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SPEAKERS

Rob Mineault, Pramit, Ryan Fleury

This is the 80 banter podcast, a balanced and entertaining look at assistive technology accessibility and its importance in people's lives. Join Rob Minow, Ryan Fleury, and Steve Barclay as they banter with people around the world about anything and everything regarding assistive technology and the disability community. Now on with the show.

Rob Mineault   00:34

Hey, and welcome to another episode of at banter, banter, banter. It is 2021 This is our very first episode of the year. Happy New Year. Happy New Year, everybody. Hope everybody had a wonderful holiday break.

Ryan Fleury   00:56

That's right, we're looking 2020 in the rearview mirror saying goodbye. Yeah, I have to say there were some positives that came out of 2020. People began to work from home and, you know, I think it's just really opened the eyes of a lot of people to show what can be done when push comes to shove.

Rob Mineault   01:17

You know, there's some definitely some pushing and some shoving. One way of putting it. How was your holiday?

Ryan Fleury   01:27

It was really tiring. I don't know maybe. I think I've been fighting some health issues. But, you know, this week's been the worst so far. But overall, the holidays were fine. We did a bunch of video chats with family and friends. And, you know, Christmas Eve, we did one and then Christmas morning, we did another one and opened presents together with family virtually. And so yeah, we had a lot of fun, played some games.

Rob Mineault   01:58

Yeah, I think a lot of people are in that boat. Like it was somewhat different. You know, and some people for some people. I mean, it was it was radically different, I suppose. But, you know, we got through it. It's fine.

Ryan Fleury   02:08

Yeah, I felt bad for you know, some of our customers, or anybody, I guess, who had to spend it alone who maybe didn't have family that they could Zoom with or, you know, do virtual meetings with .. just kind of strange, strange year.

Rob Mineault   02:23

It was a strange year. But I mean, I think that that's the key to dealing with something like that is just just, you know, chalk it up to this is going to be a weird year. It's gonna be okay. It's just one year out of however many. So yeah, no big deal. So you know, the less of a big deal that you make it the less of a big deal it is. That's, that's my motto. Everybody.

Ryan Fleury   02:44

Motto the show for 2021.

Rob Mineault   02:46

That's right. And on the back of that T shirt. It says "F*** it" . There you go. That's the winning attitude for 2020. That's how we got through it, everybody.

Ryan Fleury 03:04

Got it. It feels Yeah, it feels feels weird to say that even I still it's still a little bit surreal to me that it's 2021 that's what I've been saying to people as well, as you know, it's hard to believe it's been 10 months, 11 months since the pandemic started. And I don't know if I can recall another year that has gone by as quickly as 2020 did. It just seemed to fly by.

Rob Mineault 03:28

Yeah, that's that's funny that you say that? Because I find that too. I find that the year did go by really fast. Like it's sort of a lost year. It is. Yeah,

Ryan Fleury 03:37

they are so preoccupied.

Rob Mineault 03:41

I'm sure that was it. I mean, you know, it's it's kind of hard for it not to go fast. When it's when it's such a shit show. The entire year, you know from Yeah, whatever. Anyways, in any case, it's over. It's gone. We don't want to we don't want to talk. What is 2021? We're not gonna talk about 2020 because we know what we talked about 2020 enough in 2020 is all about 2021.

Ryan Fleury 04:02

Can you say 2021 One More time?

Rob Mineault 04:05

2021. Moving forward, we are moving forward. And speaking of moving forward. What are we doing today?

Ryan Fleury 04:17

Today we are speaking with an Android app developer by the name of Pramit Bhargava, who has a voice control app he has developed named Louis.

Rob Mineault 04:28

So this is and so if I'm understanding this correctly, this is an app that it basically allows you to to operate your mobile device strictly through your voice.

Ryan Fleury   04:38

a specific apps on your mobile device. And he can clarify that as well. So apps like YouTube, Whatsapp, accessing your contacts, making phone calls, all using your voice.

Rob Mineault   04:50

Well, and really those are sort of the baseline essential apps that you that most people use on their mobile device anyways, so that's definitely a Good start.

Ryan Fleury   05:01

Yeah, you know, I actually installed it on my old Android LG G six. And it's it's a little slow on my phone, but my phone, my phone is quite old. But I was able to tell it to do a search for something on YouTube. And I was a ble to pause it and go to the next video and search for videos. And all we're using my voice that works really well.

Rob Mineault   05:22

Oh, really? That's excellent. Yeah, you know what, that's something that's really been missing. I mean, I know that Apple does have a voice control app for your iPhone. And I think you can control most aspects of your phone and Android only in the last couple of weeks, or maybe month released their voice access, as well. This is great. I feel like this is a new leap forward in terms of accessibility, because if you can really unlock the entire power of something like a mobile device through voice only, not only does that open things up for somebody say who is visually impaired, it's really somebody who has physical access issues, that can really be a huge difference as well.

Ryan Fleury   06:00

Yeah, absolutely. Looking forward to talking to him a little bit, seeing kind of where, or what his roadmap is, you know, what apps if he's willing to share coming next year, he's got a great website, it's very well thought out very detailed. It's got some videos about the app and how to use it. And yeah, I'm just excited to have him on.

Rob Mineault 06:23

Yeah, you know, this is what I love about smartphones. And really, like development in general, it's so much easier to have really small development teams coming up with like, really amazing apps, like it used to be where like, in order to create like something like a piece of software, you really needed, like a fairly large development team. And there was a lot to it. Whereas now I feel like in app, app development is almost like a cottage industry, you can have a team of one or two or three people that can really develop a really amazing and innovative app that nobody else has thought of.

Ryan Fleury 07:03

Yeah, and I don't know much at all about programming or code. But I think in the last few years, maybe, I don't know, 5 or 10 years, and Pramit can probably correct me on this. But I think programming languages themselves have become more accessible. There's more tools available to people with disabilities to go and create their own apps.

Rob Mineault 07:22

Yeah, so it's, I feel like it's a real golden age of, of development, you know, especially because everybody has these really powerful platforms, ie, Android, and iOS, that they can use to develop all kinds of things. So yeah, it'll be interesting to talk to him. And I'm interested to hear what his story is. And the background in developing this. What made him want to develop an app like this. At the moment there isn't a lot out there like this.

Ryan Fleury 07:55

Yeah, I don't think so.

Rob Mineault 07:56

So cool. Hey, you know what else it is this week?

Ryan Fleury 08:02

Um, Vispero released some new updates to jaws fusion and ZoomText today?

Rob Mineault 08:09

Oh, that's boring. software updates. You're such a nerd. Ooo, it's on version 2.0 point six

point A.

R Ryan Fleury   08:20
No, I don't get that specific anymore.

R Rob Mineault   08:25
No, what I was referring to is World Braille day is this week. But, of course. When this episode airs, it will have been last week. So hello, future. But, but yeah, it was January 4, World Braille day. It was Louis Braille's birthday. And Louis Braille Of course, being the inventor of the Braille system,

R Ryan Fleury   08:53
It has definitely gained a lot of ground. Everybody I looked at on Twitter yesterday was just Braille, Braille. Braille, Braille. Braille, There was virtual seminars going on on Braille. It was everywhere. It's good to see.

R Rob Mineault   09:04
Yeah, it is good to see. I'm really glad to hear that because I really feel like for the past five, six years, Braille was a little bit on shaky ground with with the advent of screen reading technology sort of becoming a lot more ubiquitous. On on mobile phone platforms, they became a lot more common, you know, Windows built in Narrator into the the operating system. Screen readers were sort of everywhere. And I feel like for a lot of people that sort of screen reading technology, there was a thought that it might replace Braille, but it's that's so misguided.

R Ryan Fleury   09:41
Yeah, I think that's, you know, kind of been an argument for a number of years, but in order to have true literacy, being able to read and write spell words correctly. You know, Braille is the tool for the blind. And I think that debate needs to end because everyone who is partially sighted and is losing will lose their sight over time should start learning it.

R Rob Mineault   10:07
Yeah

R Ryan Fleury 10:08

You know, the sooner the better. Even if it's just a simple alphabet to label stuff in the house, it's totally worth the time and effort it takes.

R Rob Mineault 10:17

Yeah, it's interesting you say that because I think I really agree with that. I think that part of the problem right now is that people don't learn Braille soon enough. And I'm talking about specifically about, say, people who have something, some sort of a degenerative eye condition where they they know for, for a fact that they're, they're going from low vision, and eventually they will be blind. And I feel like a lot for a lot of people, they just don't want to accept that. And they don't want to learn Braille until they actually have to. And, you know, I've heard it time and time, again, from people who are saying that, you know, they really wish that they had learned or started learning Braille earlier than they did, because it would make that transition a lot smoother. But I mean, I get it in a sense, because I know that there's, you know, there's emotions involved, I'm sure that you know, when you have something like an eye condition like that, you know, you you don't want to, you know, you don't want to admit defeat, and you don't want to do something like learn Braille, because it just feels, I don't know, maybe maybe it feels...

R Ryan Fleury 11:24

Well, there's definitely a grieving process, you know, and it takes time to process the fact that a year you are losing your sight, and then B once it's gone, okay, now, what do I do, it's gone. You know, in my case, I lost it instantaneously. So I just throw it into the fire. And, you know, pretty much had no choice. But listening to people talk about when they learn Braille, how they learn Braille, it totally makes so much sense, so much more sense to surround yourself or bear yourself into Braille, whether it's having a mentor who can guide you along the way, or just going for like a four week, eight week, whatever the time period is, course, you know, just diving deep into Braille and really learning it well, because the screen readers are okay, but the same time, they are not going to read your can of soup, you know, they're not gonna read a lot of different items you may have in your house, whether it's for labeling clothing, or stuff in the fridge.

R Rob Mineault 12:32

So one of my New Year's resolutions, and my one of my 2021 goals is to learn Braille.

Ryan Fleury 12:39
Are you serious?

Rob Mineault 12:40
Yeah, yeah, I'm totally gonna do it. I'm going to take the course through Hadley, and yeah, learn how to how to read Braille. Yeah, that would be fun. I thought that was a good 2021 goal. And now when you and Rick, talk about dot eight and dot six, I know what the hell you're talking about. Yeah.

Ryan Fleury 12:59
Nice.

Rob Mineault 13:00
And who knows, you know, who knows when you need it. I mean, I also want to learn sign language too. But that's a whole nother thing.

Ryan Fleury 13:06
Well, and again, you know, when I learned Braille, it was literary, literary grade, one in grade two Braille. And then UEB came along, and some of the contractions changed. So, you know, I haven't learned the UEB code, I'm understanding that a lot of it is the same. So the learning curve wouldn't be that great. But, and I don't use Braille on a daily basis, you know, I have a Braille display here, that I can be using. But, you know, I just I choose not to, but at least I have the ability that I can pull out my Perkins Brailler, or my Braille display, and I can read in grade one, some grade two Braille, what it is that my computer might be reading to me or if somebody hands me, you know, something on that's been brailled out. I can probably make my way through it. Yeah. So it's very important.

Rob Mineault 14:03
It absolutely is, you know, and we could go on about that. But I mean, I don't know we've probably done like five episodes of the show. About our opinions on Braille.

Ryan Fleury 14:13
That's right. Go and listen to the Limitless podcast.

Rob Mineault 14:17
Oh, look at that. You're plugging the limitless podcast. Look at you go look at that. Well, yeah, we could go on at nauseum about Braille. But that's not what this show is about. Oh, hey, you know what else I got an email from? You remember our good buddy, Tony Giles?

Ryan Fleury 14:34
Yes.

Rob Mineault 14:35
The the world traveler, the guy that just shows up in countries and he's just figure stuff out. Yeah, yeah. I got an email from him. And apparently he has been keeping busy. He's still been traveling. He's got a new book out. Really hot. Yeah, it's called seeing a Slice of Southern Africa My Way: An enlightening journey.

Ryan Fleury 15:00
I bet.

Rob Mineault 15:02
Yeah, you know what? I will include that link to that in the show notes if anybody wants to check that out. But yeah, our thoughts are with Tony. We should really probably have him back on the show because he was, I was just fascinated by his story. He's such a cool guy.

Ryan Fleury 15:19
Yeah, I'll have to look back to the archives and see when we had him on last, but it's definitely been a while.

Rob Mineault 15:24
Yes, we're definitely on guitar dungeon. More than two years ago. Yeah. I wonder what I wonder if he was traveling during the pandemic?

Ryan Fleury 15:34

Yeah, I don't know, that would have been kind of scary.

Rob Mineault 15:37

Imagine, like traveling as a blind person. In a pandemic?

Ryan Fleury 15:42

Well, that's, you know, kind of one of the choruses in my latest song, right. You know, they tell us to stay six feet apart. I'm blind. How am I supposed to do that? Like, yeah, I can imagine. Yeah, yeah. people screaming at you.

Rob Mineault 16:00

Knowing Tony, man, he's fearless. That guy. So if anyone can do it, Tony can do it.

Ryan Fleury 16:06

Anybody can do it. You just stiffen your back. You grab your cane and you say, pardon me out of my way.

Rob Mineault 16:16

But you're a different dude. What did you do with Ryan?

Ryan Fleury 16:21

He's gone.

Hi, everyone. This is Steve from Canadian Assistive Technology, and this is a shameless plug. We've been working hard to find less expensive Braille products so we can make Braille available for more people. We can now say that we have Canada's most comprehensive lineup of inexpensive Braille solutions, including the 20 sell Braille ME from innovation, the soon to be released. 40 cell orbit Braille display from orbit research, as well as the world's least expensive multi line Braille reader that Canute from Bristol Braille. You can have a look at them all on our website at www.canasstech.com

R Ryan Fleury 17:03
Joining us now is Pramit Bhargava. All right, so Pramit I am Ryan, and joining us in the room is my host, Rob Mineault.

R Rob Mineault 17:12
Hello

R Ryan Fleury 17:14
And all the way from India. Thank you for joining us.

P Pramit 17:18
Yeah, thank you for having me here.

R Rob Mineault 17:19
Wonderful. Well, listen, we're excited to talk to you. But what before we really dive too far into it? I'm really curious to hear a little bit about you and your your backstory, and how Louie came about.

P Pramit 17:33
Okay, so, okay, so I was actually somebody with a normal vision. So half my life is with vision half my life as a visually impaired. So I did by a computer engineering then went on to do MBA, and then I've worked with the, you know, local companies like Unilever, Motorola Quest Diagnostics. And it was about 20 years back when the reaction of a drug impacted my retina. And the vision sort of just dropped overnight. And I could still get some corrections, I continued working, but, you know, my vision was dropping, and doctors really had no clue, you know, because like I said, it was reaction of a drug. So I had all kind of, you know, I had macular degeneration, I had pigments, you know, colorblind, anything, and everything was there. And it was almost nine years back, you know, the, when my vision start, again, started dropping rapidly, I couldn't read anything at all. And this was a face suddenly, you know, I found myself completely, you know, with no confidence at all, all the devils in the mind saying I can't do this, I can't do that. So two and a half, two years, I was just sitting at home, almost lost, I was trying to use a screen readers and just taking to them. And it so happened because I lost confidence. I think it was more in the mind that for even simple things in life, you know, even if somebody was

calling me up, or if I have to call Rob, let's say, you know, to seek somebody healthy, even for the simplest of things. So I think that experience actually taught me a great deal both about life and you know, I think it has, of course, influence, you know, how Louie voice control came about,

R **Ryan Fleury** 19:17

So Pramit let me ask you, what are the support systems like in India for somebody who is losing their vision or is blind?

P **Pramit** 19:27

Yeah, I think great question. So my sense is that people who were born blind, right, so the kids who were born blind, so what happens is there are I think, good support systems for them. Because a, the parents have no option but to go out and figure out what is there. And then there are options. Like for example, there are hospitals there are there are people who are training them there are people who are focusing on their education. So for somebody who was born blind, I think it's relatively I would say You know, though, there is far more help. Now, for somebody like me, and, you know, if you use whatever data I have looked at, I think almost 80% 85% people lose their vision over a period of time, right? And I think then suddenly, what happens is that a that person, you know, like, in my case, a I myself wasn't sure, you know, what resources that are available. Because I never looked at that, to the family around me, the friends are all around me, they had no idea. And, and then the, you know, somewhere. Like, in my case, I just tried to figure it out everything on my own, I didn't even make an effort to go out. So I would say it's probably, you know, if I compare it on a global basis, whatever I heard of us, or UK or Europe, I think it's far more organized. They're relatively, I think, far easier. Here in India, we don't have one big organization, but there are a whole lot of small ones. So you still got to figure out in your city where you stay, you know, what is the center close to you? But I think it's gradually improving. Let me put it this way. Sure. Okay,

R **Rob Mineault** 21:04

When I see that, that that is the real importance of apps, like Louis and so many others out there is that, you know, with everybody having smartphones, having apps like this to help in terms of mobility, or accessibility, or and even if it's, you know, even if it's something's minor and small, it can be a really big deal to somebody who's, you know, just losing their sight, or, or having just lost it.

Pramit 21:33

I agree completely, and particularly, right, what I would say, and this is something I've observed in India, and this was the point I was making that, like, for example, there are some certain centers who are running three month courses, six month courses. Now, for somebody who, you know, loses his vision, or, you know, didn't have vision, let's say, to begin with, you know, there have to be easy solutions with the very low learning curve, so that he's, you know, you're off the ground, you're, you're calm, because what I think, you know, is in my case, and I spoken to a lot of visually impaired people, I think, you lost the battle, or you lose the battle in the mind. So once that confidence has gone up, important to gain it back. And the only way you can do it, when you start doing things on your own, when you feel that you are in control, and you're becoming sort of independent. So I completely agree, every deal happened with you with an easy learning curve. And with you know, somebody in the family themselves can sort of quickly understand and, you know, teach you or you learn on your own. So that that is one objective behind Louis Voice Control, how do we make it really easy to use?

Rob Mineault 22:39

So can you give us a little bit of a snapshot for the audience? Just a little bit of an introduction about what Louie does.

Pramit 22:49

Yeah, sure. So, Louie Voice Control is actually a very, very simple idea. The thought is, with just voice commands, can I completely control my phone and my popular apps? Now, how this came about is important, I think that will bring alive the concept. So I had met a Managing Director of a large venture capital company and put this thought, in my mind, I was doing consulting at that time. And he said, Look, why are you you know, consulting is okay. But why not build apps for people like you, you can leverage your experience and, you know, do something which will help you and help others. So this thought was back of my mind, but you know, how it is getting into a startup is not easy at all. And I had gone to meet a friend and on the way back, he took my smartphone, and he said, Why don't I booked Uber for you? He asked me my destination, and he put it in Uber. And he said, okay, it's showing up these three matching destination, which one you want to take, I selected the one, then he told me the rights available the fare, I said, Okay, take this one. And then similarly, he confirmed everything with me, and then both and even call the driver for me. And on the way back in Uber, you know, I just felt this was a wonderful experience, it was extremely convenient. Be I just felt that, you know, I was in control. So I was also given because what I have felt as a visually impaired, that I want to be independent, but I want to be in control as well. That's very important. So I just felt that

look, what if I could create a virtual friend, right on the phone screen, which will do exactly the same thing. So what Louie does is so if I were to draw on this example, now, for example, Louie, completely voice control enables Uber. So end to end every functionality of Uber, I can control with voice commands. So that's, that's one. Second is that it does continuous voice interaction exactly like the way my friend was doing. So every time I have a doubt, I just close my eyes and think back, you know, have that experience and what will my human friend do? You know, if he were there. So there is continuous voice interaction that is continuous hand holding, the options are being given to the user, and it sort of you know, doesn't take a command Go silent. So that's very important. So that's really broadly Ryan, I would say the overall concept of Louis.

R Ryan Fleury   25:08
Yeah, I installed Louis on my old Android, LG G six. to experience it myself, I'm totally blind myself. And so, you're right. When I launched YouTube, I used it as my example. You're right, every part of it was spoken, you know, what would you like to do? And I said, search as one of the options that came up. And so I could dictate what I wanted to search for. And then would you like this one? Would you like this one? Would you like this one? And I chose the one I wanted, and, you know, it played it, after it was done, what would you like to do now? And, you know, like, like you said, from beginning to end, it was Louis, guiding me through each step of the way.

P Pramit   25:52
So like I said, I just tried to a solve my own problem. And I think just replicate that whole experience, which I had with my friend. But there is just so just so you know, there's still a lot of work to be done. So right now, we are seeking a lot of feedback and inputs from everybody.

R Ryan Fleury   26:08
Will Louis allow you to fully control your phone, or just specific apps on your phone?

P Pramit   26:15
Okay, so, so we have to work individually on every app, or every functionality of the phone. Right? So like I said, the vision is, and that's why I said, there's a lot of work to be done. So the way we want to go forward is that look, all the critical functionalities of the phone. So for example, whether it's settings or, you know, weather, all the popular apps that are out there, we want to do it on our own, and hopefully, you know, create a UI more

like a platform where, you know, other app developers can come in, we can share an SDK, and they can integrate their app with it. Because I mean, of course, we can't do everything. But the idea is to cover all popular apps, when you've got the second,

R Ryan Fleury   26:52
yeah, you've got the basics down, like making a phone call, you know, accessing contacts, like you said like booking an Uber, some of the things that people might do on a regular basis, Louis does.

P Pramit   27:04
And one of the other things that we are also working on, so I'll give you examples, because these are all results of feedback in the last one month. So for example, right now, it works only in online mode. But within three, four days, we are taking out an offline capability also, because there are parts of the world where either internet is very expensive, and or it's patchy. Yep. And if you want to make like you said a phone call, you want to send a text message, you don't need an internet for that. Similarly, you know, the other thing, what we are working on this, you know, the images, you know, so for example, today on WhatsApp, let's say if if Louie were to encounter an image, it will just tell the user this message contains an image now, which is actually you know, of no help. So what we're doing is we're completely integrating OCR, as well as image recognition and have a completely seamless way. So the whole idea would be that, you know, just like it would read a text message, or or play out an audio message, it would be able to, you know, in that same seamless, seamless way, just tell the user that this message has an image which has got so and so and has got this text on the image. So all those capabilities were we're sort of building in and you know, hopefully be able to do even something like an Instagram, which is so visual, but then you know, which can really open the doors for a lot of visually impaired people to be, you know, in the hottest social media app. So so you're right, so the basics are there, but you still need to build a lot more capabilities.

R Ryan Fleury   28:27
Yeah, and I think that's one of the great features, like I have an iPhone, and one of the great features of has is I guess the AI ability to try to grab whatever text might be on a graphic or give you information, as you know, image contains two people dog and tree, which is better than just image image image. So is that what you guys are doing is they're using AI as well, or object recognition?

Pramit 28:52

That that's correct. But just just to be, you know, just to be so that I don't over claim or anything. So, you know, I think, Louis, what we do very smartly, is we don't reinvent the wheel, right? Because see what we must appreciate it. Like, for example, for example take Siri, Siri is almost more than a 25 year old project. I mean, Apple bought at only 2010. You know, it was there since 1990s. And I think billions of dollars would have been spent, you know, trying to build that. So for us as a small startup, you know, what we are good at is leveraging a lot of existing technologies, including OCR and image recognition, because, you know, we can't build these, you know, you can imagine, though, I mean, you all the biggies are there, you know, trying to do that and do better. Yeah, so the smartest is to, you know, how do we leverage the existing technology and provide an experience and a solution, which is tailor made for a blind person, you know, and I think that's the biggest difference, we are making the kind of hand holding continuous interaction. You know, like I said, that seamless ability to even you know, make images accessible. So, so that's what really we are good at.

Ryan Fleury 29:57

And do you have plans to bring it to iOS or you gonna stay on Android because it's easier?

Pramit 30:03

Yeah. So see, we needed to start somewhere. And I think it just so happened that, by the way, Android also was not easy, let me tell you. For years, I've been working on this only two and a half years back, we formally started a social venture. Initially, everybody told me, not possible. So I went to some large companies, everybody, you know, their Android heads, first thing was first response was just not possible. But we stuck at it. We did a technical feasibility for almost six months and cracked Android. So the same approach I want to take on iPhone as well, which is second half of next year. So yes, a lot of people are telling us that, look, it's not as open, you may not be able to do it. But I just want to attack it with an open mind and if required, you know, possibly go to Apple also, because I think there is a strong social impact case for something like this. Great. So I'm not going to give up. I want to get onto iPhone as well, because I really realized that, you know, a lot of people across western countries for sure, use iPhones.

Ryan Fleury 31:01

Yeah. And is there like a cost or subscription for Louis?

Pramit 31:05

Okay, not right now. But you will appreciate that at some point, you will see sometimes what happens, good ideas come and then they cannot sustain themselves. Because Android keeps changing, apps keeps changing, technology keeps changing. So it's important that, you know, for us, it's important that while there is a social good aspect of it, and we want to make sure that it is so affordable, that everybody in the world can afford it. So that's very important for our social venture, but at the same time, so you know, it's important to be sustainable and profitable. So just to just to give you an idea, so we have right now 13 people in our team, and we have investors in India, U.S. and Singapore, and then you know, at least for a year, it is going to remain free. I like to keep it free as long as I can with investor support. But even when we price it ourselves the thought is you know, will not just have one dollar price across the world. So we'll have even in US, for example, we want to keep it at an affordable, you know, I like to benchmark it against a cup of coffee. So just one cup of a normal coffee, regular coffee, not a Starbucks coffee, which would be $5. But one regular coffee. And if you benchmark like that across the world, you will get a very different pricing, right. So you know, Africa can be a very different point of affordability. So that's what we want to do. Because for me, you know, I'm doing it more to like I said, solve my problem, and hopefully make it work for everybody else. So it's important that not 2% of the people use it and make us profitable. But you know, I mean, everybody has access to it, and they can sort of afford it.

Rob Mineault 32:35

So I'm curious about the actual technology behind it, because I've always thought that something like being able to control your your phone with your voice - I'm often surprised that that isn't something that hasn't been more available sooner. I know that Android has some some sort of limited built in functionality in that sense. And Apple as well. Why is it that that this type of technology really hasn't - I mean, we're here we are in 2021 10 years down the road from from smartphones. And still we don't really see a lot of apps like this, why do you think that is?

Pramit 33:20

Okay, so you're absolutely right. I mean, come to think of it, it's a ridiculously simple idea, right? I can take up a tent over this idea that you know, by voice control, by just voice commands, manage control your phone, I think if you asked me where the differences that see our starting point was a blind person, and today also the core use cases of a blind person who cannot see the screen at all. So as I said, then then, you know, then the requirements are completely different. Not today, all the tools and technologies are there, you know, if somebody wants to do a do it, it's not going to be easy. You know, of course,

Google and Apple can do it far more easy. But for any third party, it's not going to be easy at all. But I think somewhere, you know, everybody is focused on the sighted person. So even for example, if you take Google Assistant also as an example. And if I take the whole you over experience, and it asked me, where do you want to go? And if I say, Okay, I want to go here, it will show up three options on the screen, and we'll just select right now that doesn't work for, you know, for a visually impaired. And then of course, they have the habit of going silent all the time. Because the way they have been designed, I think it's more of a design thinking. So even Siri that you know, fundamentally, they're designed with your one command, and then you take an action and then go silent, you know, that whole continuous interaction, and particularly being able to do everything within an app. I don't think it exists right now on any other app.

Rob Mineault   34:42

Yeah, and the thing about this type of technology is that it extends far beyond even just, you know, blindness or, you know, low vision into people who have, you know, physical access issues, for example, people who are in wheelchairs or quadriplegics, I mean, and I know that there there is there are solutions out there for this, but it just seems to me like having something like, you know, the like an app like Louis, or built in functionality to the operating systems of these phones would just have been like some some sort of a natural fit.

Ryan Fleury   35:15

Even something like Dragon NaturallySpeaking, which is, you know, dictation software for the computer for the PC, or Mac still isn't allowing us to do natural language dictation to the computer, there's still specific commands you need to speak out in order to have things done. So, you know, natural language processing, I guess, still is a tough science project.

Pramit   35:39

It is. But like, like a like we try to do for Louie, I think you could still figure out, you know, a certain kind of human interactions where it's sort of more controlled, and yet, you know, user is easily able to understand it and do it. So I agree with you, there's a lot more work that can be had that can happen in the core technology definitely exists.

Ryan Fleury   36:00

So how do you prioritize? Like, what apps you're gonna work on next? Is it community

driven? Or do you have your own roadmap?

P **Pramit**   36:08

Okay, see, right now, it's completely community driven, but just to be honest, see, like I said, I, I've been working on it for four years, two and a half years back, we started the company. And I think almost one and a half years back, we had a very basic prototype, which we still decided to put it up on Play Store for, you know, users to use. And honestly, you know, all along at that time, I always had this feeling that look, am I the only idiot in the world who's going to use this app. So it's about six weeks back that we actually started telling the world about Louie. And today, we actually get, you know, all my email id, my mobile WhatsApp number is, you know, freely available with users. So I get a lot of these direct calls and talk to a lot of people. So today, it's all community driven, if you ask me. So for example, I'll give you examples. You know, so we did have a roadmap. But then, you know, users came back and told us that look, I have difficulty even doing, for example, Google search, browsing on Chrome, being able to read articles, being able to read documents, etc. And then, you know, documents, which can be scanned documents, or documents which are readable. So, or even simple things like, you know, receiving calls, disconnecting calls, or like I told you about the image recognition and reading it, or even something like Instagram, I mean, a lot of people just don't use it, because they just feel that look, it's not for visually impaired. So so I think as we're going along, there is this rich feedback, which we continuously keep getting offline, the thing that I spoke about, and that's the way I would really like to build this app.

R **Rob Mineault**   37:43

So in terms of development, so when you say, pick an app that you're you're going to make Louis compatible with like, say, we use WhatsApp for an example. How closely Do you then have to work with those app developers in order to make it all work?

P **Pramit**   38:01

Okay, actually, that's the another beauty of our app. I don't have to go to anybody. So okay, so just to tell you, we initially built a screen reading technology for ourselves. And now we leverage that. So the way it works is that imagine, you know, if I have to go to any of these big multinationals, and for them to open up their app, there will be massive documentation, legal agreements, liabilities, there's that it could take months, I mean, I'll be out of business by that time. So what we do is we actually work on top of each app. So we have the capability to work on top also also work with API's wherever available. So for example, the entire phone calling in Android contacts, management, text messaging, is all

through API. So that's done under the hood. But Uber, for example, WhatsApp, YouTube is all right on top of the screen. So like I said, it's like a virtual friend right there on the phone screen. Now, that gives us you know, so theoretically, whatever a sighted person can do, Louie can also voice enable it completely for any for a blind user, with just voice commands. So that's why our approach is so much more powerful.

R Rob Mineault 39:05

So it sounds like that's really the power of Louie is that it's very versatile, because you can really literally just pick any app that that the community has sort of chosen as something that they'd really like to see included. And you can just roll with it. And you don't have to wait for all that.

P Pramit 39:22

Absolutely. But I don't have to seek any permissions etc. And by the way, these companies help. So for example, Uber helped us with the test accounts. Otherwise, imagine we would have gone bankrupt by now, just booking these overrides and canceling them, right. So today, I have these tests accounts, where anywhere in the world, any city in the world, I can actually take an Uber, right, you know, and test my app, whether it's working in Mexico City, whether it's working in New York, I can do that sitting right here. So we have received a lot of support and help from them. But like I said, You know, I mean we just do it independently and you're absolutely right. It just gives us complete freedom.

R Ryan Fleury 40:00

I've got a list of apps, I'm gonna email you tomorrow.

P Pramit 40:05

Please do that. And also, you know, not only list of apps, uh, you know, things, which are pain points, you know, things which you find difficult to do and wish that, you know, they were a simple, simpler solution, or

R Ryan Fleury 40:16

Its not even difficult. I just wanna use my voice. I don't want to have to reach over and touch my phone.

Pramit 40:22

I know, by the way, it's very addictive. I used to have a mental block against using voice commands, can you believe it? So it was an investor who pushed me and he said, Look, the future of technology is voice. And tomorrow, there may not be a screen. So what are you doing with your screen reader? You know, that's where the conversation started. And he was right, because today, if you see smart speakers gadgets, you know, voice capabilities. And it's very, very addictive. I can tell you today I don't I just hate to use a, you know, touch my screen and not for typing at all. I mean, I just hate typing. It's not needed. I mean, this is far more convenient.

Rob Mineault 40:59

You know, it that's, that brings up a really valid point, though, too, because I think you're absolutely right, we are moving in that direction, of voice controlled, and it is becoming more ingrained in people. Like I'm a perfect example. Over Christmas, I went and bought smart bulbs for my living room. Right, and so that I could just, I can just tell Google to turn off the lights. And I could also just lean over and turn them off. But you know, what, nine times out of 10? No, I'll tell Google to turn them off. Because I don't know, because I'm a nerd. But, but you know, but I do think that that that is it, we are moving that way as more and more as we get get used to voice commands, and we want to like be able to like turn the TV on and off with our voice or, you know, the idea of a smart home is becoming more and more comfortable for a lot of people. And I really see a really huge use case for blind or partially sighted people, especially in a mobility sense. So you know, if you're out on the road, and you've got a cane in one hand, or you've got your, your dog in the other, the the ability to be able to use your voice to control your phone to bring up Google Maps or to to answer the phone or to check your email or whatever you want to do, I think is really powerful. But that being said, there's also a huge mainstream applicability as well, because I think that just everybody could use, you know, voice control on their phone at one time or another.

Pramit 42:35

Absolutely. And you know, so you had mentioned motor disabled, there is also a sizable, elderly population, and some of them are not so comfortable with technology as as well, especially the touch phones. So, yeah, it works for them as well, beautifully.

Rob Mineault 42:50

Yeah, you know, and especially like, you know, especially as great as voiceover and

talkback are like, and I'm sure Ryan can attest to this, like, it can be a real pain in the butt where you're after your swipe, swipe, double tap, like that can really require a lot of, you know, it can require you needing extra hands, especially when you're on the go,

R Ryan Fleury 43:12
Well, if you look through the list of gestures in iOS, or in talkback on Android, you know, there's one finger tap, doubletap, two finger tap, two finger, triple taps, three finger traps, four finger taps, yeah, you know, like, you could tap, tap, tap, tap, tap all day long, and still not learn all the gestures. So if I could just say, Louie, play my audio book, you know, Man In The High Castle, you know, it starts playing it, then I can pause it, I could skip forward, I could skip backward, you know, some of the things that people want to do on a regular basis is super powerful. Like I was saying earlier, you know, if I, if I'm laying in bed listening to an audiobook or a podcast, or I want to check the time, I don't want to have to reach over, hit my phone, unlock it, swipe up to find the time or pause my book or whatever, I could just say, Louie, stop, or Louie, what time is it? Or, you know, Louie, pause the podcast. It's so much more convenient.

P Pramit 44:10
Absolutely. And I think the good thing about voice solutions. So you know, the other difference I'd like to point out is, let's say I'll take an example of WhatsApp, which is like Messenger. Now you want to, let's say, clear your chat. So all the messages in the chat not typically have to do it by a screen reader, there are at least, you know, lots of swipes and taps and you know, all of that you will have to do probably 810 of them. Now, with Louie, you just have to say clear, and that will you know, it will open up and do everything. So it actually saves you a lot of that trouble as well. And you I mean, and as a user, you just need to save what you want, rather than worrying about what's on the screen. Which buttons are there, where inside the menu it is there. You don't have to worry about that. Yeah, I feel like a learning curve can be really, really short for this.

R Ryan Fleury 44:55
Well, and not all apps are created equally. You know, developers use different design techniques. different layout structures?

P Pramit 45:01
Absolutely.

R Ryan Fleury   45:02

You know, so you don't with Louie, you don't have to learn that the pause button is down in the middle of the bottom of the screen. Or, you know, the, I don't know, the next button is on the right hand side of the screen, Louie will come up and say to you, Ryan, what would you like to do next play stop next back, you just tell it what you want. It's so convenient. Like, it's great.

P Pramit   45:24

And, you know, the apps also keep changing, your apps might change, you know, their UI itself. So suddenly, you know, what used to be on the left has now you know, gone to the right, or you know, cheese completely. And, you know, it impacts you as a stranger. It doesn't affect us, actually.

R Rob Mineault   45:42

Well, and that was my next question. Because as a developer, because, you know, obviously, apps get updated all the time, and UIs change. Does that ever screw you up? Like, do you have to be like, Oh, no, Whatsapp completely changed their API. So now we have to adjust.

P Pramit   46:01

Okay, very, you know, I tell you once in a while now, what we have become good at the game. So just to tell you WhatsApp, in last two years, one and a half years only once they had made some changes, we saw them coming, it took us about six hours to fix those. Uber keeps changing here and there little little changes. YouTube also got up to see YouTube, I think comes with an update every two three days. But most of them don't impact us, right, these are minor changes, which we are now good at, you know, in a lot of these changes, you don't have to update your app. So you know, what we do is our voice data is actually stored on the server. And we just update the app, you know, so let's say there is a minor change, I can actually just make the change uploaded to the server and automatically comes on to your phone. So you don't have to update your app, you know, to make it work with the new version of let's say, Uber or YouTube.

R Rob Mineault   46:53

So now I'm curious about the team. Because I was just saying this to Ryan earlier that I really feel like the the great thing about today is that it's very different developing

software slash apps than it was 20 years ago, 20 years ago, you know, you had to start a software company, and there was just seem to be a lot harder. Whereas app development these days seems to be a little bit more like a cottage industry. And you can have a smaller team. So I'm just curious to know the story around your team, and just how big it How big is it?

Pramit   47:31

So we started with me as the single person initially, then the earlier recruits are all developers. And today, we have a team of 13, which includes six people who are Android developers. And then, by the way, I have three more visually impaired people in the team. So they are they typically take care of user experience and testing. And then we have a small marketing team. So that makes it total 13 of us. And so you're right, today, I think the tools are there. But then the whole game is a the concept, the visual, you know, that visioning it out and saying, Okay, what is it that we really need to make? And then, you know, like I said, smartly, putting this technology together, and the one other area, which you focus on, and I realize myself that look, users don't really deal with technology. Right? So if you take Louie, what is Louie for a blind person, it's just, you know, Louie, saying something that the user is supposed to say something, right. So it's just a two way conversation. So we focus a lot of a massive amount of energy on user experience. So just to tell you, you know, let's say if I'm doing an app, it is quite possible that I might crack the app in a in technical terms, within three weeks, it might take another three weeks to get the user experience, right, the user flows, right. So slowly, our developers are also getting used to that idea, you know, I too initially even use the blindfolds, because often, you know, they look at the screen and say, oh, it seems to be fine. You know, what's the problem? So I had to, you know, put on the blindfold and say, Now you tell me, can you do it? So, I think somewhere, you know, while we say technology, there are these softer aspects, you know, which are very important. So we will, you know, day one, we knew that it's going to be a global app. So we and one of the ways you can start it by is by saying, hey, Louie, so we, you know, wanted a name, which is short and sweet and easy to pronounce, whether you are in Russia or us or South Africa or India. So, so does one of the agencies that was helping us, they came up with the name Louie. And they saw it, it was completely inspired by Louis Braille. And we know how much Braille has impacted our life. So Louie has, you know, with that inspiration, then maybe we can also create some kind of an impact, you know, on our community. So there's so that's how the name of Louie came.

Rob Mineault   49:46

I love it. And it was just World Braille Day.

Pramit   49:49

Yeah, absolutely. Correct.

Rob Mineault   49:53

Well, listen, we want to thank you so much for coming on. before we let you go, though, can you let everyone know where they can find Louis and reach out and contact you if they have any questions or if they want to suggest an app.

Pramit   50:08

Great. So Louis is spelled as LOUIE, the name of the app is Louie Voice Control and you will find it on Play Store in Android. And like I said, we would be working on getting it for iPhone as well. And I can be reached on my email id it is pramit@Louievoice.com. And like I said, Louis being spelled is LOUIE. So pramit@Louievoice.com.

Rob Mineault   50:37

Excellent. Well, listen, Thank you, sir. Best of luck with the app. It's amazing. And we'll have to have you back on when there's some more apps being supported. And we'll talk again.

Pramit   50:50

Yes, thank you so much. I just enjoyed it here. Great.

Ryan Fleury   50:54

Thanks so much. You're just starting your day over there, aren't you?

Pramit   50:57

Yeah, correct. Yeah. And I look forward to your email with all the suggestions for the apps.

Ryan Fleury   51:05

You'll have it by Friday. It's a long list.

Rob Mineault   51:10

Careful what you wish for.

P **Pramit** 51:13

You know, and by the way, please use it. And even if you don't like any of it, just give me the feedback as I really love it. In fact, you know, a lot of the feedback, I have people come back and say, great app, it doesn't help me. So this is not working for me, or can you make this work differently? Because this is what I need? I mean, because actually helps us improve.

R **Ryan Fleury** 51:33

Let me ask you one question while we still have you, sorry. Rob, the editor. Are there specific system requirements for Android in order for Louis to work?

P **Pramit** 51:42

Yeah, so only one requirement? It works on Android seven and above? Okay, we support right all the way up to Android 11. And the only reason is because Android came up with a new accessibility architecture with Android seven, right? So it can work with five and six, but then, you know, it's not very stable. So we decided, you know, because every user who downloads it wants a good experience. So the right now we only support Android 7 and above. Sure, great.

R **Rob Mineault** 52:08

Okay, now we're done.

R **Ryan Fleury** 52:09

We're done. All right.

P **Pramit** 52:12

Thank you so much.

R **Ryan Fleury** 52:13

Thank you.

Rob Mineault 52:16

Wow, that was really, that's really cool. I love the fact that I really thought that they'd have to really work closely with those app developers, but the fact that they don't, and they can just basically overlay Louie over top of the app and have it work like that. That's, that's really powerful.

Ryan Fleury 52:35

Yeah, you should try it cuz you're an Android user, aren't you? Yeah, yeah, definitely download it and give it a shot. Because it is pretty slick.

Rob Mineault 52:43

Well, and you know, the more I do think about it, the more I do think that there's there's incredible mainstream possibilities here as well, like, this is one of those great apps, that's it's a, that would be a great piece piece of AT. But it's also a really powerful mainstream technology as well. And those are always the the things that really blossom, because you have people on, on all sides that are getting use out of something like this.

Ryan Fleury 53:09

Yeah, absolutely. You know, I'm just thinking of some apps that the blind are using, like, one of them, in particular is Voice Dream Reader, which is an accessible, you know, multi document style format, reader. And, you know, I'm not sure if it does highlighting of the text as it reads along. But you know, something like that, for somebody with reading difficulties. If you could get Louie to say, you know, open Voice Dream Reader, read, document, blah, blah, blah. And it highlights the text as it goes, That's super powerful, you know, sub that that same person may not have the dexterity to use a touchscreen properly.

Rob Mineault 53:47

Yeah, and like I said, like, we are really moving towards this idea of smart, smart homes, and smart devices. And we want now that now that, you know, we they've snuck these, you know, smart assistants into our lives, these smart speakers, and digital assistants into our lives. I do feel like more and more, those are going to be features that are built into things all around us and that we are moving in that direction. So, you know, having having a voice controlled phones seems like a pretty logical next step.

Ryan Fleury   54:19

Yeah, absolutely. You know, voice assistance is, you know, kind of a one way communication for the most part. Now, you know, Amazon and Google have started, I guess, giving you the ability to prompt you for a follow up question. But you're right. You know, how many of us have smart plugs in our homes? How many of us may have smart thermostats, you know, sitting on the couch saying turn on the Christmas lights or the outdoor lights or whatever the fact may be? It's convenient. And you know, I'll be I guess the first to come up and say that we as humans, I think are pretty lazy. And we will take full advantage of convenience where possible. That's right.

Rob Mineault   55:00

It's true. It's true. Convenience is certainly something that appeals to the mainstream market. But again, like, you know, that's the real irony, right? Is that for somebody who has any sort of a disability, it's, it's a lifesaver. It's not convenient.

Ryan Fleury   55:17

Yeah, absolutely.

Rob Mineault   55:20

But if that will still drive the market, like the mainstream drives the market, and if you can make a piece of AT that has a really strong, mainstream implications, you're going to be successful.

Ryan Fleury   55:34

You know, if I could sit here on my couch in the guitar dungeon, with my home theater all around me and say, Hey, Louis, play, I don't know, Sons of Anarchy on Netflix. And it says, Would you like to start season one, episode one? Yes. It starts playing it, sold, done. Like, I don't have to grab the remote. Make sure I'm on the right input, you know, scroll to that episode or that season, hit the play button, like I'm done.

Rob Mineault   56:02

And there is that functionality in Google Home, maybe you should get a Google Home Mister, and

R Ryan Fleury 56:09

I gave you mine

R Rob Mineault 56:12

I use it all the time. But um, ya know,

R Ryan Fleury 56:17

if you have a Chromecast and you can do all that, yeah,

R Rob Mineault 56:20

Sure. But that is the limitation of these of these smart speakers, right? They generally have that functionality, but they're only for certain apps that they support, right? And it's usually in the same ecosystem, right? You have an iPhone, you're screwed. Or if you have an Apple TV and a Google Home, well, good luck with that, like, that's those aren't going to play well together. So something like Louie, that is flexible enough to be for them to be able to be like, Oh, you know, a lot of people are asking for this app. So let's just build in that functionality, and it takes them a month or something to do it. That's a lot more, they can respond a lot faster than, than somebody like Google and for Google Home to introduce new functionality for new for new devices or features.

R Ryan Fleury 57:10

Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, I think a company like Primat's, and smaller app developers, as well, are a lot more forthcoming with information and looking for beta testers and communicating with their audience. You know, the Apples, the Googles aren't that great. So when something new comes out, there might just be a blip, but then it's gone. And you don't really hear much about anything from them.

R Rob Mineault 57:32

Well, you know, and that's always that's why I love talking to these small app developers, right? Because they're always so community driven. And they're always just about the community and they love people like getting criticism and are having beta testers and you don't get that with the big companies. No. So yeah, I love that's why I love talking to guys like like Pramit.

Ryan Fleury 57:54

Yeah, that's right. So everybody get out there. Go to your Android Play Store. Download Louie, give it a shot and give them your feedback.

Rob Mineault 58:01

Yeah, there you go.

Ryan Fleury 58:02

Make the app better.

Rob Mineault 58:04

We will include a link in the show notes. We will Hey, you know, we you know what we what happened again, I noticed but Steve is not here and we did not even address that.. Got some fans in the audience.

Ryan Fleury 58:22

Who does? Steve?

Rob Mineault 58:23

Yeah, maybe?

Ryan Fleury 58:24

No. He doesn't have fans. Oh, no.

Rob Mineault 58:27

Has he ever gotten the fan mail?

Ryan Fleury 58:29

That's the Ryan and Rob show. There you go. Change the name of the podcast to the Ryan and Rob show.

Rob Mineault 58:36

Yeah, well, maybe I've been wanting to rebrand the show for a long time since like our fifth episode, where we realized Yeah, we're not really going to be talking about AT

Ryan Fleury 58:46

But we do talk more than just AT. AT can stand for a lot of different things.

Rob Mineault 58:51

Yeah, it's true, but it's your imagination. That's why we've never actually said what it stands for.

Ryan Fleury 58:57

That's right If you want to help us rebrand the at better podcast, send your suggestions to cowbell@atbanter.com

Rob Mineault 59:08

We're not rebranding

Ryan Fleury 59:10

Not after four and a half years. Damn it. We have a following

Rob Mineault 59:18

That's right.

Ryan Fleury 59:18

We're not losing any of them. We love them all.

Rob Mineault 59:23

You're all staying here with us.

Ryan Fleury 59:24

That's right. You're all rockstars No, you're all duct taped in our basement. not going anywhere.

Rob Mineault 59:35

All right. Hey, Ryan,

Ryan Fleury 59:36

Rob.

Rob Mineault 59:38

Where the hell can people find us?

Ryan Fleury 59:40

They can find us at www.atbanter.com

Rob Mineault 59:45

You can also drop us an email if you so desire - you talk to us about whatever the hell you want or give us an idea or whatever. cowbell@atbanter.com

Ryan Fleury 59:59

and please give Some show ideas. We love to hear from our audience and we're always looking for new ideas for the show. New guests for the show.

Rob Mineault 1:00:07

Yeah, there you go. Wait, didn't I just say that?

Ryan Fleury 1:00:10

Yes. And just following it up, saying yes, audience please submit your suggestions, topics, guests. for an upcoming episode.

R   **Rob Mineault**   1:00:21

Wait, sure, sure. Let me do it right. I don't, I don't know how to I don't know how to speak backwards. (Tries to speak backwards gibberish) Put Sergeant Pepper's overtop of that. There you go. There we go. Anyways, all right. Well, I think that's gonna do it for us first episode of 2021 in the bag. I thought it went splendidly.

R   **Ryan Fleury**   1:00:58

It was it was bad at all.

R   **Rob Mineault**   1:01:00

You see there. You're you're your own worst critic.

R   **Ryan Fleury**   1:01:03

I am indeed.

R   **Rob Mineault**   1:01:04

Alright. That is about do it for us this week. Thanks, everybody, for listening in. We will see everybody next week. Bye bye.