**Accessibility Insights with Sarah Herrlinger of Apple**

**Transcript 16 February 2021**

Annie Mannion:

So hello everyone and welcome to the

eighth session now in our accessibility

insights series

where Abilitynet's head of inclusion

Robin Christopherson hosts a monthly

online chat

with individuals who are each working to

improve digital accessibility and

digital inclusion

and this month he's chatting to Sarah

Herrlinger who is

senior director of global accessibility

policy and initiatives at apple

i'm annie mannion and i'm Digital

Communications Manager at Abilitynet and

i'll be

running you through today's session so

just to go through a few bits of

housekeeping

and we've got slides available at

slideshare.net and

you can also find them on our website at

abilitynet.org.uk/insights-apple and if you have any technical issues

and you need to leave early

don't worry you'll receive an email in a

couple of days time

with the recording the transcript and

the slides

and depending on how you joined the

webinar you'll find a q

a window to ask questions and

if you want to ask sarah or robin any

questions please do drop those into the

q and a area and they will answer those after

today's session in a follow-up blog

on our website and that will be at

/insights-apple as well and then and finally we

also have a feedback page you'll be

directed to at the end

um which invites you to tell us about

any future topics you'd like

us to cover in our webinar um series so

please do

let us know so now over to robin and

sarah

Robin: Brilliant thank you Annie thank you so

much so yes a huge

welcome to Sarah for taking some time

out of what is i'm sure a hugely busy

schedule to talk to us about apple

and everything that's going on man it's

been a busy time but before we get into

that

we always start off these sessions by

asking you

what beverage you've got what drink you

have to help you get through this ordeal

so i've got a cup of tea

and i've got a horrible feeling this is

a mug with the union jack on

which i don't know why i picked that

one because i'm super depressed about

brexit but anyway

so have you got a beverage to help

you get through

Sarah: I do, I will admit coffee is my vice

I came to it late in life but

once i did i did so with a vengeance so

I’m quite the coffee drinker

Robin: Brilliant

great so thank you very much indeed

for

joining us. So as i alluded to a moment

ago it has been a very very busy time

for apple 2020 and

in particular you know the last quarter

maybe of 2020 but the whole of the year

really has been massively busy

for apple do you want to give us some uh

you know get the ball rolling by giving

us some

some personal highlights or what you

think uh you know

the particular things that um have been

exciting in recent months

at Apple sure yeah

2020 was quite a year for us we had a

lot that went on

and i think it starts off with just

some amazing

hardware that was delivered over the

course of the year

you know i think amongst those that

are beloved by

all of the many communities is the

iphone and

this year with the iphone 12 lineup

quite a great mix of

products um you know starting with the

mini

as a new you know the iphone 12 mini is

a

smaller device along the same lines as

the se

so really good for fitting in smaller

hands

i know within the blind community uh

they often don't need the larger real

estate of some of the bigger devices so

one that is really nice and compact and

easy to use

also last year with the

the the iphone se the second

generation that came out

and um with that one it gives the option

in that same

sort of basic size of one with touch

id

and one with face id so depending on

what your

needs are or what your preferences are

an option for both

but then also the iphone

12 and then getting into the pro

lineup

of the iphone 12 pro and iphone 12 pro

max um also two

amazing uh devices um

i think that one of the keys there is

with the addition of lidar

in those two devices it adds some

really interesting functionality then

i'll talk about a little bit

more later because i wanted to focus on

hardware at this point

but also you know we had some

great additions to the mac lineup

now with the new generation of

the latest macbook air the 13-inch

macbook pro

and the mac mini all powered by the

m1 chip which is our our own

proprietary you know breakthrough system

on a chip designed specifically for the

mac

this just gives better performance um

better speed just a lot of great things

that make these m1 max

just a fabulous addition for 2020.

um also you know we delivered the new

homepod mini

um which is just uh an awesome

new way to create a personalized and

deeply integrated experience for

those who have iphone and and those with

iphone and apple watch

it's also got the great new intercom

feature

which is just a fabulous way to be able

to connect and communicate with

others throughout your household or even

those who

are not in the same building that have

gone out

in the world which you know for those

who

just want to communicate with anyone in

their vicinity and make sure that

everyone knows everyone is safe and good

and needs are met

um great way to have that intercom on

there

also airpods max

those were were brought out just at the

very end

of 2020 and i think that's a great

addition to the airpods family for those

who

prefer that kind of over ear

headphone experience

the quality the sound quality

and just the

the performance of them is really

fantastic so

it has been a lot going on with

hardware

and i should actually also mention um we

did a

a huge update to the accessibility

website

uh at the end of 2020 as well so for

anyone who wants to find out more about

our products and our accessibility

features

we did this really just to make it

easier for all of our users to discover

and learn more about the accessibility

benefits that are available in all of

our products

and so i think this gives a just a quick

simple easy way to know what features

are there what products they're

available on

and then also drop you into some um

great kind of how-to's and and uh things

to just sort of get you started and

learn how to use them and then to dive

deeper on them

so we doesn't we stay creative videos

on in the accessibility center really

really good yeah

thank you yeah thank you very much you

mentioned the m1 i mean i'm talking to

you here on a 16-inch macbook

i my daily driver is a mac mini and i'm

really really excited to get my hands on

an m1 some apple silicon that will

happen sooner or later i'm twisting

arms as we speak and you mentioned the

you know the integration with the apple

watch when it comes to the homepod mini

the thing that i'm particularly

excited about is apple fitness plus

and the integration with the apple watch

because i think a lot of people are

going to be

you know focusing on fitness with the

new year

that's kind of a perennial new year's

resolution isn't it so i think that's

brilliant

with the really good descriptions of

you know the yoga positions or whatever

the particular workout exercise

is so that's that's brilliant news

for people that don't necessarily want

to go out and

you know go to gyms and have one-to-one

fitness instruction

so yeah apple fitness plus as well it's

been really busy here hasn't it

yep no rest for the weary we got a lot

going on

so let's broaden it out a bit and

i want to sort of take your mind back to

even say the last decade

because so much has happened i mean you

know you've just mentioned what the last

few months

have u you know the changes that we've

seen there particularly in hardware but

also

in services and updates to software etc

we're gonna look ahead soon but you

know looking back

over the decade you know what what sort

of

big changes do you see either within

apple

or within the kind of inclusion arena

more broadly what's your kind of big

takeaways

from the last decade yeah well i think

the biggest thing i would say that i

i feel like i've

i've seen or really appreciated

is being able to take accessibility out

of the fringes

and normalize it into consumer products

which has really been

the core of what we've tried to do you

know at apple

we've included accessibility in

basically everything that we've done

across the line whatever products we

make we really try and think about how

anyone who would want to use them has

the opportunity to do so

and so you know i think for us we try to

show that focusing on accessible

design ucould enable some of the most

popular consumer products ever to also

serve as

really powerful assistive technology

you know i think when you look back at

you know i guess really over the last

decade and a year so

2009 when we came out with voice over on

ios it was the first time

that someone had made a touchscreen

consumer product

accessible for the blind community

and then since then

everything we've done in terms of

supporting physical motor

and you know just really building in all

of these

assistive technologies so that right out

of the box

it's available for you for whatever

you want to do

you know it's it's that kind of

customization

that goes beyond just a couple of

of you know here's an accessibility

feature and that's it it's how do we

make sure that

every person who wants to use the device

the way that they want to

has the opportunity to do so and i think

that

really did pull accessibility from being

single-use devices additional

things both in terms of purchases and

just extra

stuff that you had to carry or use

into just making people see basic

consumer products as

something that level the playing field

something that you know mitigates

social stigma that everyone can use

that you know your tech support could

just as easily be a family member

who was a member of the blind community

or someone who's a quadriplegic or

someone in the deaf community or it

doesn't matter because they're all using

the same device and whoever is the one

who's best at it

can just be the person who you know

helps the family or whatever it might be

it just it becomes easy

absolutely the mainstreaming of

inclusion

as you say you know has been massive the

products that i use on a daily basis are

completely different

from 10 years ago i don't think there's

any specialist ones at all

i don't own any specialist products

anymore and

the prioritization that apple have

always given to inclusion

means that i've always been confident

that when the next big thing came out

you know every single hardware

announcement not just last year but you

know

in the last decade i've always been

confident that we're going to be

able to you know keep with the

with the latest and greatest and you

know be part of that kind of ongoing

party of tech so it's been absolutely

brilliant

so the next question is about how within

apple or maybe more broadly as well you

know that kind of

agenda has been pushed forward

i just want to mention about how

brilliant it was in ios 13 i think it

was bringing accessibility out from

under

general because that just said volumes

you know everybody's different nobody

should really settle for a

vanilla out of the box experience you

know we all are different shapes and

sizes

we slide up and down the impairment

scale on an hourly basis as we use our

phones in different extreme environments

and somebody in a recent webinar that i

was listening to said that

if you do a mind map or you know spider

diagram of all the

settings within the settings app in ios

accessibility will actually be more than

half

of the whole settings you know app

so all the options within accessibility

are hugely powerful so people ignore

those

at their peril but yeah so how have you

seen that change within apple and how

has that kind of continued to be

prioritized over the recent years

yeah well i think one of the

the core things for us that has helped

us to be able to achieve that is the

fact that

we have always seen accessibility

as one of our core corporate values and

i think

you know rather than having that just be

it

element of you know corporate social

responsibility

it truly is a value that's reflected

in all of our fundamental design

you know for everyone at apple whether

their title has accessibility in it or

not

we strive to ensure that anyone

in any role at apple understands that

accessibility is important to us

and treating customers with disabilities

with dignity and respect

is pivotal to who we are as people

and so you know the more that we have

been able to

to push that within our own

walls to you know educate our own

employees on what we're building what's

in there and what they can be using

regardless of whether they self-identify

as having a disability or not you know

to your point there are so many amazing

features

within the accessibility settings that

can be

super helpful to you throughout your day

even if that's

you know your use of that is

productivity or

communication and collaboration rather

than a specific

you know you may not be a part of the

community for which it was intended

it can still be a really powerful tool

for you so

we always work to educate our own

employees

and make them proud of the work that

we're doing but then also

internalize that into everything that

they do

and i think then what comes out of that

is a lot of the innovation around what

we're doing because by getting every

employee

to think about it i think one of the

things that sets us apart is

that because we build all of our own

hardware software and operating systems

we can really not just infuse

accessibility across all of them but

have these amazing teams with their

expertise

be coming to us to say we have a great

idea we have a really cool thing we're

working on

how do you think that might benefit the

community and i think

as a great example of this um

when you think about lidar which i

mentioned was in the

new iphone 12 pro and iphone 12 pro max

the the inclusion of the lidar scanner

in the sort of camera element of the

device means that now we can do a lot

more for individuals who are blind in

low vision

now as a part of magnifier a couple of

things have been improved

one of which is that you can now

have better awareness of what's in front

of you

the through magnifier the iphone will

describe to you

you know people objects and other

environmental elements

as they appear in the magnifier's

viewfinder and that's working

dynamically so for example as you're

walking down the street being able to

give you information even as the

the elements around you change but

another really great one we did was add

in a feature called people detection

which as it sort of

as the name suggests it uh detects

any person in close proximity to

you as you once again move through space

and notifies the user both

or through a number of different ways

with

you know a a over sound out

of what it is where they are also

giving you a tone that it says if

someone enters your threshold

area vibrations and then

a visual readout of where someone

is in proximity to you so that

you know you can have a better

understanding as you move through space

as to where others are

around you and i think this

you know certainly has great

applicability

today as we are currently living

in a an unprecedented time where

obviously knowing where people are

around you and making sure that you're

able to

properly social distance is

incredibly important

but really this is a feature that we

started working on

long before 2020 became 2020

and we did it really to

just help with even some of the more

mundane things in life

like you know shopping or commuting

where we had u some of our

teammates some of our employees who are

blind who came in and said

you know one of the things i still

struggle with is

for example if i'm standing in a line

it's

i don't know whether the person in front

of me has moved forward so how can i

better have an

understanding of just where i am in

relation to other people

and then when all of 2020 happened we

we worked to make sure that we got this

out in a timely manner so that we could

use it not just for those reasons but

for some of the ones that have come up

this year as a

huge priority yeah absolutely and

you know the the kind of um go-to way of

of seeking assistance pre-covered was to

borrow somebody's elbow

to take you from the ticket barrier to

the train

carriage or to help you advance in a

queue

but i don't know about over there but

here in the uk that's the elbow that

people are told to cough into

if they haven't got a tissue so that's

not good

so something like this was hugely

timely

so yeah absolutely and intelligently you

know the people detection one locks onto

the kind of the nearest person so it'll

jump from one person to another in a

quite a you know changing crowd you know

or situation where people are coming and

going and passing you by in different

directions and stuff so it's really

really useful so what about um covid and

the pandemic

more broadly what has it um brought to

the fore or

changed focus on within apple or is it

just

the fact that because you were already

on that page

prioritizing inclusion that you were

just really well

positioned to be able to give people

what they needed

and you know you're already thinking

about what inclusion was like

and helping people in really diverse

situations so

anything to say on how covid kind of

changed how things were

prioritized or done within apple

yeah well i think um you know thankfully

i

am very

well i guess i would say i'm very

thankful at the fact that

we have always prioritized this so in

coming into a year like this

i think we were we were well

positioned with a lot of features

that are beneficial but i think

even with that being said given

no one could have known you know the

world we live in right now

i think it still made us realize even

more

how much technology is important to

enabling independence

you know it's really been

the key to well to both independence but

also to connection

you know to the fact that we are all in

one form or another isolated whether

that be

in bubbles or alone and um i think we

are relying

on technology so much more than we

ever have

in order to be able to exist through the

course of this

experience and so making sure

for you know from our perspective that

we build technology that

supports that across the board i think

is really just been incredibly

important

and interesting for us to even note what

you know the stories that we hear of

people

how they're using our technology and

what it's done

i think one of the other things i find

interesting

and really you know good is i think more

people are starting to realize

that in a world like this

and when you are working from home and

you are relying on technology when that

technology is made to be accessible it

really

does level the playing field for people

so i am hopeful that

in terms of things like employment

and connection that people will learn

from this and um begin to give more

opportunity

absolutely because a lot of people who

had support around them

either in the workplace or you know a

friends or family support network

are having to have had to go it alone

for much of 2020

so to have devices that are truly

inclusive

and uh you know giving you that extra

bit of help perhaps to bridge the gap

where maybe the the applications or the

apps that

you need to use solo that you might have

had some support with otherwise

have been made more inclusive so

you know in and ios 14 recognition you

know screen recognition

things that are built in that will

cleverly you know

in a smart way interpret what's going on

on an app that might not be 100

accessible gives people that

independence so yeah you guys have been

busy

in recent years during coverage

certainly and yes voice over recognition

that's another great one to bring up

thank you

yeah that's been one i think

particularly the screen recognition part

that has great applicability as you said

you know our goal is always that we

want developers to make their apps

accessible because clearly even with

screen recognition

they're going to do a better job than we

could because they know exactly what

they want each element to be

exp or how they want it experienced by

someone

but we also you know believe

that everyone should have access to apps

and as much as we can help

with bringing more of that information

forward

we want to do it so that was another

big and wonderful project that we took

on over the course of 2020

and leading up to it certainly to really

use machine learning and ai

as a way to build out just

some massive models of

screen elements so that we can do a

much better job

of just through machine learning on

device

so not going up to the cloud but just

on your device itself being able to

better understand you know what's a

button what's a slider

what's uh any of the elements that might

be in an app so that it just

really makes a lot of apps that were

otherwise

largely inaccessible something that can

be very usable

by the community now yeah and this is

where developers for whatever reason

didn't

kind of do the the accessibility

adjustments that

they are guided to do when developing

apps there are apps out there that have

always been problematic but now

in large part you know that that extra

level of intelligence has made them

really really usable and so you know it

can make all the difference when you

know in a business critical situation to

be able to use a particular application

say

but it also adds a lot of delight so for

the very first time i'm getting

all people's user profile images uh

described to me in social media apps for

example

or messaging apps so i now know what

everybody looks like which is really

really cool

so very quickly because we're running

out of time just looking ahead

do you think ai is where it's going to

be at in the next decade or have you got

other ideas about what the big change is

coming up

might be yeah

you know we don't oh we don't really

talk about

what we're working on next but i think

you know whether it be ai uh

or other areas i think the big thing

that i see is just

by having added accessibility in and

leveling that playing field

it means that we're not

focusing we don't need to focus as much

on building out the fundamental

assistive technology

and we can focus on using

all of the cool things that the general

population is using

or is excited about over this next 10

years and figuring out how to

not just make those things accessible

but to use them to our advantage

and so whether it's ai whether it's

you know other forms of machine learning

or or any of these things

lidar you know hardware benefits

whatever they might be

our goal is to figure out how to make

them

just better for our communities

themselves

and these new hardware you know

developments like lidar et cetera

the beautiful thing is that they tend to

get leveraged for the disabled community

right from the early days of their

introduction which is really really good

you know we don't have to

twiddle our thumbs thinking well what

are they going to do with this new thing

so yeah that's really good i think i'm

really excited

about ai and machine learning um

you know to take us to that next level

and you know describing what's around us

give us more access to things that have

been problematic

up till now so yeah brilliant um we're

going to finish off then

with i've loved this conversation by the

way thank you very much

so every month we speak to

a fantastic person like yourself last

month it was Alejandro

Moledo he's policy coordinator at the

european

disability foundation and he had we

always asked them for a comment or

question

to ask the next guest so he said

what is the most positive aspect that

accessibility legislation

has had on apple's work he's very big on

policy

as it suggests in his title say um

have you got a response to Alejandro

yeah i i know Alejandro well so um i

am i'm not surprised it's a great

question um

you know it's an interesting one because

i think legislation has been

an essential part of the journey towards

improving access and equality

for people with disabilities all over

the world i mean certainly it is

incredibly important but i would also

argue that from apple's perspective

because we

consider accessibility to be one of our

core values

we've really always tried not to think

about it as a compliance issue

or one that's really about checking a

set of boxes i mean

when you think about accessibility at

apple we

we actually uh started our first office

of disability in 1985 which was

five years before the americans with

disabilities act came to be

and i think that kind of helps

to illustrate that our our efforts to do

this

are really you know firmly

set in doing the right thing not

necessarily doing just what has been

you know deemed as a piece of

legislation

so for us

i think the the elements that come

up through

legislation are great baseline elements

but i think we always strive to

not just do more but to do the things

that are

best suited on our devices

to make accessibility once again just a

seamless

part of the experience absolutely and

you can certainly tell that

accessibility isn't a compliance

issue within apple it's not a box

ticking exercise

far from it so yeah brilliant

Caroline Casey we're hoping will be next

month's guest

so she's the you know valuable 500

creator founder they're doing a

brilliant job

getting you know global brands

to prioritize accessibility well

disability

in the boardroom and you know the

trustee level

anything that you'd like to pass on

either a comment or a question

to caroline next month

i guess my question for caroline would

be what is the technology

that you relied upon most during

the year of 2020 with all that was

brought on

by covid brilliant question

it might not be apple products but it

might be

but either way yeah i'm sure there'll

be many apple products in there but yeah

that's a brilliant question

really good because disability obviously

is something that

apple does so well in in catering

for people's needs so it may well

feature large

fantastic thank you very much indeed

Sarah

have a brilliant rest of 2021

let's see where we go thank you very

much

same to you yeah brilliant always great

to talk to you robin

likewise thank you so much and we'll

pass back to Annie

to just do a closing bit of housekeeping

thank you

Annie:

yeah thank you so much Sarah and Robin

and there are loads of questions that we

hope to answer

online in the next few days and so

you'll receive an email with the link

and so just to go through a bit more

information that might be of interest to

you

we also run online training sessions on

digital accessibility and you can find

out more

at abilitynet.org dot uk forward slash

training

and you can use an exclusive 10 off

discount code available to

webinar registrants which is abilitynet

webinar 10 which is 1-0

and some of the training courses are

available for roles including

content creators and editors designers

developers

testers project managers and leadership

and also we have some new um courses for

higher and further education

professionals

in 2021 and then and

just to finish up we've also got our

newsletter which you can

hear about the latest announcements in

digital accessibility

we've got our youtube channel and our

podcast

and then we have a suite of

accessibility services to suit your

organization

and then don't forget about our next

webinars at forward slash

webinars and that's all from me so

thanks again

sarah and robin and everyone that's

joined us today and

we'll be in touch with you soon bye

everyone