

# AT Banter Podcast Episode 247 -Robin Christopherson

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

accessibility, echo, people, google, skills, podcast, absolutely, organization, digital, digital assistants, play, built, air fryer, home, lady, app, spoken, amazon, demo, digital inclusion

## SPEAKERS

Rob Mineault, Steve Barclay, Robin Christopherson, Ryan Fleury

- R** Rob Mineault 01:15  
Hey, and welcome to another episode of AT Banter,
- S** Steve Barclay 01:20  
Banter, banter.
- R** Rob Mineault 01:22  
Hey, my name is Rob Mineault. Oh, joining me today the fantabulous Mr. Ryan Fleury. Hey, And the stupendous Steve Barclay.
- S** Steve Barclay 01:34  
Wel l, there is "stup" in there ... let's go with that
- R** Rob Mineault 01:41  
Another week and other podcast, boys.



Ryan Fleury 01:44

Absolutely.



Rob Mineault 01:45

Indeed. How's things? How is it going over there?



Ryan Fleury 01:50

Oh, it's pretty darned quiet.



Steve Barclay 01:53

But you know, I'm counting down the days until I'm going fishing.



Rob Mineault 01:56

Yeah, are you so where are you going?



Steve Barclay 01:59

Euclulet



Rob Mineault 02:00

Oh, really? Again? You kind of go there every year. It's this is at the same spot that you go?



Steve Barclay 02:06

Yeah, yeah. It's a spectacular fishing offshore there. It's just amazing.



Rob Mineault 02:11

That place must have been so nice during that heatwave. Because it's like it's it's like its own zone - Weather zone. It's so much cooler. Over there on the, what is it, the east coast of Vancouver Island?



Steve Barclay 02:25

Yep. Their West Coast, the far west coast. Yeah, yeah. It's usually a few degrees cooler just because the ocean temperature keeps it keeps it down. Yeah, we were looking at our our weather reports for two weeks when we start fishing and I think it's gonna be high of 20 and down to about 11 at night.

**R** Rob Mineault 02:48  
Chilly

**S** Steve Barclay 02:49  
Yeah. It'll be nice.

**R** Rob Mineault 02:53  
Hey, Ryan.

**R** Ryan Fleury 02:56  
Yes?

**R** Rob Mineault 02:57  
What are we doing today?

**R** Ryan Fleury 03:00  
Today we are doing a podcast.

**S** Steve Barclay 03:02  
Oh are we? I'm wearing the wrong shirt.

**R** Ryan Fleury 03:08  
We are talking with Robin Christopherson, who is the head of digital inclusion at Abilitynet. And I should and I should also say, a podcast host of the dot to dot show and the echo show.

R Rob Mineault 03:25  
I love talking to other podcasters.

R Ryan Fleury 03:29  
Yeah, you know, this is gonna be informative for all of those of us who have digital assistants and wonder what we could do with them.

R Rob Mineault 03:37  
Hmm, true. I said, you know what I really underutilized my Google.

R Ryan Fleury 03:44  
Well, you know, it's interesting is I saw something the other day on the internet about Google, and how there's like, I think 8000 different things you can ask your Google Home or Google Assistant to do. There's like 8000, like, where do you find all that information? Like, there isn't just one spot to find all the commands?

R Rob Mineault 04:04  
Yeah, I've tried. I've literally have a Google device in every room of my of my apartment. And I don't use it for nearly enough. I use them to play Spotify to set timers. And occasionally, like all ask, like, what the weather like what the temperature is. And that's it like and really, I really need to really do a deep dive and figure out what it can actually do. Because I don't know.

R Ryan Fleury 04:33  
And that's all we do with our Amazon Echoes as well. You know, one of the couple lights in the house can turn on and off whole house music because I have an Echo Dot each room, like you're listening to Spotify. And basically whether, you know, yeah,

R Rob Mineault 04:50  
So we have these amazing pieces of technology that we're not even using. So I think that by the time this podcast is over, I think we're going to be inspired to actually do some research and actually figure out what how I can be using it better.

**S** Steve Barclay 05:33  
Yeah, I'm looking at a list of some of the different things you can ask it. Such as, aren't you a little short for a stormtrooper? I am your father. That's something else you can tell it. You can ask it, how much would it would a wood chuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood. You can ask it how many roads must a man walk down? You can ask it. What is the airspeed velocity of an unladen swallow...

**R** Ryan Fleury 05:59  
That's a topic for some shows. We should get somebody from Google on again to talk about just the digital assistant because this show is Echo based. So different device, you know, you know, get somebody on talking about the Google Homes, the Home Pods from Apple. Do a head to head or something.

**R** Rob Mineault 06:19  
Yeah, well, you know, it is a really, I really do feel like these devices are really underutilized. I think a lot of people have them in their homes, and they don't use them to their full capabilities, mainly because they just don't know what they can do. And I don't know if that's because they're always updating these these devices in the background. You know, adding to the firmware, adding to the capabilities and the general public just they're not clued into to all these changes, and they just don't know what what functionality there is in there or even what they can do. So yeah, it's it's interesting. I'm intrigued to have this conversation.

**R** Ryan Fleury 07:05  
Excellent. Well, why don't we bring him on? Joining us now is Robin Christopherson.

**R** Robin Christopherson 07:09  
Hi, guys.

**R** Ryan Fleury 07:10  
Thanks for joining.

**S** Steve Barclay 07:11

Welcome.

R

Robin Christopherson 07:12

Thanks.

R

Ryan Fleury 07:14

So I thought what would we what we would start with Robin is kind of a glimpse or a snapshot about who you are.

R

Robin Christopherson 07:23

So I'm English, as it might be apparent, live over here in the UK in Warwick, a nice part of the world, nice castle, do come and visit. And I work for an organization called Abilitynet, which is a UK tech and disability charity, with the only pan disability pan impairment pan technology organisation. So you've probably heard of the RNIB, which are experts in vision. And there are other similar organizations as well. But we are particularly useful to our clients to our customers, because you know, we're a one stop shop, we have a range of services, auditing websites, doing diverse user testing, you know, providing internal audit of organizations, accessibility maturity, shall we say, and various other free services to disabled users, their friends, families, etc, helping them get the most out of technology. So I probably sound a lot younger than I am. But I've been working for abilitynet for 25 years. And it's been absolutely fantastic. It's like being paid to play.

R

Ryan Fleury 08:46

And you're the head of digital inclusion. What is your responsibilities for Abilitynet?

R

Robin Christopherson 08:51

Hmm, so I'm kind of a mixture really, I work in the sales and marketing team. But before that, when I joined them in 96, actually before even ability now, it was called ability net. It was a special needs product division of IBM. So I was you know, working with via voice and screen reader for Rs two warp and stuff like that. And then when it turned into abilitynet, I was an assessor going out to individuals in the home, etc. And then in 2003, we had our first inquiry about website accessibility. And I started the consultancy team, which is now about 30 strong. And we, you know, was part of that team for a long time, until I decided that I'd had enough to do with code and auditing etc. So I moved over to the dark side of sales and marketing, and I've been there for probably about eight years now.

And it's brilliant. Because I do a lot of public speaking a lot of advocacy sit on a lot of I don't know, government committees. And that doesn't sound too exciting, actually, does it? Get to write a lot of blog posts and do a lot of podcasts, etc? So, yeah, I'm just talking about, you know, accessibility, and use the technologies, why businesses should care about digital inclusion and all that sort of thing. So, yeah, keeps me busy.

R

Rob Mineault 10:29

So I always have to ask people in the industry, because I'm always really super curious. But what have you found the past, say, five or six years in terms of of business? Have you found that there's a real uptick in interest in things like digital accessibility?

R

Robin Christopherson 10:50

Absolutely, yeah. I mean, digital, obviously, is getting more and more important, all the time. COVID has put a laser focus on online, and digital delivery, etc. But even earlier than that, I think ever since the emergence of the smartphone, and obviously, we know now that it is in very real terms, a mobile first world, you know, traffic to any given website on any given day is well over half is around 60%, from mobile devices. And that doesn't even factor in the apps that people use, instead of going to the website, which obviously are mobile only as well. So it's definitely a mobile first world. And there's been a growing recognition that accessibility, whilst it's obviously aimed at disabled users, and all of the guidelines are, you know, crafted in such a way that if they are complied with, then it does make it possible for disabled people like ourselves, I'm blind, to, you know, actively participate in what everybody else is doing online. But it actually makes it better for everybody else. And that's because everybody is different shapes and sizes, you know, shouldn't settle for the vanilla experience, you know, we would encourage everyone to play with their accessibility settings. And if you do, like a spider chart of all of the settings in the Settings app in iOS, for example, well, over half of them are in accessibility, something like 65%. So, you know, it's a major part of your phone's potential customization that you would be ignoring if you didn't have a play in there. But even more than that, everyone that is using a mobile phone, regardless of whether they've got an impairment or not, is kind of extreme computing their computing on the edge, you know, if you're juggling your phone one handed, just using your thumb to, you know, tap on things, or even, you know, use the on screen keyboard, say, if you're on a bumpy bus, or car, in noisy cafe, you know, if you're trying to order an Uber, after a good night out, and you've had a few drinks, you know, the extreme usability that you need, there is what someone with cognitive impairment, might need to be able to successfully do that, you know, use that app, unsupported, you know, so there are so many parallels now. And I would say the biggest change in the last five years is that the conversations that we have with clients is

no longer about, oh, you know, why should we do this? It's moved on to, you know, a recognition that it's really important, we would say it's table stakes, really, to consider accessibility to make it extremely usable for everyone, whilst making it usable for those that would otherwise be locked out. And, you know, it makes your product fit for purpose in a in the age of extreme computing, shall we say?

R

Rob Mineault 13:40

Yeah, and I feel like that's the really important part of this all is is to really get things like businesses, really on board with the idea that it's, it's just a really good business case, to to have accessibility built into your product, whether that be a website or an app. So in that space, like how have you found that that mindset is slowly shifting away from say, accessibility being something of a of an add on or an afterthought after the fact to them being a little bit more aware of starting to bake in accessibility at the at the development stage?

R

Robin Christopherson 14:22

Definitely shift left, you've probably heard that about, you know, applying to lots of things. But when it comes to accessibility, we've definitely moved away from working with our clients in a kind of an ad hoc basis, project by project, you know, we'd work on a particular app, and then they bring us in 12 or 18 months later on some other project. And then they were kind of back to square one with their knowledge. You know, there hadn't been any sort of knowledge transfer, or upskilling within the organization. So yeah, we've moved much more towards embedding accessibility maturity, and there are digital accessibility maturity models that organizations can use to kind of review how they're doing things internally, across everything: you know, training, tooling, documentation, component libraries, procurement, sea level buy in proper support and resourcing champions network all of these things within an organization that will actually make sure that they don't, you know, patch it at the end before it goes live and then get a horrible shock when they realize that they've done something that's going to require quite significant retrofitting. So yeah, we're absolutely seeing that. Maybe not across every organization, because you know, the people that come to us are the ones that care enough to, you know, want to have help in, in kind of really accelerating on that journey. But having said that, our delivery has tripled since the beginning of lockdown. And before then it was, you know, doubling each year. So, yeah, we've we're very busy. And we, we definitely see that as being a recognition that accessibility is important. And that's driven by, you know, the kind of CSR which is now you know, the Corporate Social Responsibility being seen to do the right thing. You know, Apple is very vocal, so is Microsoft about the importance of accessibility. And that's now kind of morphed into ESG, environmental, social, and

governance. And the social bit is definitely where, you know, there's a recognition that diversity is really important. And we've got, you know, celebration of LGBTQ and race, obviously, is hugely high profile at the moment, we do a lot to make sure that disability doesn't get forgotten. In that kind of Carnival sort of Cinderella, that often gets forgotten. But yeah, there's a definite recognition that device diversity is a good thing. And we're, you know, benefiting from that as well.

R

Rob Mineault 16:54

So recently, there's been a little bit of controversy here. And I'm not sure if you guys are even aware of this, but there's this there's this product out there called Accessibee..

R

Robin Christopherson 17:05

Why did I think you're gonna say that? Yeah, I've already written an article on it. Absolutely. Right. And you covered it last week, didn't you? Or last time?

R

Ryan Fleury 17:14

We have a few times, yeah.

R

Robin Christopherson 17:17

Yeah, I mean, you talked about whether there's a place for overlays. And whilst it is horrendously mis sold, and whilst it literally does degrade, the accessibility of some sites that it's applied to, you know, actually makes things worse. It's, there are other ones out there that don't do that, and that probably are worth considering. So until your browser, for example, allows someone with dyslexia to mouse over a link or a button or a paragraph, and have it spoken out on hover. Obviously, we've got an immersive reader and, you know, reader mode and stuff, which strips out a lot of the complications and reads the document from start to finish with like a play pause button and stuff. That is nothing like what someone with dyslexia needs to just be able to zip around and, and have something spoken out. So something like browsealoud is a plugin that just does that. So there's definitely a place for a site to include a style switcher, you know, actually code that into the site, you know, those three A's and stuff that are different themes. And for things like browsealoud, but definitely not an all singing, all dancing overlay solution. We would have issues with that we do have issues with that.

R

Rob Mineault 18:37

Yeah, and I'm so glad you said that, because that's really was kind of my thought initially to was that, you know, there must be it the tech, the technology itself, the idea of a web overlay, you know, isn't a bad idea in and of itself, it's just that really these excessive, you guys have just sort of taken that and really kind of perverted it into something that's that actually runs against digital accessibility, which is really the problem. You know, if it worked as intended, or as they marketed to be it, you know, it could very well be a good thing. Because if, if we can make web accessibility and digital accessibility, an easier process for businesses, you know, I can't see how that's a bad thing. But that being said, I do also understand the flip side of that in the sense that building a really good accessible foundation for your for your digital product, whether that's an app or if it's a website, you can't do any better than just going in and building the code to standards by hand.

R

Robin Christopherson 19:45

And that messaging should be front and center on any organization that selling an additional plugin, or add on tool and, you know, an organization with a good moral compass like texthelp, which do the Browsealoud plugin We'll we'll definitely shout about how compliance you know is first and foremost, but that this is where this particular, you know, tool adds additional functionality for this particular group or whatever. So, yeah, and even then though with something like browsealoud, a lot of times someone with dyslexia, for example, would want to use a solution that was that was local, so that they would make, you know, provide that same functionality in Word in wherever, you know, across your whole computer. So then they would have that functionality in a browser as well to be able to hover over a button and have the label spoken, etc. So even then, you know, it's not as if you're going to be leaving people with dyslexia high and dry, if you don't build that sort of thing in so even that messaging should be made clear that, you know, some people will be coming to your website, without already having those, you know, AT solutions in place, even things like changing the settings within your browser, so that you've got that the kind of color contrast and font size choices, line spacing choices that you want. Even then a style switcher may or may not kind of interfere with those. So it's a sensitive, delicate issue. And at the end of the day, compliance should be first and foremost, and what 95 - 98% of websites out there aren't even single a so that's a much bigger conversation and kind of goal to champion to make sure that we sort of nibble away at that.

R

Ryan Fleury 21:37

Now, we've been having that conversation for too long, it's time to get off the big stick.

R

Robin Christopherson 21:41

Well, funny, you should say that. So here in the UK, the last bit of legislation that came over from Europe before the horrible Brexit, you know, guillotine happened was the web accessibility directive, which was an EU legislative legislation that had built into it, the requirement for government to proactively monitor and reinforce or enforce the law, which surprisingly, has never happened, it's always been left up to disabled disabled individuals or, you know, group actions by the rnr, or organizations like that, to take individual companies to court. But this web accessibility directive that came over and became the public sector body accessibility regulations, it's only unfortunately for public sector. But that's really important because it's, you know, government is local authority. It's some universities, it's the BBC and stuff like that. They have all set up very straight, and really pull their finger out because, you know, this legislation does, as I say, include a great big, knobby stick to because they are going to be actively monitored by a government department over here, the CDO, the central digital and data office, and they will be reporting publicly on the websites that failed, they will be giving them a period to comply, they will be issuing fines, and that has seen a seismic shift in the activity in that sector. So we definitely know that you guys over the Well, certainly in the States, I don't know about you guys, but you know, you're all about small government hands off, like touch, etc. But there's no replacement for you know, you talked about the business case before they should be carrots, juicy carrots, and they should be nobly sticks. Yeah. And if the stick is just this weak, wimpy thing it's never used, then, you know, that's not going to have as big of an impact as it otherwise would. There's a brilliant in the in Norway, which aren't part of the EU. So they went their own way. And for a while they've had legislation that has been actively enforced by the government and the department over there diffi that does it they surveyed there. Well, one of the sites that they said we're in, you know, they reviewed and that weren't complying was their low their national airline DSS. And they gave them a year to comply. And at the end of the year, the essay said, Oh, it's too hard, we can't do it. And they said, Look, we're gonna give you 10 days, 10 more days, and we're gonna find you 15,000 euros, that's about I don't know, \$20,000 a day thereafter, and they fixed everything in 10 days. So nothing like a nice bit of incentive to you know, the right incentive will work miracles. So we love that same level of productivity across all sectors here, and indeed in Canada and the states and everywhere else. Unfortunately, they are the one that applied to other sectors. The European Accessibility Act missed that Brexit thing and there's absolutely no chance that current government anyway are interested in bringing any other EU legislation the UK, law books, you know, any time soon, so....

R

Rob Mineault 25:07

We've been saying that for for ages. I mean, that's, that's our biggest problem here in Canada is just it the enforcement. I don't know if it's just because as a society, we're just

too damn polite. But you know, we the best we've got is like a little twig that we use. And we're lucky to have that. I mean, we've just here in in British Columbia, we just passed an accessibility act in the past few weeks, and it literally has no enforcement mechanism. Like there's just there's no, there's not even a reporting mechanism.

S

Steve Barclay 25:40

Well, it doesn't even have standards of any kind. It's it's, it's basically an Act that basically says we should come up with some standards.

R

Robin Christopherson 25:49

Even here in the UK, and that was a similar picture. And it is across other sectors still, it's really kind of anti the claimant or the you know, the individual that's put that has been discriminated against, because there's a loophole, but there's a requirement that if you, if your damages that are awarded, if you're successful, are lower than your costs, then you're liable to all your costs. And you can see why they do is to discourage, you know, flipping, you know, gold digging kind of speculative claims against organizations, but a recent legal case was found in favor of the disabled individual, the organization was made to make changes, I don't know if they have done it yet, but they will also find 32,000 pounds. So yeah, 30,000 pounds were the awards, it was the fine, but the legal costs was 33, say this individual had to pay 33,000 pounds. So that's a discouragement for anyone to you know, use the law to try and get the website or app that they absolutely need to use to be accessible. So, that's scary.

R

Rob Mineault 27:11

Yeah, it is, you know, and the story that we we sort of hear time and time again, when we have guests on the show is also that, you know, the importance of digital accessibility has been really, really driven home, by the pandemic, when with you know, the shift of so many different services to to an online platforms, when those platforms aren't accessible, well, then you're just leaving people with disabilities out in the cold for usually essential services. So hopefully, this is, you know, we're seeing sort of a bit of a loop between that I feel like and this shift to embracing inclusiveness and diversity, I'm hoping that, you know, we're entering into sort of, like a golden age or renaissance of, of embracing digital accessibility.

R

Robin Christopherson 28:05

I think it's almost indecent to say that you don't want to comply these days, when diversity

in general is just so popular. And so, you know, seen as like, a universally good thing, diversity is a hugely popular cause these days. And, you know, it's almost indecent for an organization to say they don't care enough to do anything about it.

R

Rob Mineault 28:30

Well, you know, it's funny, I almost think that, you know, we don't even need lawsuits these days, if we could set up some sort of a public shaming mechanism where, you know, we have a website, we've just have companies that that have gone against compliance. I almost think that that could be effective.

S

Steve Barclay 28:48

Stocks dot com, it's probably taken. Hashtag, you know, yeah.

R

Rob Mineault 28:54

You know, what I mean? Like we you could almost do that way because that companies and organizations are terrified of, of getting flamed on Twitter. And, you know, I think that that you don't even need to mire the courts down in in lawsuits. Just, yeah, just just flame them on Facebook.

R

Robin Christopherson 29:16

I think we can all advocate in our own way.

R

Rob Mineault 29:18

Absolutely. For sure. Okay, Ryan, I'm turning things over to you to talk about the fun stuff already.

R

Ryan Fleury 29:25

Enough boring business stuff. Let's get into some of the entertainment fun. Robin, you are the host and probably producer, I'm guessing of a couple podcasts. One of them. I'm quite interested to talk to you about is the.to dot. And that is based all around skills available on the Amazon echoes. So I wanted to ask you how or why did you decide to take that on?

R

Robin Christopherson 29:58

Cool. Yeah, say thank you. So much, Dot to Dot, we're up to Episode 16 hundred and twenty something. And we've not missed a day, it's a daily podcast hasn't been going as long as yours, but it is daily. And basically, when the Echo was a thing, when it came out, I was just blown away, I thought it was brilliant. And obviously, it's improved a lot since then as well become a lot smarter. But even then, you know, I wanted to know what it could do. And it's pretty easy to go in and, and kind of dig around in the skill store and that sort of thing. And back then she was very well, she didn't surface other skills or suggest things to you at all. She's a lot better at that now. So he really had to go away and find what she could do other than, you know, Wikipedia and the weather and playing music and stuff like that. So I thought, Hmm, I am going to dig around, I'm going to do a podcast, which always demos doesn't just talk about always demos built in functionality, skills, games, productivity, you know, whatever it might be. And goodness knows, there's a lot you can do with your smart speaker. So that was the idea. And it was really, really straightforward. I didn't have a mixer or anything at the beginning. So just holding my phone up to the the echo. And, but yeah, every single day, we practice, we don't do a practical demo of something. And they're less than five minutes, almost all the time. So they don't take long to listen to. And then hopefully, if that's available where you are, because I know that the states have a bit more built in functionality than we've got over here, for example, things do sort of come over to other regions, sort of slowly, but surely, I'm looking at your notes, I want notes on the Echo like they have in the States. But where it's not available where you are, you know, at least you could see if there was something similar, for example, in your skill store. And where I wasn't able to demo it, I thought, oh, I'll ask listeners to send in their contributions. And sometimes, and I got a really good response. And you know, there have been lots and lots of different voices on it over the the months. And sometimes, if I heard about something that I couldn't demo, I would reach out to one of them and ask them to do it. And they've always been really kind to do that. So if you're gonna pick a daily podcast to do, then make sure that you do a really short one, and one where it's really easy to know what to do next day in the next day in the next day. And luckily, that's what Dot to Dot is.

R

Ryan Fleury 32:45

Yeah, and I haven't seen many other podcasts that have done such a deep dive into the skills that are available. So how do you go about choosing the skills that you're going to demo?

R

Robin Christopherson 32:59

Well, luckily, she does say, if you like this, you might like that. Or you can say what are

your top travel skills? Or what are your most popular skills this week, so you can kind of query or quiz her about stuff as well. And that's all relatively new. There are newsletters, obviously, there's the Friday morning one from Amazon itself. There's other newsletters, like voice brew, which is a daily one, as well. So and then obviously, there's just digging in skill store and, you know, looking in different categories or searching for keywords and stuff like that, I'm not going to say that every skill on the skill store is good. It's not there's a lot of stuff in there, which are very basic skills or even just not very good skills. So you do have to do a bit of digging and, you know, trying out and making sure that you pick one that is good enough to go on the show. I'm not going to say that everyone that I've ever covered is a winner. But it was good enough for me to bring to the table as it were. So yeah, and people would send in people that didn't want to demo stuff themselves they would email me suggestions and that sort of thing.

R

Ryan Fleury 34:10

Do you have a favorite skill?

R

Robin Christopherson 34:15

Episode number one was the magic door which is a choose your own adventure game. Well it's five in one Choose Your Own Adventure is really well done. And for the reason why I did it as number one is because I thought I'd share this with people. I've got to demo this to people and all they you know, once they've listened to it, they just say a lady lunch the magic door or open the magic door or whatever and they're they're instantly playing it themselves as well. So yeah, that I think is still my favorite. And on the sister show to Dot to Dot, the Echo show. We've done a live playthrough on that sort of like a really deep dive people Listen to that as well. Can I talk about the Echo Show?

R

Ryan Fleury 35:02

Yeah, that's our next step, so fire away.

R

Robin Christopherson 35:05

So yeah, the Echo show is a weekly show, which is still based on practical demos of built in features or third party skills. With a fantastic guy, many people will have heard him on another technology based Canadian podcast. It's Sean Preece, the brilliant Sean Preece, he comes from his shed in Manchester, and I'm in my office in work. And we, you know, co host this show every single week, the Echo show, it's not a brilliant name, because a lot of people think it's just to do the ones with screens. But yeah, no, it's just like a bigger version.

It's like a biggerr version of Dot to Dot with banter. Which I'm sure you guys are all for.

R

Ryan Fleury 35:58

Nice. So what is it about the Echos that made you decide to go that route versus, you know, Google homes? Or Homepods? Siri? Of course, I'm assuming you're still all in the echo ecosystem?

R

Robin Christopherson 36:17

Yeah, I mean, since during the show, Amazon keep on sending me stuff. So I think they want to, you know, avoid any opportunity that I buy anything else. So recently demoed the new echo show 10, which is a 10 inch screen that swivels around to follow you around the room, which is pretty spooky. Yeah, so we've got more records than we know what to do with to be honest. But I think that, because you mentioned Siri, and you know, we've all probably used Siri a lot, because it's often quicker to get you know, the answer that you want, when even you know, quicker than doing a quick web search, or Google or whatever. But Siri always often anyway, defaults to, I found this on the web, she does it a little bit less these days. But you know, it was a kind of a weird mixture of spoken and visual. And that was one of the things that I was really excited about when I heard about an AI that was in a can that had no screen. So that, you know, I was really pleasantly surprised when the echoes when the a lady, you know, came up with the goods there. Because there's no screen, everything is spoken. And I thought that's got to be helping Siri because they're going to realize that, you know, it's just so much better to speak things as well as shown on the screen, you know, compliment the stuff on the screen with the speech as well. But actually, that hasn't changed that much in subsequent years. But yeah, once I was got my first Echo, and found out how much you can do with it, I didn't really need to look anywhere else. I certainly use her more than I use Siri for getting, you know, quick bits of information, I use it to access my diary all the time, because my weekday diary is absolutely chocker. So something like when am I free, on the 27th in the afternoon, she'll just tell you the gaps. So that's so much better than you know, you have three appointments, one at 1232, blah, blah, blah, and you have to, you know, work out what the bits are in between and stuff like that. So it's really powerful for productivity things as well as games and stuff. And the Google Home, I don't know what it is now. But it had 8000 actions, which are they're kind of equivalent to skills. Last time I looked, and the a lady skill store here in the UK anyways, 50,000 is a lot more in the US skill store. I'm not sure about Canada, but you know, there's no comparison. Really.

R

Ryan Fleury 38:50

Yeah, that was something I was gonna ask about. or mentioned, I think the discoverability of what's available on an Amazon Echo, versus the Google Home is much easier to find something that is going to work for you whether it's home automation, whether it's, you know, entertainment, so on and so forth. When you just mentioned 1000 activities on the Google Home, I had no clue. I have a Google Home mini here. I honestly haven't gone into look at or find a place that lists the activities that are available. And I think that was an issue early on is I really didn't know what the Google Home was capable of. Whereas with the Amazon Echo, you could open the app and look at the skills and you know, pick and choose.

R

Robin Christopherson 39:42

Yeah, I mean, I don't claim to know anything about the Google nest family as it is now. So I wouldn't even know where you would go and look for that has the Google nest got its own app, you know, over and above their Google? I don't know. I don't know anything about it. I'm afraid but Certainly you mentioned smart home and connected devices and stuff. And my sister who's blind also has MS. And she has no use of arms or legs or anything like that just her voice, she can't see anything. And the echo that she uses, does everything he knows she gets, that's how she gets her talking books, her radio, her podcasts, can phone, people, you know, all of that sort of stuff, but also can control a bunch of stuff as well. And, you know, I've written loads of articles about the accessibility features built into the Echo, and also the kind of broader implications of connectivity for people with a range of different impairments. So yeah, it's super empowering for her. And I would plug a little bit of kit called the Harmony Hub, which, if you haven't got a, you know, a lady compatible TV or VCR, well, would you call them like Digi boxes these days, then, anything with a remote control, you can program the Harmony Hub, to then be a kind of a proxy remote control that is a lady enabled. So you know, you just, you can either search on the harmony app for your particular Digi box or TV model number. And it will have all of the things all of the codes already in there. Or if you haven't, if it doesn't show up, then you can point the remote at it and kind of program it button by button. And then you've got the different voice commands for that. So you can, you know, play BBC One, set record whatever it might be on these less smart devices. So and that's like 80 pounds or something like that. And you can fully control everything in your environment, super powerful for people with a range of impairments or if you're just super lazy.

R

Rob Mineault 41:59

Well, you know, smart speakers are so fascinating, because it's it's a great example of one of these advances that hit the mainstream and is a great mainstream product, and nearly ubiquitous in households these days. But it's also like a pretty amazing piece of assistive

technology when you when you really think about it.

R

Robin Christopherson 42:09

Yeah, I mean, it really is it could almost be designed for you know, people with disabilities. If you think that you need to be able to talk or speak clearly to use an Echo, you absolutely don't if you have one with a screen, there's a number of things that you can turn on in the accessibility session settings. So you tap to alexa, brings up key commands on the screen in little tiles. And you can also bring up a keyboard to put in a custom command etc. There are various other accessibility settings, which you know, we know that if you can't hear then you can, you know, turn on captions in videos and everything that she would otherwise say, you can have brought up on a screen if you've got an Echo Show. So you know, you don't need to be able to talk to us A lady you don't need to be able to hear to use it. You don't need to be able to see to us on the screen because it's got built in screen reader etc, etc. So yeah, they're like the ultimate access AT device.

R

Rob Mineault 43:43

I feel like it's just a race like I can't wait until someone thinks to be like -- here's how it'll start. It'll be like let's put a smart speaker in a Roomba. And then then it's mobile, we can we can move around and then from there, it's gotta be only a matter of time where we can maybe we can just like add some little arms and like some little legs and then boom, here we go. Or even you don't even need the arms like this just like we can just make R2D2 just like put a smart speaker in that and have them roll around and follow you around. I would want something with arms so that it could fold laundry.

S

Steve Barclay 44:22

Rob what you really need what you really need is a daughter. Yeah, that's all mine does, follows me around going "Listen to this. Listen to this. Check out this out".

R

Robin Christopherson 44:33

I should also say because I think certainly I personally and maybe other people as well try to you know stave off the lockdown pounds and stuff like that. And anything that you can do to be a little bit more active so on the A lady, there's loads of workout ones, and there's even one called desk workout which does a lot of exercises that you can do at your desk miss them sitting down at require no space at all. And they last only a few minutes. So there's absolutely no excuse for not, you know, being active and my son who's a personal trainer, and he's built like the Incredible Hulk is a very strong advocate of not doing any

labor saving things at all. So you know, if there's a machine that will avoid you having to pick up a piece of paper off the floor, that's like Wall-E time, basically. Do that, you know, do do everything yourself. Basically, if you look on YouTube, there's a brilliant guy called the Bioneer and he's a huge advocate for this as well basically do do everything yourself. So yeah, you could go the other way and have the, you know, imagine a future where the A lady will do everything for you, but at the same time, today, you can make her help you do things you know, and stay in shape yourself.

**R** Rob Mineault 45:53  
So true. Very true.

**R** Ryan Fleury 45:57  
Well, we have to say goodbye now, Robin. Thanks so much. We want robots!

**R** Robin Christopherson 46:04  
Yeah, sorry. I wasn't talking to the choir there. Yeah, absolutely. Bring them on. Yeah. And a self driving cars. Absolutely.

**R** Rob Mineault 46:11  
However, then it's only the trouble with that. And then it's only a stone's throw from like Terminators, right. Hey, A lady, go kill Sarah Connor ...

**R** Robin Christopherson 46:24  
Can I plug two other podcasts as well?

**R** Rob Mineault 46:26  
Sure.

**R** Robin Christopherson 46:27  
Before I go, so yeah, there's Dot to As we've spoken about, that's three words, the two in the middle is just to please do check that out. It's a really badly named podcast for playing on the A lady. You have to really enunciate it. So apologies there, you can actually add it to your flash briefing by asking her to enable the daily five minutes skill demo show.

So that's a try. I was getting it every single day

**R** Ryan Fleury 46:52  
Try getting it to play AT banter. Good luck.

**R** Robin Christopherson 46:55  
Well, it worked for me that first time. In fact, she said play at banter back to me. The Echo show, as we've mentioned before, and two others one has a Canadian co hosts. That's the Maccessibility that's like accessibility with an M. So I absolutely have to mention that that's a fortnightly vi tech show, Maccessibility. And every week I do Tech Talk, which is an RNIB technology show with the brilliant Steven Scott, amongst other people. So yeah, check out all four of them, please.

**R** Rob Mineault 47:36  
And you know, we'll include links to all four in our show notes.

**R** Robin Christopherson 47:41  
Brilliant. Thank you.

**R** Ryan Fleury 47:42  
I'm just so grateful, you're able to make the time to come and join us, Robin, I've wanted to get you on the show for quite some time about the Dot to Dot podcast and just let our listeners know all about it. So again, thank you so much for your time. Really appreciate it. Thank you.

**R** Rob Mineault 47:56  
See, I knew it. I knew I was not using my Google to its full capability. I am seriously I'm, I'm this weekend, I'm just going to spend a day and I'm doing some research because I yeah, 8000 actions...

**R** Ryan Fleury 48:11  
That's crazy. Well, that's the Google Home. And you know, his show Dot to Dot he does a

five minute kind of tutorial or informative podcast every day on a new Amazon Echo skill that you can use on your Echo dots, or your Echo shows every day, and he's up over 1000 different skills now.

S

Steve Barclay 48:32

That's crazy. Can you imagine, I mean, we have a hard enough time pulling together weekly podcast.

R

Ryan Fleury 48:40

That's commitment.

R

Rob Mineault 48:42

Long ago we would have killed each other doing a daily one. But no, but that, but it that almost makes me kind of wish that I was dialed into the the Echo or the sorry, the Amazon, I guess ecosystem, because that is amazing to me that there's so many actions out there.

R

Ryan Fleury 49:03

There's there's actions, there's games, there's all sorts of stuff, right? You know, and I think that's kind of one of the nice things about the Amazon devices is you can go into the Amazon smart assistant app, and drill down through all the skills and see if there's anything that are of interest to you and try different skills out with the Google Home. Yeah, you can go into the Google Home app. But what is the discoverability like? Because honestly, I don't know. And if somebody can send us some information on that, please do. But I think discovery on the Amazon Alexa devices is way easier.

R

Rob Mineault 49:42

Yeah, that's interesting. That's a really interesting point. I mean, you know, in some way I feel like you know the whole conversation about you know, which smart speaker or which digital assistant even. is better is is very much like a 2018 conversation. But I mean, part of it is kind of still relevant because they are very different. And they do seem to have very different capabilities. But I just feel like people make the decision on which one to go with, based on what they're using, what what ecosystem they're already dialed into.

R

Ryan Fleury 50:19

Yeah, and as I've said before, you know, I've got Echo dots in the house, I have a Google Home mini here and the guitar dungeon. I have Siri on my phone, and iPads, and Apple TVs. So I haven't really dove into one ecosystem entirely. But I think each device probably has their place. You know, people with Homepod say it has the best speaker out of all the digital assistants. Google, of course, has so much history in search, that it has so much data, you can ask it anything and it'll come back, probably with the right answer. Amazon, digital assistants, not as smart, smarter than Siri, but not as smart as Google. And, you know, going back to the Google Home minis, you can cast stuff too. So if you have a Chromecast to your TV, you can ask your digital assistant, you know, hey, gee, cast that over to basement TV, and boom, your videos or whatever show up on your TV. So each of them kind of has their strengths and weaknesses.

S

Steve Barclay 51:24

I just had to reset up our Google nest network in the house and my daughter's Google Mini. When she paired it, she put it on the family access group. So I'm pretty sure now that when she's sleeping in one day, I will be able to wake her rudely up by playing Woolly Bully at full volume off.

R

Rob Mineault 51:48

Yeah, I don't know. It's fascinating stuff. But I'll keep you posted. I'm gonna, I'm gonna do some research this weekend. And I don't know, maybe my whole life will be driven by my Google home at this point. Because like, I don't know, my calendar again. I haven't used I don't use my calendar at all with it. Which I could be.

R

Ryan Fleury 52:08

Maybe find some really creative ways to make Chef Boyardee

R

Rob Mineault 52:12

I have an air fryer now. I love this air fryer

R

Ryan Fleury 52:17

I know we keep talking about getting one and I just can't wait to keep putting it off.

- R** Rob Mineault 52:21  
Do it, they're not expensive.
- R** Ryan Fleury 52:23  
Oh, I know.
- R** Rob Mineault 52:24  
Get it. Do it this weekend. I'm telling you everything is so much better than the airfryer
- R** Ryan Fleury 52:30  
That's what everybody says.
- R** Rob Mineault 52:31  
Yeah, even bacon.
- S** Steve Barclay 52:34  
I want one of those dual units. It's both a microwave and an air fryer. Because I you know, I would get rid of my microwave. If I could get that.
- R** Rob Mineault 52:49  
Yeah. Totally. Because even Yeah, reheating stuff and stuff is way better in the airfryer like pizza reheated in the airfryer. So good. So good. And really fast like it. It's almost as fast as a microwave, but it's just it's way better. It's, yeah, my life has been changed. And if it could build a Google into the air fryer...
- S** Steve Barclay 53:10  
Well, I mean, now you're getting out of hand.
- R** Rob Mineault 53:15  
Yeah, I know.

- S** Steve Barclay 53:17  
Well, there is an Amazon Smart Oven.
- R** Rob Mineault 53:20  
Well, that's exactly. I mean, I made a joke. But I mean, really, that's the thing like smart appliances are you know, the it's a thing. So that's a whole that's a whole nother episode. We could we could have an episode just where we just talk about smart devices and smart speakers. There you go. Hey, Ryan?
- R** Ryan Fleury 53:42  
Rob.
- R** Rob Mineault 53:44  
Where can people find us?
- R** Ryan Fleury 53:46  
They can find us at AT Banter.com
- R** Rob Mineault 53:49  
They can also email us if they so desire at [cowbell@atbanter.com](mailto:cowbell@atbanter.com)
- S** Steve Barclay 53:57  
Hey, hey, hey, you know what else? You know what else guess? Well, guess what? You can find us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as well.
- R** Ryan Fleury 54:07  
For now.
- R** Rob Mineault 54:12  
Cuz you never know. You never know what's gonna happen. Facebook, Instagram could go under. Facebook's on shaky ground. Remember the day when like things would be

popular for a little bit and then they would die off. I feel like that's the natural order of things. That's what really needs to happen to Facebook. Like that's part of the problem is it's too now it's too established. Like we've created a monster and we can't get rid of it.

R

Ryan Fleury 54:46

Yeah, but I think it has its place for a certain demographic, right you know, all the all the younger, younger folk who had jumped on it early on are now all on TikTok, right, or they're all on, you know, Twitch. Whatever. So you know, there's other platforms for different demographics.

R

Rob Mineault 55:05

That's true. That's true. So maybe Facebook will die off eventually. Because Yeah, you're right. None of the none of the kids are using it. No, you can give a crap about Facebook. That's stuff that their parents are on, right? Well, there you go. Another show topic. Another show topic. Look at us, we're just workshopping our asses off here you go. Anything else? Anything else?

S

Steve Barclay 55:30

Nothing to report.

R

Rob Mineault 55:32

All right, then. Well, I think that's gonna do it for us then for this week. Big thanks, everybody for listening in. And we will see everybody next week.