

AT Banter Podcast Episode 237 - Audio Description: Human or ...

 Tue, 4/27 10:24AM  1:06:08

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

synthetic, voice, people, description, audio, terms, companies, technology, human, speech, client, movie, discussion, bit, case, point, text, work, called, melissa

SPEAKERS

Rob Mineault, Steve Barclay, Melissa Hope, Valerie Hunter, Ryan Fleury



-  **R** Rob Mineault 00:44
Hey, and welcome to another episode of AT Banter..... Hello?
-  **R** Ryan Fleury 00:53
That is Steve's line
-  **S** Steve Barclay 00:56
Banter, banter.
-  **R** Rob Mineault 00:57
Oh my gosh. I thought I unplugged my mic or something. I just - very funny. Very funny. It's not even April Fool's.

R Ryan Fleury 01:09
That's right.

R Rob Mineault 01:14
And the other reason why that freaked me out because I have been - this week has just been nothing but technical snafus with me. Because between Rogers, the whole Rogers network going down

S Steve Barclay 01:29
Oh, yeah, that was fun.

R Rob Mineault 01:31
It was terrible. Yeah, it was awful. Where were we? Hey, my name is Rob Mineault. Joining me today. Mr. Ryan Fleury.

R Ryan Fleury 01:41
That's me again.

R Rob Mineault 01:45
Yeah, and Mr. Steve Barclay.

S Steve Barclay 01:47
Not to be mistaken for Ryan Fleury.

R Rob Mineault 01:50
Yeah, clearly. And what's, what's what's shakin with you boys? what's been going on?

S Steve Barclay 02:32
Oh, not a lot here. Just you know, trying to stick close to home. Listen to Dr. Bonnie Henry's recommendations about not crossing health region lines.

R Rob Mineault 02:46
Yeah.

S Steve Barclay 02:47
But you know, it's, it's tough. We are considered an essential service. So you know, we're allowed to go out and do stuff but all the same, you know, we got to we got to cut back. We have got to we got to stop these numbers. These are getting scary crazy, with this P variant. It's nuts.

R Rob Mineault 03:08
Yeah, it is. It is a little bit scary. And it's just scary that people don't really seem to be taking it very seriously. But I know I don't even know what my health region is.

S Steve Barclay 03:20
You are Fraser health. Which who so is that that's pretty much all of like the general Vancouver area, basically all of the gvrld except for Vancouver and the North Shore.

R Rob Mineault 03:34
I see.

R Ryan Fleury 03:35
So it's everything, chilliwack, coquitlam, Burnaby, poco.

R Rob Mineault 03:39
Right.

S Steve Barclay 03:40
So you can go anywhere East you can go anywhere South but you can't go to Vancouver proper. You can't go to the North Shore. You can't go up to Squamish Whistler. Vancouver Island,

- R** Rob Mineault 03:52
Right. So weird.
- S** Steve Barclay 03:55
Cuz you're a filthy animal!
- R** Rob Mineault 03:59
You know, did you guys have you guys registered for your vaccines?
- R** Ryan Fleury 04:02
Oh, yeah. Long time ago.
- S** Steve Barclay 04:04
I've had my first one.
- R** Rob Mineault 04:05
What?
- R** Ryan Fleury 04:06
Yes, yeah, Steve got his, I could have got mine too. But I passed
- R** Rob Mineault 04:08
Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, really?
- S** Steve Barclay 04:11
Yeah, I had mine Good Friday. Ryan and I qualify because of working with Assistive Technology. One we're considered an essential service, but we're also considered an essential visitor to old folks homes. So we qualify for the for the vaccine.
- R** Rob Mineault 04:30

I tell you, I you know, I leave the company and now you guys are essential workers. You guys get perks. We get like all I ever got when I was there as I got one of those like Subway cards, where you can like stick every 10th sub was like a free sub.

R Ryan Fleury 04:48
Thank you slagging you, Steve.

S Steve Barclay 04:50
I think so. Yeah.

R Ryan Fleury 04:53
Pretty sure.

R Rob Mineault 05:07
So but Ryan you turned it down? Right? How come?

R Ryan Fleury 05:10
Cuz Linda and I are waiting for our age group because at the time Steve was getting his I thought we were going to be getting the AstraZeneca or he was going to be getting that one. It turned out he didn't get that when he got the Pfizer. So I could have went but Linda and I are waiting for the Pfizer.

S Steve Barclay 05:24
Yeah, I wanted the microchip.

R Rob Mineault 05:27
Yeah, me too. That's so cool. I would love a microchip.

R Ryan Fleury 05:31
So pretty soon.



Rob Mineault 05:34

I see. Yeah. Yeah, I haven't I haven't heard anything back at all.



Ryan Fleury 05:37

You should have gotten an email right after you registered, that you've got a registration code now. So when they do call or email you, you did get this right. Okay.



Rob Mineault 05:44

Yeah, yeah, I've got all that. So yeah.



Ryan Fleury 05:46

So now it's just a matter of waiting.



Rob Mineault 05:48

Yeah. So I yeah, I feel bad for you know, the Fido. And the Rogers networks went down. I feel bad for the people who maybe, like sort of got screwed over with their appointments because of that. Because it would mean was out for a day and a half. So I mean, I don't know if the system was trying to text them or phone them for their appointments. And they just wouldn't have gotten through.



Steve Barclay 06:12

Well, think about all the Uber drivers.



Rob Mineault 06:20

Yeah.



Steve Barclay 06:24

I talked to a guy, he delivered some stuff to me that day. And he, you know, he's a delivery service, and he's got no contact with dispatch. His wife can't call him on the phone. He's

basically incommunicado in his truck, just like it was back in the 80s. You know? It was crazy.

R Ryan Fleury 06:44

Well, there were a lot. There were a lot of concerns to about people, you know, not be able to get through to 911 as well.

R Rob Mineault 06:50

Yeah. Yeah. It's crazy. I've never I've never seen a network outage for that long. In that widespread, like this was this is across Canada. This wasn't localized. And Rogers and Fido those are major networks. So yeah, who knows how many millions of people were affected by this for like a good day and a half. So yeah, it's pretty crazy. I'm really curious to know, I didn't have any either of you guys heard of actually what the problem ended up being?

R Ryan Fleury 07:18

There was a software update.

R Rob Mineault 07:20

Oh, my God. Are you serious?

R Ryan Fleury 07:22

According to a Google News article? I didn't read the article. It was a software update.

R Rob Mineault 07:26

Wow.

R Ryan Fleury 07:27

Sounds like Rogers is going to credit some credit people for the outage. I guess. I didn't I didn't read how much or what

R Rob Mineault 07:37

Crazy. craziness. Okay, well, in any case, we are here, everybody. Don't worry. Some of us are vaccinated and safe. Some, some are exercising, some are and so my days are probably numbered, because I've gotten neither. So welcome. Welcome. Welcome to the Ryan Fleury Show and The Steve Barclay show.

R Ryan Fleury 08:01
Well, you're optimistic today.

R Rob Mineault 08:05
Cuz I'm not exercising at 5am. Apparently, we're not, you know,

S Steve Barclay 08:09
Nobody's exercising at 5am. What animal would exercise at 5 am?

R Ryan Fleury 08:14
That's right. I'm usually up at six. But if I'm up at 530, I get up and exercise.

R Rob Mineault 08:19
All right. We'll get that update later. What are we doing today, though, Ryan, because I'm excited about today's show.

R Ryan Fleury 08:27
Today we are talking about a topic that seems to be making some noise in the blind, low vision community regarding audio description, and more and more companies seeming to lean towards using text to speech voices over human narrated audio description. So we have Valerie, who works as an audio describer. And Melissa, who works for Descriptive Video Works joining us to discuss this.

R Rob Mineault 08:55
Yeah, this will be interesting, I'm really interested to hear their takes on this because it is a little bit of a hot topic right now. Apparently, you know, this the whole debate on whether or not we want synthetic voice and to have more content or better quality content, but

less of it. So it'll be interesting to hear their take on it and, and just just kind of get an idea of what what is actually going on with these and what some of the pros and cons of using synthetic voice is over over that human component.



Steve Barclay 09:29

So and just to provide some better perspective on this. For the rest of this podcast, I will be voiced by an accent SA synthesizer.



Ryan Fleury 09:43

But if you have a chance, just anybody interested in this, bring up the new Microsoft Edge. And I think it's the called the Read Aloud. Listen to the read aloud. Microsoft has I think these called they're called Cloud AI voices and they're pretty good. We're getting close. We're getting close.



Rob Mineault 10:04

Well, certainly certainly better. I mean, I would say that in the past 10 years, we've we've made some leaps already, but I don't know this this, this technology might be a little bit premature. But we'll talk more about that shortly.



Ryan Fleury 11:14

We have two guests this week. We are so fortunate that both of them agreed to come on our show. I don't know why came on our show but they did. Our first guest is an audio describer and the voice of the AT Banter intro from Valerie H Productions. We have Valerie Hunter.



Hi guys.



Hi.



Hi.



Rob Mineault 11:35

Your voice sounds so familiar.



Valerie Hunter 11:38

Possibly a bit too familiar at this point.



Rob Mineault 11:41

Yeah, I've literally listened to it for like three 250 times



Valerie Hunter 11:45

I'm sorry, but y'all set yourselves up for that. I'm taking no responsibility for it. I just do what I'm told.



Ryan Fleury 11:53

And our second guest is I think I think this is her first debut on the AT Banter podcast. Yeah, but the organization she works for is no stranger to us. From Descriptive Video Works, we have Melissa Hope.



Melissa Hope 12:08

Hello, thanks for having me.



Ryan Fleury 12:10

Welcome to the show. I do have to say, though, when I when I approached you, Melissa, about coming on the show and what the topic was about. I loved your response. "Ooh, hot topic."



Melissa Hope 12:23

I follow all the like audio description related Facebook groups and things. And of course,

there's nothing that again, an email group fired up faster than, you know, synthetic voices, yes or no?

R Ryan Fleury 12:36

And I'm glad we have both of you here because you can you know, you both do audio description. You're both in that industry. And I'm sure between focus groups and your own opinions, this will be a great conversation.

R Rob Mineault 12:46

Let's set this up. So what are we talking about?

R Ryan Fleury 12:49

We are talking about audio description, but not what everybody I think, considers to be audio description as we know it on media like Netflix and, you know, movies, where most of the time it's been human narrated audio, what we're seeing more and more, I'm hearing more and more, our TV shows using synthesized text to speech voices, instead of human narrated audio. So if anybody's familiar with screen readers, or magnification products with screen readers, or even Microsoft Edge has some features built into their Read Aloud, I think it's called where text to speech voices will actually read an article to you. That's what some places are using, or similar technology to audio description or for audio description versus human. So I thought this would make an interesting discussion as to pros and cons cos do we like it? Do we not? Where do we go from here?

R Rob Mineault 13:48

Yeah, and I do know that, you know, I have started seeing a lot of a lot of ads - and it's probably because I've been doing a little bit of research and you know how Google works - but I've been seeing more and more ads for places that are offering these services where you can just literally type in text and it will generate a synthetic voice .. that's not not too bad. Is this something that's a new presence within audio description? Or has it been around for a while?

V Valerie Hunter 14:19

Let's see. Do you have any background on this on when it started?

M

Melissa Hope 14:22

I don't really know when it started. I know that it took off in this last year?

V

Valerie Hunter 14:26

Yes. Yes. I agree. Um, there's been I think it's over the last, you know, two, three years, I guess that places have been starting to sort of toy with it. But yeah, in the last it's been in the last year that things really kicked in. And part of what I think inspired part of this discussion, we mentioned briefly, mailing lists. And this come this in and certainly this has come up. You can kind of tell actually, when it started it's when the discussion starts, because it's a reaction to it to the technology being introduced. Personally for me, I sort of keep up on the audio description project, mailing list. And it was like, last month, it blew up, because somebody was like, Hey, wait a minute, America's Most Wanted has got some kind of weird thing on it. Is that a thing? And everybody just went nuts. And, and, and so. And once it got brought up, then people were going were were going, Oh, wait a minute. Does that? Is that what that was? And then more instances sort of built up. I think what really was the what really was the breaking point in terms of discussion is the fact that it was appearing in broadcast narrative material. So people were like, oh, and so yeah, discussion really got going. So I think it's been a while the concept of text to speech in terms of description has been sort of discuss theoretically, kind of, but I think it's that the technology has gotten to the point where people feel that they can have some sort of a discussion about whether it actually gets remotely close, or at least, the technology has gotten to a point where companies or proponents of this sort of thing, have have more of a have more of a case to have more of an excuse than they used to. We're not there are fewer people who will immediately laugh in their face when they bring it up. So yeah, so it's, it is a relatively recent hot topic, but it's, but that's because of the technology has sort of caught up kind of

R

Ryan Fleury 17:11

Melissa, have you guys that Descriptive Video Works, asked or done focus groups on the synthesized text to speech?

M

Melissa Hope 17:19

We did one many years ago. And back then this text to speech was a little more theoretical. So we haven't done one recently, we do hope to, because the technology has changed. And even though Descriptive Video Works, we do believe in using human voices. We love human voices. We love our huge roster of diverse voices. We know that the

technology is changing and other demands are being placed on us and on the industry. So yeah, trying to find out what people want beyond the arguments on email lists and Facebook groups, is really important to us with it full knowledge of what the technology can and can't do now.

R Ryan Fleury 18:01
Right

M Melissa Hope 18:01
I think our respective experiences was with broadcast producers and with broadcasters. With that, with that experience in the back of our heads. The concept of this makes sense, in that we've each worked with broadcasters for a very long time. And no matter what the technology has been, I mean, I go back to sbhs for heaven's sakes. It's always a matter of in terms of the broadcasters, it's always a matter of how can we do this the fastest and how can we do this the cheapest and is never, ever changed, and they'll come up with any. And so the fact that this has come up, and that there's the odd place that is offering this as an option. It's it's not at all surprising. It just fits in the fact that this technology happened and I'm guessing the broadcaster's were like, Well, that sounds a bit. But the broadcaster's were, might have been waiting for something like this. And yeah, in terms of what they want to in terms of what their priorities are,

S Steve Barclay 19:21
We had a fellow named Roy Samuelson on the podcast, right? Yeah. But he talked about the whole idea, but, you know, planning and, and, you know, looking at the scenes, and, you know, coming up with strategies for how he was going to describe that scene, all of that, it seems, would be out the window if you're just using synthetic speech.

M Melissa Hope 19:44
What we have noticed listening to some synthetic AD is that there doesn't seem to be a human mixer involved a lot of the time. So it a lot of the time it really sounds like all the audio almost completely cuts out. There's the description and then it comes back And so the art of the mix is is lost.

V Valerie Hunter 20:04
Yeah, which is, which is a thing that is a bit longer term of a thing that people have had to

deal with. Because that was one of the first actually, that was one of the first shortcuts the company started doing was to, was to, you know, set an automatic cut off of trucks going slamming down at a certain point and then slamming back up again. And that hasn't changed. In fact, first of all, in fact, one of my first reactions to this idea of synthetic voice happening was, oh, so they fix that other stuff that they've moved on to this, in terms of in terms of placement, and in terms of space, from what I understand. I think, at least in terms of what I've heard that Amazon is doing, I think it's sort of a variation. You're right, of course, that it's it's the it's the writers domain, in the terms of Amazon, it seems like they have some sort of a software, that is a bit like software that has been floating around for a decade or two, of automatically setting. Well, not automatically setting but setting where exactly gaps are, and setting exactly how many seconds there are, and what what can actually fit in there in terms of words. And that's going by, that's going by a certain algorithm of you know, how long it takes to say a certain thing, which is always been always been an inexact science, in my opinion. But anyway, so basically, from what I can tell, they kind of took that in terms of setting the space, and then go, Okay, now, fill stuff in with that. And the writer would still do that. Fill stuff in with that. But now the difference is to have an automatic voice thing that they would choose different kinds of voices and choose what what would work, supposedly, for the piece, and then it would be automatically generated into that space. And that's, that's what I understand is the process, at least I know, in terms of what Amazon is doing at least as much as they've as much as they've, they've explained. And of course, it's proprietary, like duh, but it's basically, it's basically seems to be that kind of a process.

M

Melissa Hope 22:48

Yeah, so we've used as a synthetic voice tool for our client, we have a client who uses this and and we agreed to use their tool. And it does sound really similar, we are able to change those placements. So it had suggested placements, but we could move them. So the writer still had a great deal of control. The good or bad thing is that synthetic voice always speaks the same speed. So the bad part of that, of course, is that you can't speed it up to fit in more description, the way a human could. The good is, though, you do know exactly what will fit because the synthetic voice will always be the same.

V

Valerie Hunter 23:27

Yeah, in terms of a Roy-ish sort of concept that I believe as well, that makes things Yeah, that makes things tricky. In terms of Yeah, alternately, altering your pacing, not simply from a technical point of view and able to make things fit, but also in terms of matching up with the pace of the action that's occurring that you're describing. For example, you know, when you're in a fight scene, you're gonna be you're gonna go faster than you

would if once the fight scene is over, and they're all recovering. And in this case, you can't have that, at least certainly not, at least certainly not now. And certainly, you won't have any sort of, you won't have any sort of reaction. You're, there's no change in how the describer is reacting to what's going on, which, even for some human to seem, they seem rather unerringly consistent, anyway. But we won't name it, we won't name it, but but they, but yeah, that's another that's another problem with this sort of system. You just have the space and you have the words, but you have nothing else.

R

Ryan Fleury 24:55

Well, that's just it. You know, synthetic speech will not give you emotion. It won't draw you into a scene, like "Jason crouches in the closet knife at the ready", you're not going to have that emotion come across and draw you into the scene or to the action. Synthetic voices, I think do have their place. But it's, it's not going to be in my regard as a blind person, it's not going to be in a dramatic scene, it's not going to be an action movie. It's might be appropriate for ads on TV, it might be appropriate for some sitcoms, you know, I'm sure we've all you were just saying, Valerie, we've all heard bad human narration. Consider synthetic voices make up for that, you know, they also don't have the dialects available. And there's a whole nother population of people that are being left out.

V

Valerie Hunter 25:56

Right, although, in reading some background on this stuff, and I'm not even trying to be devil's advocate here .. although I feel within myself I am being one .. of the points that has been forwarded by companies who do this has been that they can, in fact find, they can use voices with different accents. Much like Siri has, like, for example, my my Siri is an Australian guy named Bruce. And so there, there was inflections and, and, of course, recently the, the accents have gotten more precise in terms of culturally speaking. And so an excuse, maybe, that maybe someone maybe, for some reason, because casting is hard. You can't find a human person with possibly an accent that doesn't match that matches up with the projects you're working on that might be from another country, or that might be different people or whatever just doesn't fit or something. And maybe you have more options when you go through your little Rolodex of synthetic humans, and can just bring something like that in. That's, that's one of the arguments.

M

Melissa Hope 27:27

I sent Rob an article earlier today kind of talking about that point. You know, I think synthetic speech have 40 or 50, maybe 60 different languages available to them. Yeah, but there's over 600 languages around the world. So you know, and that's, that's really

not an excuse. And you know, to your point, casting has got to be a nightmare. Trying to match voices, languages dialects, with with a scene with a movie with a with a script is a big one, Testing is so much fun. So I so I don't work in the audio description side so much as the project management side. And it's, it's a huge part of what I do is the casting and trying to find new voices alongside my colleagues. And, like, we have a movie that's about to come out that I'm allowed to talk about, because it's not under a strict NDA. It's called Dawn, Her Dad And The Tractor. And it's a story of family drama about a trans woman. And so they requested a trans woman for the narrator, which we actually already had a couple on staff, but nobody whose voice was quite right. And so I went out and sought a new trans woman narrator for this particular movie, and got to meet the neatest people and hear the neatest demos. And that that's a that's a voice. I can't imagine a synthetic voice doing Yeah. Like, how can a synthetic voice be a trans woman? It's just, there's something there that a robot can't do. To top it off. This is also a family drama. So that voice needs to be able to talk to like a funny little scene where a kid does something silly has to have a little bit of smile to it. And then like a big family drama scene, because it's about a family and dramatic things happen. Yeah, has to have a little bit of sadness, a little bit of grief in the voice a little bit of tension. And it would be easier for me to get a brand new narrator trained up to do that than it is to find a synthetic voice capable of doing that.

R

Ryan Fleury 29:34
Sure.

M

Melissa Hope 29:35

Very good point. Yeah. Good point. And I know from being a voice person, I'm you know, I'm pretty lazy about casting because I'm a one person band here. So I can, I can just call on my great acting ability, um, but still. So there are some things that I you know, I can't do and I will and I will defer To that, and there may come a point where I will need to cast somebody. But I can also remember in terms of the times when I've directed other people, that was kind of how I, I started in production and then worked my way up, and I was running shotgun for the director working with the voice talent, and you know, you learn a bit and then I kind of took over, and the fine points we would put on stuff. And, and, you know, described video work says that as well. to like, have a very, a very clear sense of the context that you're in. We happen to and I continue to not read to this, I do it independently, just me and a script. And that's basically what it used to be at Audio Vision Canada. Now I am at AMI is and and so we didn't have that visual context, every once in a while when we couldn't remember something, we would bring it back in. But we would write notes along the way and go No, this this that this was what the scene was, and this is

what this scene was. And there are adjustments to make. And and yeah, that that does not happen in this that can't happen in this sort of thing. And you'll lose something there. I think I think most people, I think we're all well, we're all kind of together on how I don't want to say problematic. It's such a common word now. But problematic, this sort of thing is for a narrative piece for for dramatic, possibly comedy, anything fictional. That this is, this probably isn't gonna work for something like this. What I the ones I've, I've heard of so far, with synthetic have been things like things like reality-ish shows, not terribly dramatic, either. But pretty, you know, pretty cut and dried.

V

Valerie Hunter 32:18

I'm wondering if anyone has heard of anything. And and again, the example that I use with the first one was America's Most Wanted, later on. Someone noted, another show that was, you know, kind of reality ish, straightforward. was another one that was was using it. So I'm not sure how, if, if there have been many that have come up that are narrative sorts of things. I know there must be for reasons I'll explain in a second. But first, I'm curious as to if anyone's heard many stuff in a narrative framework about Yeah, with description like that.

M

Melissa Hope 32:58

Yeah, I guess I can't talk about it too much, because it's under NDA. The client we worked for within synthetic voice did, or huge range of fictional content. For movies, sitcoms, TV dramas, okay.

V

Valerie Hunter 33:14

Yikes. Anyway, so...

M

Melissa Hope 33:16

So yeah, so our job in that case is to do the writing as well as we can to the synthetic voice is as good as it can be. We have a special QC process for that.

V

Valerie Hunter 33:27

Yes, that's another that's another very good point that I saw, I read about in the Amazon process was that there's at least one QC post the process. And that's Yeah, that has to be terribly important, especially important, this sort of thing. You're kind of restricted, what you can adjust and what you can do, but you can at least you can at least try to minimize

the real clinkers that come up.



Melissa Hope 34:00

Yeah. And check the punctuation and as the spelling we had to misspell a lot of words. Yeah, right. Yep. interest. And it was entertaining, actually, because some of the different synthetic voices pronounced the same word different ways.



Valerie Hunter 34:13

Oh, my gosh. Oh, yeah.



Melissa Hope 34:16

So it's a different challenge. Casting synthetic voices is a bit more difficult



Valerie Hunter 34:28

Oh, yeah. Not as easy as it seems.



Rob Mineault 34:32

And I end up that brings up an interesting point, too, because I feel like this technology, I feel like it's not exactly quite ready for primetime. But there are these companies that are behind it, they're kind of trying to push it into primetime. They want to make this happen. And so I think that as a result, I think the business case for this is still, you know, the jury's still out. Is it actually cheaper going with something like a synthetic voice because you have to go through all these extra hoops, you have to do QC pass, you have to, you know, the writer has to write in a different way? Like at the end of the day, is it all that much cheaper for a company to go with a synthetic voiceover just going with the voice actor? And I feel like, we're not quite sure that yet is that kind of right.



Melissa Hope 35:24

So what we've concluded having done both having done mostly human voice, and then this, this special project for a client using synthetic, it is faster to do synthetic, there's, there's no getting around that. But whether it's a huge money and time saver, you'd really have to dig into it a bit. But we've figure right now that about 70 to 80% of the work involved in audio description is the writer. And so that's only 20 to 30%. They're saving, even if even setting aside extra QC, things like that. So if that translates directly to money,

I don't know. But at least it tells you it's not a huge time savings. It's not weeks of time savings. It's a day or two. It's it's, it's 20 to 30%.

V

Valerie Hunter 36:14

Yeah, in terms of another if you said he heard from Amazon is part of the context of them working on this thing is filling up their catalogue that they saw that they were going to, to work on just a ton of back catalogue is hundreds and hundreds of hundreds and hundreds of titles, and how the heck were they going to do that? Never mind the fact that some of them may have already been described in other places, and you just didn't feel like making the deal on that, even though it's right there. That's another show. They're looking at how many hours they got to do and going Ah, and this is where you end up. So I can see in I can see in terms of in terms of in terms of quantity, again, the usual balance between quantity and quality. And in terms of in terms of quantity and having to get something done to say that they got it done. regardless what comes out the other end. That's another possibility. And there and in the debate, the rather heated debates that have happened around synthetic voice on the various mailing lists and what have you, you know, there will be people that are like, well, if it means we get more stuff, fine. If we get if we get a ton of things audio describe that I normally wouldn't have. In other words, it's yet another chapter of it's better than nothing. Yeah. But we've progressed to the point where the technology is improved. And there's enough demand that companies find that it's, well demand in various forms, that the companies have found that it's, it's necessary behooves them to work on catalogue or to audio, describe some things in quantity that this has come up. But it comes down to basically the same thing, which is, you know, well, would we are we going to get this otherwise? Yeah. And so the audience has that decision to make, and they've definitely been debating.

M

Melissa Hope 38:44

And that's Yeah, that's the thing. It's definitely a point of contention on whether the quantity is worth it or not. But it is, I mean, it is sure a huge amount of quantity to hear, to hear what Amazon's talking about. So, you know, in terms of just getting a lot of audio description, it does accomplish that.

V

Valerie Hunter 39:02

And yeah, so while you're while you're saying that the savings you have in time, they always emphasize time as much as money to make them sound good. The savings and time. While it may seem small, in terms of a small part of the workflow, you quantify that, you know, you'd multiply that by 1000s of hours. Starting to make a little more sense. 20

to 30% is a lot of hours over 1000s There you go. Exactly. But so, you know, that's another issue that's, that's come up and it's it's yet another nice issue to have. But it's still an issue and whether it will be a slippery slope, and you know what, you know, that and again, it's back to they'll take any excuses, things More, anything faster and faster and cheaper. Anything anything? So. So yeah, it's definitely the Pandora's box has been opened on this.

M

Melissa Hope 40:14

Yeah, there's there's probably no going back and closing that I pletely agree Pandora's box is open. So I think there's a couple of things, you know, there's trying to direct people to using it, where it matters less. We're using it on documentaries and you know, things where the descriptions are minimal. There's some shows where I know we've done shows where there's like, three lines of description. Yeah, it won't matter if those are a robot. Yes, sure. I love when those come in. But yeah, oh, yeah. Not I feel kind of guilty. makes up for the ones where there's 700 events.

V

Valerie Hunter 40:51

Yeah, it always evens itself out. Yeah.

M

Melissa Hope 40:54

So you know, direct clients to using it appropriately. Definitely, there's been some discussion on the groups that there's concerns that the quality of the writing isn't as good when a synthetic voice is being used. And I know that's one of the reasons we agreed to do the synthetic voice for this client is because we pride ourselves on really good writing. And we're like, control, we can at least control that we can give good writing, even if it's with a synthetic voice. And like I said, maybe experimenting with whether a bit of human mixing a bit more human touch, in the post production part would make a difference. We would love to be able to test our theory that that would help a little bit, but we haven't found anybody willing to test it with us yet.

R

Ryan Fleury 41:36

Melissa, can I ask what text to speech and and you guys are using?

M

Melissa Hope 41:40

I can't say, it's the client's.



Ryan Fleury 41:42

Okay.



Melissa Hope 41:42

Yeah, we don't have our own. Okay. Nope, we're not really looking to do that yet. We really love our human voices for our own stuff.



Rob Mineault 41:52

His name is Roy Samuelson.



Melissa Hope 41:55

I wish I've never gotten to actually work with Roy. I've talked to him many times. But no,



Valerie Hunter 42:00

I haven't worked with him directly, either. But heard him plenty. Yeah. he's pretty, pretty great.



Steve Barclay 42:06

When it comes to video description, if people provide feedback, saying, Hey, we really hate this narration? Are they gonna care? Are they gonna consider that job done? we've we've done the audio description. That's what we had to do, period, forget about it. And we're not listening to anybody?



Melissa Hope 42:23

That's a great question.



Valerie Hunter 42:24

Yeah, I would say depends on how much there is, um, and which companies actually care and which are just happy to fulfill the mandate and not really care. But, and but the thing is, it seems to be, there's a mix of, of those sorts of priorities. So yeah, the best thing I can, the best thing I can say is that, especially in terms of, you know, the new people who have started on this didn't and also like, the Netflix, the Netflix, people who have gotten who

have, have gotten sort of spoiled with human stuff, and then if they start switching over, there may be some sort of, it may be more apparent of a jarring change, as opposed to people who may be you're coming into this fresh, but I, I'd like to thank and I know, it's so annoying to always have to say, you know, speak out and say and advocate for yourself and blah, blah, blah, cuz you gotta be so tired of that by now. But, um, but yeah, do that. Especially in terms of, you know, you know, if something, something sucks on amazon prime, you know, good Get in, get in the comments and go nuts and it you know, for as much as, as we've been saying, the sort of, kind of started this tale started with, with discussion online, and mailing lists and whatnot. There are some definite opinions and they're very, in the, the discussion has been very robust. Take that, just put that discussion in front of the vendors. Put that discussion on their websites, don't don't be fighting it out here in the mailing list, go to the specific you know, the, our our niche such as it is, go go out on Main Street, and and get in the comments about it. And it's nice you can do really because especially in terms of companies that like to fancy themselves as being ahead of the curve on this sort of thing and being and being upright and noble about this sort of thing. Those that have in fact decided that this is worth it to them. I mean description generally not the not the worst thing. But if they've decided that you know this, there's enough of an audience for it, then you have to continue making it clear that there is an audience for it. And what's specifically quality wise, there is an audience for, there's more of a chance than say there was, I don't know, five, seven years ago, that an audience will be listened to, then then it was.

- R** Ryan Fleury 45:28
So a lot of times to you, when you're watching a TV show. It'll say, who did the description whether it's descriptive video works or ...
- V** Valerie Hunter 45:36
not enough
- R** Ryan Fleury 45:37
Yes. Yeah, exactly. So a lot of times you can get some information, like you say, and go to their website, leave a comment. Bring your friends, tell your friends, right? Because humans don't get it right, either all the time.
- V** Valerie Hunter 45:52
But also, yeah, it's it's worth giving feedback to description companies, but also has this

case here with with Melissa's company, this was this project was something that was set up for them by the client. This was this was the client's requirement that this be done. And they did the best with what they could with what they've been given. So they didn't really have the choice. They just did the best they could. The clients got all the choice. So it's the client, the producer, the broadcaster, the one who puts the orders down to us, Porsche max to make the content. They're the ones who've got it here. We can pass things on. Absolutely. But you can get direct to the companies that that can I feel that has a bit that could have a bit more influence on who and what they end up using.



Ryan Fleury 46:59

Melissa, there's a Rolls Royce in your future, if you tell me who it was. I tried.



Steve Barclay 47:14

When do I get a Rolls?



Valerie Hunter 47:18

Fair, there are also you know, there are description companies who do who do this and offer it as a service. They advertise it as a service. And so they, I don't think they would be doing that unless they had been hearing, they've been getting demand for sure. It's not the demand specifically for this sort of thing, the demand that we constantly hear over the course of our careers, from clients going faster, cheaper, faster, cheaper, faster, cheaper. So completely understandable. But I don't don't want to make the clients as being necessarily entirely bad guys, or anything, this is good. This is coming from demand from from different levels. And it's worth considering where they come from.



Melissa Hope 48:13

It's the tricky part sometimes of being in our position is that the end user is not our client, right? We have them in mind, they're first in our hearts, they're first in our minds when we're doing this work. But ultimately, it's the person it's the company between them and us, that's, that's paying for it. And yes, making these choices. And so, ultimately, if the consumer complains to the person that they are a client of, it's probably going to be more effective than complaining to us. We're a service provider for that same company. We love feedback, we get great feedback. Every once in a while on our emails and things. But in terms of in terms of changing the industry, it's probably better to go to the companies that are paying the bills. Exactly, right. Yep. So you can see you can listen to whether credit comes up for company, one of one of us, which is awesome, but, you know,

produces the whole thing. And so they're, they're the ones really, you could contract in terms of in terms of how things should be done.



Rob Mineault 49:24

Right. Yeah, I mean, it's such a I, my mind is reeling. Such a big topic, because there's so many aspects of this and there's so many pros and cons on either side. I mean, I certainly see a space for something like this, like, like you mentioned, like for throwaway shows, for shows that something like a synthetic voice would be fine for like reality shows or, you know, whatever. Because, you know, I don't think anybody's ever arguing that a synthetic voice is ever going to be as good as That human element, you know, especially in a narrative, especially in a narrative, well, maybe



Melissa Hope 50:05

There are people trying to argue that it's gonna be Yes, it is. Maybe not there yet, but it will be. A thing that kills me, it kills me is the odd. I don't know why I'm not naming names. But, um, but the company or two, I shouldn't specified because this is a cliché.



Ryan Fleury 50:48

Yeah, those of us using screen reading technology, with text to speech, we all have our choice of voices. So whatever choice client decides to go with, maybe the shittiest voice on the face of the earth, but we just don't like, right, you're not going to please all of us all the time by choosing one particular voice. So how do they walk that? Walk that balance?



Melissa Hope 51:12

Well, you're not gonna like it for human voice either, though, right?



Ryan Fleury 51:15

Yeah. I've actually heard some people say that that human voice sounded synthetic. So...



Valerie Hunter 51:20

or just, you know, it doesn't isn't pleasing to your ear, for whatever reason? Yeah. So there's definitely feedback that it's like, I don't like that person's voice or whatever. And that's, you know, fair. Yeah. Just like the audio book, toss me a whole audio book aside, because you don't like the narrator. Series won't work. Right. So as long as they give us variety to

work with, and don't stick us all with one voice. And that's one thing, the tool that we were using had, I can't remember how many voices but a number of different voices to choose from.

S

Steve Barclay 51:52

Because you can you can go to like I believe it's Acapella offers the option of recording snippets of human speech. Yeah.

R

Ryan Fleury 52:02

Oh, right.

S

Steve Barclay 52:02

Yeah, It'll crunch that into a synthetic voice. Yeah, using voice samples from from a real person speech,

V

Valerie Hunter 52:10

I can see that having potential in terms of synthetic speech in the years to come. I think that there may be more of a hybrid starting to happen. But I want to, I want to bring up another possibility for this sort of thing. I, I work for the DCMP Described Caption Media Program. And so I'm doing educational stuff all the time. And part of what we part of what we do is not just trying to put out as much content as possible for, for educators, and parents, and both, but also to, to try to help try to help people in these situations to have more accessible stuff, regardless whether they use us that's part of what the description key is for AV we have kind of a section of a site that kind of helps walk people through the process of description, from the standpoint of, say, a teacher, who has a student with an IEP come in, and they have to work with some stuff, and how do they How do they negotiate, you know, the content they already have in their curriculum, and make it work for this one student, or a couple students, and maybe another one will come in a couple years later, or something like that, in sort of, in a mixed environment. And I can see a potential for that in this. Um, the idea of making the process as simple as humanly possible. When you take, take it away from the companies, and the big money and stuff has real potential in terms of making audio description more accessible. And in these terms, I mean, accessible, meaning more people can do it. It's sort of a continuation, possibly of what say, Josh melian, you describe does the, the, the concept of anyone can do this? I mean, obviously, the quality varies, but the idea of people in specific, very, very specific situations. Being able to make things more accessible for students, for a child for

whatever that comes upon, I see real I see some I see some good potential in that. I'm, I'm I may not be all that thrilled with one of the richest companies in the universe trying to cut costs on on description, but I'm more than happy to have a parent who's trying to he's trying to educate their kid to have all the tools possible. And that's where I hope that's where I hope this technology really, really gets going. Yeah, that's exciting.



Ryan Fleury 55:13

Ending on a happy note



Rob Mineault 55:24

we've solved nothing



Steve Barclay 55:28

Wait Am I putting aside this storm the Bastille speech?



Oh, you can have it because they're still you know, we still got the big guys to deal with so go storm!



Steve Barclay 55:43

I got to go find my Bastille first.



Rob Mineault 55:47

I don't know closing thoughts. Anybody have any any anything else to add?



Ryan Fleury 55:54

Our robot overlords will soon be overtaking us.



Rob Mineault 56:01

Wow. Okay, well, like I said, we've solved nothing. But it was it was lovely, connecting with you guys. I this is fascinating. Um, we're gonna have you both on every podcast because I

feel like we can just sort of sit back and let you guys go.

 Ryan Fleury 56:15
Right.

 Valerie Hunter 56:18
Next up let us loose on on the question of why audio description doesn't follow the show as it was purchased by other.

 Ryan Fleury 56:29
Write that down and email it to me. I'll get you guys back on later on this year. Because I'll forget.

 Rob Mineault 56:36
Honestly, yeah, we'd love to have you guys back on. Absolutely. It's it's a fascinating topic.

 Ryan Fleury 56:40
And you guys can talk about it way better than we can

 Rob Mineault 56:43
That's right.

 Valerie Hunter 56:44
We can rant about it. At least in that case. Yeah, we can. Yeah, we can. We can do inside baseball ranting.

 Ryan Fleury 56:54
no, it's all content. We love it.

 Rob Mineault 56:57

Listen, our last rant was about Pepe LePew not being in the Space Jam movies. So great.

R Ryan Fleury 57:05
Yeah, please come back. We need help. Rob

R Rob Mineault 57:18
hashtag rehabilitate Pepe.

R Ryan Fleury 57:23
I still think you should start that hash tag going.

V Valerie Hunter 57:27
Oh, my.

R Rob Mineault 57:40
No, it was actually a pleasure. Thanks, guys for taking some time out. Yeah, it's, I feel I feel more like I have a grasp on on both sides of this now. And hopefully our listeners do too. And yeah, let's do this again, real soon.

M Melissa Hope 57:55
Wonderful. Thank you so much.

R Ryan Fleury 57:57
Yeah. Thanks, Melissa. Thanks, Valerie. for your time. Thanks.

R Rob Mineault 58:01
Yeah, man, it I tell you it pays off getting experts on the show. Yeah. It's a fascinating topic, because I really do see both sides of it, I see that this is a really, it's a nuanced subject, because I can see, I can see the pros and the cons.

S

Steve Barclay 58:18

I totally get the argument about, you know, people wanting access to more content. sure that that makes perfect sense to me. But But I mean, at this point, it's almost like the the text to speech should be a stopgap measure. You know, it's just something okay, here's, here's your access to the content. And then we'll go back and we'll make it good. Sure.

R

Rob Mineault 58:41

Yeah, and I think that that's the fear, right? Like, it's, it's with anything corporate, as soon as you give them, like, Hey, here's a way to save, like, even 20% they're gonna run with that you they'll take something that should be maybe a tool and like you said, maybe a stopgap measure, or used in certain situations where it's not going to affect the quality of whatever they're, they're describing. They're just going to, they're just going to run with it and just throw everything at it because it's cheaper.

R

Ryan Fleury 59:13

I sent a theme here because we have an upcoming show relatively soon that is going to touch on some of these same topics. Well, you know,

R

Rob Mineault 59:19

it's interesting you say that, because I had the same thought, you know, this, this is not something that's happening exclusively with audio descriptions happening in other areas of accessibility as well where it's just like, oh, maybe this is a cheap and easy way to make something accessible, make something accessible, and you know, there's a part of me that's kind of that's that's kind of offensive like you know, okay, so now you're going to like, you know, you're going to spend \$80,000 getting just the right sound effect for your for your movie gun, but then you're going to skimp and not want to actually pay for quality audio description for this niche market of people like me. I mean, that's like where, where they're deciding to cut corners or to try to, you know, try to have a quick and easy fix. Kind of pisses you off. Yep. Agreed. But I mean, you know, the end part of me too, like, tell me if I'm just a conspiracy theory nut. But I do find that it's really interesting that this technology, and there's a bunch of these companies coming out of the woodwork Now, with this text to voice speech, when there's been all these mandates about audio description, and a certain number of hours of audio description, like where were these guys, when we were trying to make jaws sound better or to make other text to speech? software packages for people with disabilities sound better? So I just drive people crazy listening to it all day. Like, where was the technology, then?



Ryan Fleury 1:00:52

Well, it's interesting, like Valerie said, with regards to Amazon wanting to make some of their back catalogue or 1000s of items in their catalog, audio described, you know, text to speech, like cses might be a stopgap measure. But recently, we did an article, I think, on HBO Max, where they're going to be releasing a whole bunch more titles in the next year, a couple years with audio description. It didn't say what type of audio description. So again, is that going to be all text to speech? Or are they going to buy descriptive tracks that were narrated by people that are already out there and licensed those? Or you know what I mean, like,



Rob Mineault 1:01:31

yeah, and what it's gonna come down to it, right? Yeah. And what it's gonna come down to is, is really, it's probably just the business case for either, but it's a it's a complicated topic. We could talk for literally three hours about this.



Ryan Fleury 1:01:44

Well, I'm gonna bring Reed Hastings on from Netflix.



Rob Mineault 1:01:47

Who's Reed Hastings?



Ryan Fleury 1:01:49

Isn't he the CEO?



Is he okay?



Ryan Fleury 1:01:52

Sure. Yeah, reach out to read. Do it. See if I can get him on the show? Yeah. Rick Hansen, man.



Rob Mineault 1:01:59

Your heart. You're a heavy hitter. You got 236 episodes under your belt. Just throw that. Anything else to say about that? fellas?

S Steve Barclay 1:02:10
No. Oh, not

R Ryan Fleury 1:02:11
a whole heck of a lot. No.

R Rob Mineault 1:02:13
Well, in that case, Ryan.

R Ryan Fleury 1:02:15
Rob.

R Rob Mineault 1:02:16
Where can people find us?

R Ryan Fleury 1:02:19
Well you know what, they can still find us atbanter.com and.ca because my domain just got renewed so we're good for another year.

R Rob Mineault 1:02:44
Wait, it's time for the bit or weekly bit .. How is the exercise going?

R Ryan Fleury 1:02:47
The exercise and going it's going every morning? 530 or six in the morning for half an hour I get on the bike and pedal miles. That's okay.

R Rob Mineault 1:02:54

Good for you.

S

Steve Barclay 1:02:57

I did 6.3 kilometers on Sunday. I did five yesterday and I think I'm probably not doing it tomorrow. I'm probably doing it Friday. I'll do another five Friday. Nice. So I'll get 16 kilometers in this week.

R

Ryan Fleury 1:03:13

Man yeah I'm using what you fitness plus app on my iPhone and my Apple watch so I've got trainers there that drive you push you and of course it's honor based right but yeah, I'm I'm sweating 30 minutes and typically take Saturday and Sunday off just to kind of get my legs recover

R

Rob Mineault 1:03:31

and work with you guys for like I don't know whatever it what crazy amount of years that I've worked with you guys and now all of a sudden I leave and now you're like the God knows all those Japanese workers you see at the Auto plants doing calisthenics in the morning and stuff like you guys probably have, like matching jumpsuits that you guys were

S

Steve Barclay 1:03:50

Yeah, that's that's when we get the tandem bike.

R

Ryan Fleury 1:03:52

That's right.

R

Rob Mineault 1:03:54

Please do that. I want to see that.

S

Steve Barclay 1:03:56

Then we got to get then we got to get stretchy pants.

R

Rob Mineault 1:04:02

Anyways, we digress. Uh, where were we? We were at, oh, well, where else can people find us other than email and they didn't give email yet? Well, then let me just tell you about our email address. It's cowbell at 80 venture calm if you would like to email us or anything.

S

Steve Barclay 1:04:25

And I don't know if you're aware of this, but you can also get us on all kinds of social distancing platforms. So we've got Facebook to keep away from people we've got Twitter to keep away from people and we've got Instagram to keep away from people so you can catch us there and not ever have to come anywhere near us.

R

Rob Mineault 1:04:49

That's that's, that's that's a that's a very attractive prospect. For many people. I think. All right, that is going to about do it for us this week. Big thanks to everybody for listening in. A huge thank you to both Melissa and Valerie for joining us for that rousing discussion. And we will see everybody next week.