Transcript for Accessibility Insights webinar: Christopher Patnoe of Google, November 2020

Annie Mannion: Hello everyone and welcome to today's

webinar

it's just gone one o'clock so i'm just

going to give everyone a chance to join

and do feel free to drop into the q a

box and say hi

we've disabled the chat feature as we've

discovered it can cause problems for

some people using screen readers

so i can just see a few more of you have

joined so

we're going to start the webinar now so

hello everyone

and welcome to the fifth session 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 this month

robin's chatting to christopher patno

who is head of accessibility programs

and disability inclusion at google

i'm annie manion i'm digital

communications manager at ability net

and i'll be running you through today's

session

so just to go through a few bits of

housekeeping

slides are available at slideshare.net

forward slash abilitynet

and also on our website at

abilitynet.org dot uk

forward slash insights google

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 captioned recording transcripts

and slides

and also and depending on how you joined

the webinar you'll find

a q a window and so

if you want to ask christopher or robin

any questions please do

drop those in the q a area for them to

address which they'll do

after today's session in a follow-up

blog on our website

and then we also have a feedback page

you'll be directed to

at the end which invites you to tell us

about any future topics you'd like us to

cover in our webinars

so please do let us know okay and so now

over to robin and christopher for

today's webinar

Robin Christopherson: thank you annie very much indeed

and an even bigger thank you to

christopher

for joining us giving us some of your

really valuable time

you don't get much bigger in

accessibility in the accessibility world

than christopher patnay thank you so

much for joining us

that's a horrible thought but thank you

i consider myself so some middling

person

well um certainly you know from an

accessibility point of view christa has

been massive

massively high profile um in in the

years that i've known him

and google are doing a fantastic job in

accessibility so maybe there's a

correlation

i don't know maybe we'll find out today

so first of all christopher

i don't know why we always ask this

question but what's your poison what's

your beverage of choice to help you get

through

this ordeal i've just got very boring

tea i think i always have tea actually

i'll have to do better i'll have to up

my game well i i'm meeting you

uh tea for tea i'm using because of

where we are today i'm using my abby

rhodes studio teacup

it is literally the smallest teacup that

i have but i'm drinking a tea from a

restaurant that i used to work at

when i was in university called the good

earth those people don't know i'm a

failed musician so of course

i had to make a living by by waiting on

tables and this is a black tea with

orange and cinnamon and rose hips

it's it's pretty garish but i love it

wow

what instrument did you fail with voice

actually okay

great which is funny since i talk all

the time

yeah well you know you've kind of put it

to good use in another

field um brilliant thanks very much so

first question then um so google as i

alluded to a moment ago

has always prioritized accessibility you

know it's been

um amazing to see how the proliferation

of your services have not meant

that you know accessibility is left

behind or excluded you know

we can come to the party at every

step of the way so i don't if you want

to

comment on on your kind of track record

so far but the main thrust of my

question

is do you think that that ongoing

prioritization

of accessibility of digital inclusion

has um put you in good stead

for the fallout of covid and and all

that that's meant for your customers

yeah that's a good question there was no

way anyone could have predicted what was

going to happen

and and continues to happen on on a

weekly basis it seems like

but it in terms of the work that we've

done with usability

i think it actually put us in a really

good place a really good standing

regards to covid

for example our captions in google made

have been a huge help

for people spending a lot of time in

video calls whether you're deaf or hard

of hearing

or english as a second language it's

really really helpful

another another one that's been recently

released that i that i had a

a neat conversation with a body mind

named matt he's deaf

and he uses a pixel phone and he uses

the new feature called live captions for

calls

and he used it to talk to his son

recently and and a bit of a lovely post

but we spoke last week and he said he

actually spoke with his doctor on the

phone for the first time

and because he could see the captions

coming in he knew what the doctor was

saying

because he's verbal he could speak back

and had a real

live conversation with his doctor and

given how quickly things move the covet

i think

not having to negotiate for a time for

um for someone to take the text someone

to take the call for him

is actually something that is has a huge

potential to make people's lives better

and safer in the time of covid

with projects like euphonia you know if

you have a hearing impairment and

maybe you have speech that's slightly

off

the normal you know slightly out of the

ordinary then

google's technologies are very forgiving

in that regard as well

so it's a it's a really powerful

combination that you've got there

so i mean it is a massive organization

google and

i mean i'm think of abilitynet and the

challenges we have within this miniscule

organization that we are to um

you know keep keep our eye across

everything that we do and make sure that

we do things inclusively

both internally and externally you know

what's your secret or how do you

kind of meet that challenge even halfway

with an organization the size of google

well i think the first thing to think

about is that it's always a journey

the nature of technology and the nature

of people's needs are always evolving

so we may be in good stead today it

things could change tomorrow and

we could have have a challenge so i

don't want anyone to think that we've

got it made and

and we we have it we have it solved

because i think i think it's

everyone's on a different part of the

journey and even within a large

organization different teams won't be on

different parts of the

of that journey but within google i i'm

lucky that accessibility is actually

part of our mission statement

our our for those people who don't know

our mission statement is to take the

world's information and make it

accessible and useful

so that's a good place to start um and

in particular over the past

few years we've really doubled down on

building with people with disabilities

and i think this is a really important

part of making products that really

resonate and and meet the needs

we have an erg called the disability

alliance and

it recently won erg of the year award

from disability in

a group here in the us and

because we have this relationship with

our customers because we have this

relationship with ourselves

it gives us that ability to see what we

need to do it work when making bespoke

products we actually can very easily

reach out and and get honest sincere

feedback whether it's good whether it's

bad

but when building from when building

products

one of the biggest challenges you're

going to have when building any kind of

product

whether it's it's accessibility or not

is schedule and quality

so if you can make the point and create

the culture change in your in your

in your in your company to make

inclusion a core part of

how you build from the very beginning

you really reduce the amount of of

stress and reduce the extra time it

takes at the end to make sure that these

things are impossible

um i i i joke that you want to do it

early and often

you get when you're building something

bespoke for example like our lookout

you we built with people in the

community we both have people who are

blind of low vision

and they had insights that we didn't

have people who were fully

able because it's not our life so when

building with people of building with

people with disabilities you create the

products that's necessary

yeah with lived experiences so and to

what extent

are you are um the structures within

google

set up to try and optimize what you do

from an accessibility point of view

is it about governance is it about

processes and practices

that you know kind of are built into

people's day jobs

or how how does it work within google is

it something that

um is a journey and we're all on

on that journey um do you feel like you

know there's a level of accessibility

maturity

built into google at this stage

i think with a company as big as ours

there are

different organizations that have a

different sense of maturity

because it is as important in terms of

leadership buy-off

if you have a leader who who gets it

it's much easier to have the

conversation and make sure it's part of

the process

when a new leader comes in there's a

re-education and a

reacculturation that needs to happen but

in general i think

we it it is a company mandate

we have to build these things we have to

make them accessible and it's up to each

organization to prioritize and schedule

in to make sure that it happens

but it's something that's expected from

our customers it's something expected

from

from our googlers with disabilities

themselves it's something that we just

expect to do because it's the right

thing to do

it's good business all those reasons why

why we do it

absolutely yeah it's a challenge it's an

ongoing journey but

you know you can tell from what the

products that google produces

that um that that battle that challenge

is being won

or probably on a daily basis so that's

really really good

um so going forward then

let's put google to one side for a

second what do you think from in the

accessibility landscape

is the the future of accessibility you

know is it more about

um ai machine learning um

is it about better you know

mainstreaming of inclusion in devices in

in software

um is it about better tools for

developers

have you got any thoughts in that area i

think

i have plenty let me let me try to make

the atleast a little coherent um

there's two important things that we

need to do one is we need to do a better

job

for regular products not bespoke

products but regular products

because as as people get older their

needs are going to change

and many people even with somebody that

could be considered

a technical disability don't recognize

themselves as being disabled

so they're not going to go to the

settings and find ability settings and

find

large fonts and make those things larger

those kinds of things

we should just do by rote it should be

just a part of the natural development

process for mainstream application

and mainstream experiences they should

just be made better

in terms of the more bespoke and

exciting things

i'm dating myself here but i loved the

tv show called star trek the next

generation

when i was growing up when i was in

college we'd get together in the tv

in the tv room and we would watch it and

jodi laforge for me was a huge

inspiration

and i think those visors as ugly as they

are

this this this beam that goes across

your face that that

that that gave him these super powers

for me that's the future but it's not

the future just for people with

disabilities

but it's an opportunity to up level

everyone and then in terms of this whole

equity versus equality some people need

a little more help to get to that next

level

so here it's the combination of

augmented reality and

machine learning where you have the

ability to create something that makes

everybody better

you have the the contextual awareness of

say glasses or

i don't talk about visors because i

think those are dangerous glasses that

you wear

we now we know where you are we know

where you're looking we know what's

around you

we and and if we do this in a privacy

sensitive way

we could really make someone's life

significantly better then

you overlay things like computer vision

and machine learning and you can provide

more specific details

now you've got the opportunity for

indoor navigation

outdoor navigation you have the

opportunity for

live captions being projected onto a

pair of glasses that you have

these things are these things are the

future it is

it is a when not an if and i'm really

excited to be in a place like google

where we're building the we're building

these building blocks that make that

reality happen

i was really excited when glass first

came out for the you know the first time

around and then

super excited when it kind of re-emerged

and i know that um

organizations are leveraging that

platform now uh envision

ai those guys i know have been working

with you to

do a lot of what you've just been

talking about which is to you know

leverage the full android well the

android based platform that's within

google glass

to provide a really good tailored suite

of experiences that use the sensors the

camera the accelerometer etcetera

in ways that you just described maybe

not quite jordi laforge yet

but uh we'll get there yeah

yeah i'm going to uh predict that that

google will be first to the to the

bionic eye table hopefully anyway

um so talking about futuristic stuff so

waymo which is the um autonomous vehicle

the driverless cars

uh i want to say um section of google

but it's not it's kind of a spun off

company that are all under

the one company alphabet isn't it but so

yeah the

google technologies that are in

driverless vehicles and

you know i don't know how many million

or tens of millions of miles have been

driven completely

autonomously to date but last time i

looked it was several million

um so in phoenix for example you have

a pilot project which has now gone

big time so the driverless taxis

whizzing around phoenix in america

are now open to the public for them to

hail

a ride which i'm really really excited

about

so you know what do you think um

actually this came from twitter this was

a question from twitter

um about driverless vehicles and you

know when

are we likely i mean this is very timely

and it might have been triggered by

you know the waymo um service being

opened up to the public

when are we going to be able to do that

on a street near us you know how

far away from really mature

driverless technology do you think we

are

given what's happened recently between

uber and the cabbies

i'm a little worried to make any kind of

prediction in terms of what could get

what could make the cabbies lives harder

um but one thing i want to clarify

is waymo really isn't the car uh was the

driver

waymo builds the driver that the car

runs

so given the relationship that waymo has

with jaguar

the the the company that the english

company that does these these neat

electric i-paced cars

we're already in a relationship with a

company that could bring it into england

so i think one significant hurdle who

could we partner with that makes sense

that part's done or could be done if the

need is there

the really interesting challenge though

is and we talked about this a moment ago

it's the machine learning

it's it's the ai right now our ais are

changed to the us

and it's a completely different driving

experience than that for people in the

uk

where the size of the road the

expectations the laws

they're all different so these ammo

models that have been retrained

for driving in the uk and that's going

to take significant effort

both in terms of real-world driving on

the streets but also in terms of the

simulation

so these are these are all the things

that would need to happen because

these are the things that would need to

happen before it comes onto the streets

in in the uk

because it has to be safe the moment

someone gets hurt from one of these cars

it's over so this is why the waymo

company has been really really cautious

about driving this out about rolling

this out and making sure that that

happens in a safe way that meets all of

the needs

i have no real clear idea as to when

what i can say is some of the

technological problems we're trying to

solve

like recognizing and seeing through

weather seeing through

fog or rain or snow these are things

that are being worked on that will apply

just as well to the uss to the uk then

the challenge is how do you make it

uk sensitive to the rules and the rights

and the needs of the people of

the uh who are on the streets yeah i

mean

phoenix uh i know it's just one area

that

um a lot of effort has been put in into

mapping the

the streets the environment and it's it

you know

has been recently up until recently in a

kind of a pilot phase

massive data gathering and refining

phase

i just felt like the fact that it had

now been opened up to public hailing

a public service speaks volumes because

it does mean it's ready

for prime time albeit in a in a limited

environment for example in those issues

that you flagged there about

uh delocalizing it is a massive task but

you know the kind of proof of concept

has now been proven

i think yes so yeah that's the really

really interesting bit so brilliant

question

thank you sorry i haven't got a note of

who that's from on twitter but thank you

very much indeed

so kind of in that vein really um and

i have no expectation that you will

answer this question

this first part of the question what you

know other

secret new projects are google working

on at the moment that

are going to be coming out in the future

that will blow us all the way and if you

can't answer that one

uh what are you most excited about

yourself

you know that you're all either working

on or have been working on in in google

all right well i can't actually tell you

anything secret um i'm sorry i'm sorry

um

you can't it can't hurt to try um one

thing i do want to let you know is

about some of the work we're doing in

terms of cognitive impairments because

this is relatively new and i don't know

many people many of your users know

about this work that we're doing

so in in the past year and a half we've

spun up a team and

we internally call it maui here's your

secret the team that's doing our

cognitive impairment is called maui like

the island in hawaii

um and they've and they've been

partnering with

trusted experts around the globe like

like the bda the british

dyslexia association and other experts

and to help us decide what are the kind

of things that we want to solve in the

future

i can't comment on any specific feature

or app but i'm really excited about this

space

let me give you a sense the same team

this maui team

created an app called action blocks and

what it does it makes routine actions

easier

with customizable buttons on your

android home screen

so action blocks can be configured to

speak phrases on your behalf

it can be useful for people who need who

have speech language disorders helping

them to easily communicate

during urgent situations but it could

also

be useful for running commands using the

google assistant

so i i use it i have one that says text

my wife i'm coming home

and has a picture of my wife and i just

click this button and it's done

i also use it for turning off the lights

and these are

just sort of curb cutty kind of

solutions but it is

profoundly impactful for people who have

who have needs

where interacting with the phone is

harder

and last month we even released an

update to this action blocks where

after collaboration with toby dynavox we

added support for pcs symbols

into the app so people who use the aaa

the aac devices they recognize what

these symbols are

the the leap of what does this mean what

does it do has been eliminated because

we're using the same visual language

that they're used to

and we're going to keep on doing this

building with experts building and

testing with people in the community and

until we create something that that

meets the needs of more and more people

that sounds amazing and i'm assuming

that's within an

app on your phone for example it is

yeah and you know that one of the real

powers of google of android is that you

can

almost infinitely customize the the look

and feel of the device you know you can

have

a million different launchers you can

really make the experience um

very personalized so you know this is

within an app and it's

you know extremely um powerful for

people with

aac needs but you know you could really

simplify

their whole phone experience as well for

them navigating around you know much

uh in a really powerful way for people

that have

more um significant needs in this area

so that's

you know really really powerful we're

running out of time

last question or last year thank you so

much um

we'll finish off by flagging something

that we do every time which is that

a previous speaker will pass on either a

comment or a bit of information or a

question

to the next speaker and then we'll ask

you to do the same so last month's brynn

anderson of sainsbury's um

was commenting around his

one-time aspiration that ai would would

kind of solve all the problems of

inaccessibility

and make in inaccessible uis

inclusive um by magic

and that people wouldn't need to do

anything it would all be done on the

user's end

by superb ai bridging the gap and

obviously he doesn't necessarily think

that's

um you know that's not going to happen

there's no silver bullet when it comes

to a.i

but um yeah have you got any comments on

you know what you would see

as being uh you know

that uh how ai might be able to play a

part in

in helping bridge that gap and after

that i'll ask you

about what you have uh comments or

question wise

for our next speaker okay

um i think one of the biggest challenges

we're going to have

to make this this reality that he wants

to see

is its bias in in in the machine

learning algorithms and the data sets

themselves

i mean the algorithms are created by

humans and it's difficult to make sure

that they're truly unbiased

and then there's the data side of the

equation where

if the data we have isn't truly

representative of everyone

there's no way that the algorithm can be

trained

to meet the needs of everyone for

example

a model may assume that a wheelchair

will always move in one direction say

wheels first

so but i know for a fact that some

people will prefer to to push themselves

and and do what

looks like they're going backwards

coming back to the waymo thing

if we don't have a if we don't

understand this the way

any self-driving car not waymo i'm sure

they thought about this but anyone who

hasn't thought about this

could think that the person is going the

wrong direction

so this is the kind of of bias and and

and data

data that we need to have we need to

have something as representative

as as much as anyone as we can um

on the positive side not just to scare

people but you mentioned euphonia a

little bit earlier

and for those people who don't know

euphonia tries to make speech

recognition more robust for people with

with non-typical speech patterns

and we've recently hit a really exciting

milestone a thousand

hours of data so this is because of this

we can make our generic models more

forgiving of

people's different patterns but also and

that this is what people tend to forget

it's now easier for someone who needs

something that is not

possible to be recognized by the the

generic model it makes it much easier

to create a bespoke pattern a bespoke

model for their needs

so dimitri the first person who built

the very first euphonia model i think he

did 30

hours of of sentences and expressions

and things to

train him and and with more data like

this we should be able to

have it be something that happens in 20

minutes again we're not there yet

but imagine having the ability to talk

to your phone and

after 20 minutes of training it knows

exactly what you're saying

for me this is the is the magic of of ai

is when it has the right information to

understand you

and your context in a privacy sensitive

way

this is is that magic bullet that bryn

was talking about

yeah so the real power of ai isn't

necessarily to

sort out the the shortfall of the

developer or the designer

it's to really empower the end user and

you know give them the right tools that

they need so that they can

access the digital world but yep guys

developers

everybody you still need to do your bit

thanks absolutely

absolutely brilliant so very quickly

then um

our next month's speaker is marlin rigg

she's a leading accessibility expert

particularly in law but

you know just generally speaking as well

in norway and norway are doing brilliant

things

in enforcement and shifting the needle

when it comes to

compliance um so yeah have you got any

comments

for marlin off the top of your head

law okay hi marlon um

currently in the u.s we have shall we

say

lacks governmental enforcement in terms

of things like our ada

and infor and digital accessibility but

because of that we're seeing a lot of a

lot more lawsuits brought up by the

individual

in your opinion what's the right balance

of government versus end user

perspectives um is it better to ask the

individual to pursue or sue a company or

is it better to have

the government actively enforce these

things i don't have a clear answer i'd

love to hear what you have to say

brilliant really brilliant we will ask

her

next month christopher thank you so

much really appreciate it hope it's got

your day off to a good start

and uh keep up the good work thank you

very much thank you

it's a pleasure brilliant thanks and

we'll hand back over to annie just to

wrap things up thanks Annie

Annie Mannion: So thanks christopher and thanks

robin

i'm just going to um take you through a

few um

bits of information about um ability.net

and

also we've just had uh loads of

questions that we hope to answer online

in the next few days

um and you'll receive an email with the

link to access them

um just to share some information about

our

accessibility training courses and you

can find out more at

abilitynet.org dot uk forward slash

training

and you can use this exclusive 10 off

discount code

um available to registrants of this

particular webinar which is google

insights

10 the numeric 10. um

then moving on to the next slide and you

can also sign up to our newsletter

and for the latest announcements about

digital accessibility

you could visit our youtube channel and

download our podcast

we also have a suite of accessibility

services and don't forget about our next

webinars which are available

at abilitynet.org dot uk forward slash

webinars

and then finally um coming up soon we

have ability net's

annual accessibility and inclusive

design event which is

from the 17th to the 19th of november

that's techshare pro and speakers

include

google microsoft barclays

sony bdf corporate tech jar do rnib

ebc and many many more and so please

head over to techsharepro.com to book

your tickets

so thank you christopher and robin and

everyone that's joined us

and we'll be in touch with you soon bye

everyone

thank you