Speaker 1: Let's talk about accessible television, and we have someone here who knows all about it from Sony's perspective. David Williams is here. David, please introduce yourself to the audience.

David Williams: Yeah. My name is David Williams. I'm divisional director of Sony Home Entertainment and Sound based in Basingstoke in the UK. I'm part of the European TV design team. It's our first year in TechShare. Our guys across the US have been quite active in CSUN. Our Japanese colleagues active in Site World. It's the first time to come to TechShare.

We spent the morning demonstrating the technology of the Android TV or the Bluetooth headphones and we've got really good feedback. Obviously we work within ecosystems of things like Android and it's important then to make sure we engage with all the stakeholders to make sure things work seamlessly, which has been the key theme in the last couple of hours and days.

Speaker 1: It's a very interesting time for television to start becoming of its own in regards to accessibility and coming into its own with this. Let's talk about what Sony has done to make the electronic program guide and all of the functions of the TV accessible.

David Williams: That's right. So within the Android operating system, we have a number of standard accessibility fi features. The two features we demonstrated in TechShare today and tomorrow. One is screen reader where we can read back the text from either electronic program guide, which is obviously something that's been requested from Ofcom in terms of the EPG consultation.

And also text magnification which will highlight text in certain areas of screen. The screen reader also works quite well when you go to home if you're accessing content like Netflix or YouTube. Screen reader works very well in those circumstances.

Speaker 1: So what you've got here is a situation where you can buy a television, a Sony television and you can bring it home and with some initial sited assistance.

David Williams: Yes.

Speaker 1: Get the screen reader up and running and then from that point on, you're able to navigate the EPG, the electronic program guide. You can record programs as well if you attach a hard drive.

David Williams: That's correct.

Speaker 1: We'll talk about that later as well. And as well as that, you're able to navigate the settings menus and all of that, so you've got full control.

David Williams: That's correct. You have full control. I think also with this, the screen reader feature, there's an accessibility shortcut within the Android system, so if you press and hold the mute key for three seconds, you can toggle these features on and off. So if you're in the family environment and somebody needs assistance, others don't, then it's quite easy just to toggle on or off these features.

Speaker 1: That's important, isn't it? And I mean this might sound like an obvious one, but it's important to ask. Audio description is also featured in there as well. You can turn that on or off as well.

David Williams: That's correct. Audio description, you can turn on and off as a standard feature shortcut via the audio key. That's correct.

Speaker 1: Yeah. I think it's important because people don't always understand how all this works, and someone once asked me the question. Okay, so I bought one of these TVs with the accessibility all built-in and I plugged in my Skybox and it wouldn't read anything. Of course, it doesn't work for those devices that are plugged in, does it? It's only on the TV itself.

David Williams: That's correct. So the Skybox will be coming in through HTMI where you have video content. So this is screen reader from content which is native within the TV set or an application within the Android environment.

Speaker 1: Okay. And is this across a wide range of TVs? Is it available to buy now? I mean, where are we with this?

David Williams: It's available to buy now. So Sony launched Android from 2015 so Android's quite an established platform for us. It tends to sit on the mid to high end range. So we have some low end TVs which don't support Android, but from the mid level to high, they all support the Android operating system together with Google Assistant. So you get assistant support as well via voice control.

So we were trying to move to really a hands free operation or both the TVs have voice control on their remotes and certain high end TVs also have far feed microphones. So using those famous words, okay Google, hey Google.

If that's your assistant of choice, then the TVs will respond to your commands and your wake-up messages and it'll give you all the information you need at the start of every day, or before you go to bed.

Robin: So this is where I've woken up. Hi, it's Robin here.

Speaker 1: He doesn't watch television.

David Williams: He doesn't do TV. Hi Robin.

Robin: I literally don't do TV.

Speaker 1: So your job David is to sell him a telly today.

Robin: So what would I ask for? Because you can't probably guarantee that the assistants in the shop will know about the accessibility features necessarily. So yeah, you know, if people wanted this Android based version, what would they need to ask for?

And can you drive everything that we've been talking about from the Google Assistant, or would you need to know your way around the remote control?

David Williams: Okay, so in terms of which model to ask for, if you just ask for Sony Android TV, I believe it's as simple as that. We have a number of model ranges, obviously different segments, different picture features, all your features. But you just ask for Android TV and the assistant should be able to give the appropriate support.

Google Assistant, at the moment everything appears to work as a standard assistant would. The only, the advantage is you don't need the extra equipment, so the TV is set. Well, the TV itself is the microphone. It's the Google interface to the network and the applications. Then you do away with your additional Google Echo and so on.

Robin: Yeah. So could you interface it? Could you use it as the interface for doing a series record, for up and down the volume, for changing channels, that sort of thing?

David Williams: That's right. So we've got, if you want to change input to digital, you want to go to BBC1, you want to go to E4. If you want to play your radio station, play Heart or set volume to 30. All of these controls are working.

I have to say that obviously these ecosystems, we'd like to work with the community to actually confirm which extra commands would be needed and which ones add value.

So we have these down as default, but if there's any extra commands we'd like to work together with the stakeholders and through TechShare, we're asking these questions. What else do you want to find from these products? How can assistants help you in relation to televisions and so on?. We're trying to have those conversations with the various stakeholders here over the next couple of days.

Speaker 1: And of course, the fact is you're here. You're having that conversation and that is brilliant.

David Williams: That's correct.

Speaker 1: But I want to ask you about third party apps. That's always the challenge for a lot of us. Yes, I always describe it like buying a house, but you're only getting access to two rooms in that house and everything else, all the doors are locked and you can't get in. Or at least if you can get in, nothing is available to you.

And what I mean by that is that there you go, I bought my Sony television and I'm very happy with it and I can navigate the EPG and then I go to an app that I've downloaded or that's available on the TV and I go into the app, and I get no feedback at all. I can't use my screen reader to navigate that app.

What can Sony do to try and work with the developers to try and help? We asked this and I asked this question to you and I've asked it to Samsung and I've asked it to other TV manufacturers as well, including Panasonic.

So what is Sony doing to try and meet those third party apps more accessible?

David Williams: So as we are trying to work within this, I mentioned the ecosystem, we're trying to work together with key stakeholders. At least, we need to raise the importance of support for all accessibility features. We're complete in a lot, again we have a lot of apps. We have a lot of functions. We have a lot of features.

We are making extensive user testing and I think obviously from a Sony perspective, we are trying to test and make sure that things are correct and robust, and we are satisfying that the features have worked to a certain level.

But as you mentioned, we knew that apps can launch and change, they can change on a daily, weekly basis. Then we do need to work, I think strongly our ecosystem then. I believe we need to work with preferred partners and make sure at least we can guarantee certain applications working to a high level of high quality and that's what we'd seek to do in future.

So I think again, working with accessible community, if we highlight the apps where we have a high accessible need, not all apps, but then we'd focus to guarantee quality within those apps.

Robin: And the core streaming apps that would deliver the different channel experiences. Are you working with them to make sure that those apps are fully inclusive?

David Williams: The core channel meaning things like Netflix or ...

Robin: Yep.

Speaker 1: Or iPlayer, More4 or My5 or any of those, yeah.

David Williams: At the moment, the Netflix is working well. We're still to work with people like BBC and ITV players and those guys. But Netflix is working well. It's embedded within the TV, same as YouTube and so on. These are working very well with the screen reader function and text magnification.

Speaker 1: Fantastic. Well, David it's great having you on and thank you for telling us about the TVs. I think just one final thing to ask you about and that is of course, and you picked up on this Robin.

But you know it's, you buy the television, you have an issue with it, you go to the store. If it's an accessibility issue, nobody knows what you're talking about. Are there support options available from Sony? Can someone contact the company and get advice if needed?

David Williams: Yes, there are. We've recently launched an accessibility website, so we're trying to become more accessible as a company and reach out and allow easier access to raise such questions.

So if you go to the webpage, if you Google maybe Sony UK or Sony Europe accessibility, it should take the homepage and we've got a dedicated email address. You send an email through to that and we'll definitely be coming back to you with answers.

Speaker 1: David, thanks so much for coming on.

David Williams: You're welcome. Thank you much.