humidititties

 Lis Malone 51:10
Humidititties may save humanity.

 Rob Mineault 51:16
Well, one can hope.

 Lis Malone 51:18
It better be nice to me now.

 Rob Mineault 51:19
Yeah, I guess so. Joe, was there anything we missed that that you want to you want to still talk about?

J Joe Jorgensen 51:25

You know, one thing I would point out from a product standpoint is, Accessbyte has just as of like yesterday released some more like Teacher Tools on our website that are free to use for doing some quick assessments like, like like a readability assessment for font sizes and styles and all that. One for testing listening to text-to-speech voices. There's a little web playground and a few more coming. That's the only product side thing that we didn't get to. But you know, one thing that this came up in our first run before Groundhog's Day, which I should mention was filmed right around here in a town called Woodstock, Illinois. They have Groundhog's Day like fest every year. It's kind of cool. Steve, you had said something about being a long time supplier. I just wanted to like bring it back to that and say, you know, I just really appreciate that we get to have this conversation, and we've all just, you know, we've known each other for a long time, and I certainly appreciate the connection and the longevity there. It's worth noting.

S Steve Barclay 52:39

Yeah, and and and I appreciate you and the fact that you're, you know, moving forward with these terrific tools and expanding them out to to serve broader community.

R Rob Mineault 52:48

Well, that's a great segue. So, if people are interested in Accessibyte, any of the products that that we've talked about, where the heck can they find you?

J Joe Jorgensen 52:57

I think they should talk to talk to you guys. But you go to the Accessbyte website. It's like accessible, but with a computer byte at the end. So A C C E S S I B Y T E. When I came up with that name, I didn't realize how long it would be to spell all the time. But here we are. So just go to the Accessbyte website. There's free trials, there's info on everything, and there's a contact form, and I will reply to each of those specifically and individually. So, you know, there's not a lot of gap between who's making these tools and and who's using it. So, yeah, go to the Accessibyte website or you know follow on socials. Facebook is the big one.

R Rob Mineault 53:41

And Steve, if they want, if they if they want to come to you and check out Accessibyte, where where can they find Canadian Assistive Technology?

S

Steve Barclay 53:51

As always, at canasstech.com, and I will spell that out as well. It's c a n a s s t e c h.com, and yes, that is 2s's in a row, and yes, that is what you sit on. People are always trying to correct it. It's like you can't possibly have put ass in the middle of his URL, but but I did. So there you go.

R

Rob Mineault 54:15

That's right. Yeah. Speaking of that, I mean that was the that's what that was your problem, right? When you were building the the company is like spelling out Canadianassistivetechology.com like that would just been way too long.

S

Steve Barclay 54:28

Yeah way way too long. And C A T you know the the Caterpillar tractor folks already had the corner on that one, so that was that was out of the question. And and then I looked at all the various permutations of Canadian Assistive Technology and how I might put them together. And but then at this time, you know, Aroga had gone bankrupt. I was putting my ass back into assistive technology, so there you know it made sense at the time.

J

Joe Jorgensen 54:56

Right, you picked the funniest one. Very good.

S

Steve Barclay 55:01

My hope is it's memorable.

R

Rob Mineault 55:03

Yes.

S

Steve Barclay 55:04

Yeah. Oh

 Joe Jorgensen 55:05
yeah, I think so.

 Rob Mineault 55:08
Although I don't know, maybe we'll have to get a subdomain humiditties.com

 Steve Barclay 55:12
That's right. Actually,

 Rob Mineault 55:14
I don't even know how to spell that. There's too many T's in that. And humidity. Yeah.

 Lis Malone 55:21
That would be the titty version of Mississippi.

 Rob Mineault 55:24
Sorry.

 Lis Malone 55:26
Just trying to spell it, like you know. Oh, you guys don't. Oh, that's right. You guys are Canadian. I keep forgetting. You're like, we don't get the joke, the Mississippi joke. Never mind.

 Steve Barclay 55:36
M I S S I P P I? Yeah.

L Lis Malone 55:38
Oh yeah, yeah.

R Rob Mineault 55:39
Yeah, we get it. Only the Canadian

S Steve Barclay 55:41
version is M I S S I S S A U G A.

R Rob Mineault 55:45
That's right. Which is Mississauga.

L Lis Malone 55:51
Okay. Not the same ring to it.

R Rob Mineault 55:56
Well, listen, we you took Lake Ontario from us, damn it.

L Lis Malone 56:04
You mean Lake of America?

S Steve Barclay 56:04
Whatever

 Rob Mineault 56:10
See at least we can laugh about it.

 Lis Malone 56:13
And the Gulf of America.

 Rob Mineault 56:14
Yeah, I know. Listen, you guys are expanding the of America brand. You got to go to space now.
Maybe just rename the moon.

 Lis Malone 56:25
The moon of America. Yeah, sure.

 Rob Mineault 56:28
Why not? Why the heck not?

 Lis Malone 56:31
Somehow they're going to put the Trump logo on there.

 Rob Mineault 56:34
Oh, believe me, if they could figure that out.

 Lis Malone 56:37
Oh, I know.

R Rob Mineault 56:38
He's doing it next.

S Steve Barclay 56:39
You can't do that. I don't want the moon to go bankrupt.

R Rob Mineault 56:44
Okay. Anyways, we're going way in the weeds. We have to let Joe get on with his life and release him. So, Joe, thank you so much for coming on. Sorry we kept you late, and that that Lis forgot to start the recording.

L Lis Malone 57:01
Bad Lis

R Rob Mineault 57:02
Bad bad.

J Joe Jorgensen 57:06
I really appreciate you guys having me on. It was a fun talk, and I definitely appreciate you know diving in with some of these questions that you know go a little little deeper, and you know people who really know the stuff. So yeah, it's been fun.

R Rob Mineault 57:19
Ah, thank you. And listen, come back anytime you come up with something new. We're happy to have you back on and talk about it.

 Joe Jorgensen 57:28
Yeah, it sounds great.

 Rob Mineault 57:30
All right. Well, listen. Thanks. Keep up the good work. And yeah, we'll stay in touch.

 Joe Jorgensen 57:34
Yeah, sounds good. Bye, guys.

 Rob Mineault 57:36
All right. See you, Joe.

 Lis Malone 57:37
Bye, Joe.

 Rob Mineault 57:39
What a great guy, and you know, I I really do feel like we need more guys like that who have a lot of experience working in the community before they start developing a product or a piece of software because I think it really makes all the difference. It just really makes the whatever they're making so much more valuable.

 Steve Barclay 58:09
Yeah, yeah, for sure. The the lived experience there, the you know working hand in hand with the clients, it it makes all the difference for you know the direction that he's taking his product and you know the what what he's trying to do with it, you know. We we see a lot of cases where you know somebody will come to us and say, "Oh, you know, we're we're doing a university project. We want to develop X, Y, and Z. And it's like, okay, well, X, Y, and Z have already been developed; they were abject failures. So, but you go for it. Did you talk to anybody about this?

R

Rob Mineault 58:40

That's right. This is where that's where you get haptic shoes.

S

Steve Barclay 58:43

That's right.

R

Rob Mineault 58:46

Right. I mean, well-meaning they mean well, but they just really just don't get it.

S

Steve Barclay 58:52

Yeah.

R

Rob Mineault 58:53

I do really love the idea of by the Studio piece because and I'm sure you probably run into this a lot too. If you get older folks that are that are losing their vision, that's exactly something that they need. They can't relearn how to use a computer with something like JAWS. Like that's just not realistic for somebody who's you know like 77 and they've they've lost their vision, but they still want to be able to do stuff on on their on their on their laptop, right? They want to still be able to look up recipes or listen to podcasts, whatever, and previously there there really just wasn't and and a simplified option like something like Studio offers.

S

Steve Barclay 59:51

Yeah, the the go-to answer I think for a lot of a lot of families when they've got somebody you know older who's losing their vision is to say, oh well, we'll get them an iPad, you know, and because iPads got all this accessibility stuff, it's got large print, it's got speech output, it's got all this. Well, then they got to learn how to use the bloody thing, and it's multiple gestures. It's you know, it's you know, three finger this, two finger that, you know, that's that's a lot of a learning curve to take on versus arrow up, arrow down, and enter. You know, so yeah, it it fills a really great niche, and I really think it's underutilized.

R

Rob Mineault 1:00:30

Yeah, and I think that that the you know the person Joe is, the fact that he had you know teaching experience, any outside rehab experience, I really think that that really informs that type of a mindset when he when he was developing it, and I think that that's really unique in the industry. I mean you sort of have better insight into this, but I don't know of anything else like Accessibyte around.

S

Steve Barclay 1:00:59

There is a a Dolphin product that is along a similar vein. I hesitate to say that they're the same, though. But it's the Dolphin Guide is is meant to be a simplified way of accessing a computer as well. But it's not it's not very well known in Canada. It's only sold through one one distributor in Canada, and they don't really take it out anywhere past Ontario.

R

Rob Mineault 1:01:31

We should get out of here so that we can get on with our lives because it's yeah, we ran really late.

S

Steve Barclay 1:01:39

I gotta go cook a flounder.

R

Rob Mineault 1:01:40

Clearly, I don't know what that's a euphemism for, but whatever. Okay,

S

Steve Barclay 1:01:46

It means I'm going to go cook a fish.

R

Rob Mineault 1:01:47

Hey, where can people find us, Mr. Steve?

S Steve Barclay 1:01:54
Well, if they wanted to email us, they could email us at cowbell@atbanter.com.

L Lis Malone 1:02:04
I guess you want to know where they could find us on the web, right, Rob?

R Rob Mineault 1:02:07
Yeah, I do. You're right. Read my mind.

L Lis Malone 1:02:11
Yeah, spooky. Well, if they cared to do so, they can find us at atbanter.com.

R Rob Mineault 1:02:19
Hey, and they can also find us on some social media if they wanted to do that, or I think we're on Facebook. And yeah. All right, that is going to about do it for us this week. Big thanks, of course, to Joe for joining us, and we will see everybody next time.

S Steve Barclay 1:02:48
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 at 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.