

# AT Banter Podcast Episode 322 - John Melville

Sat, Feb 04, 2023 12:48PM 1:08:13

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

ami, disability, content, canada, channel, persons, broadcast, representation, shows, john, radio, called, pitch, blind, creating, watching, production, regina, crtc, producers

## SPEAKERS

Rob Mineault, Steve Barclay, Ryan Fleury, Lis Malone, John Melville

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**R** Rob Mineault 00:06  
Hey, and welcome to another episode of AT Banter.

**S** Steve Barclay 01:20  
Banter, banter.

**L** Lis Malone 01:21  
Hey, this is of course a podcast where we talk with advocates and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. Hey, my name is Rob Mineault, and joining me today, Mr. Ryan Fleury.

**R** Ryan Fleury 01:38  
Hello, everyone.

**R** Rob Mineault 01:41  
And Mr. Steve Barclay.

**S** Steve Barclay 01:44  
That would be me again.

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**R** Rob Mineault 01:45  
And of course, no podcast that we do would be complete without Miss Lis Malone.

**L** Lis Malone 01:54  
Hey, guys, what's going on?

**R** Rob Mineault 01:56  
You know, you know what really threw me with that intro is that actually it was going too smoothly. For the past four weeks or so like I've been used to like, either Steve's not here, the cowbell doesn't work or something's going on. And it just went way too smoothly and almost like completely derailed me.

**L** Lis Malone 02:15  
We're very efficient this week.

**R** Rob Mineault 02:16  
Yeah, I know. We're back to being a well oiled machine.

**R** Ryan Fleury 02:21  
Just don't ask how we're doing.

**R** Rob Mineault 02:24  
Well, that that's true. Do we want to talk about the mail that we got? Sure. So it's a lot of controversy. We did get some email that caused that caused some ripples, ripples among us. I love it.

**S** Steve Barclay 02:53  
I mean, some of us are fine. That's right.

**R** Rob Mineault 03:00  
Well, listen, we've opened Pandora's box. Let's quickly go into it. I don't have I don't have it verbatim in front of me. But I'll paraphrase. So we got a listener email from a regular listener, who advised me to stop talking about sports because it made me sound like a moron. And then

his advice for Lis was that Regina was not a funny name for a city.

**L** Lis Malone 03:26  
And I'm not funny.

**R** Rob Mineault 03:29  
And you're not funny.

**S** Steve Barclay 03:31  
Okay. There are 1000s of people in this country who totally disagree with that statement.

**R** Rob Mineault 03:39  
About Regina?

**S** Steve Barclay 03:43  
They all agree that Lis is not funny.

**L** Lis Malone 03:47  
This is not funny.

**R** Rob Mineault 03:50  
I love it. I for one, I wear my comments like a badge of honor. I thought it was great. And we do appreciate the email and thank you to the person who sent that in. You know who you are. We love you very much. And we had a good laugh at that.

**L** Lis Malone 04:06  
And Regina is funny.

**R** Rob Mineault 04:08  
Sure. I think it's funny. I'm with you as so well.

L Lis Malone 04:12  
Let me and let me just put this out there. The US pronunciation is Regina. So that's why when it's spelt it's spelled exactly. We say Regina, and that's a you know a woman's name most commonly.

R Rob Mineault 04:24  
Wait, is that spelled the same though?

S Steve Barclay 04:26  
Yes, it is.

L Lis Malone 04:28  
It's spelled the same way. So that's why, I see it as Regina and then it's being said as Regina and I'm like, wait, let's okay, yeah, I'm gonna be very child as we all know what Regina rhymes with. Yeah, it it definitely gives me a little giggle.

R Rob Mineault 04:52  
Sure. I didn't I really I thought I thought those I thought those were spelled differently. Wow, that's a revelation to me.

L Lis Malone 05:00  
Yeah, so there goes there goes the American and her goofy, unfunny way of looking at words or hearing words but so sure I'm not funny. Hey, if you say I'm not adorable that's those are fighting words but I can handle not being funny. There you go.

S Steve Barclay 05:19  
There is only one city in Canada that gets more play than Regina from comedians. Sure that and that is Dildo, Newfoundland.

L Lis Malone 05:27  
That's right. I'm gonna get in trouble now for giggling at that.

R Rob Mineault 05:31

**R** Rob Mineault 05:54

Yeah, I wonder how that happened. We should really we should have somebody from from that city on to explain to us what how that happened. Like, just how did that happen? Did it did that they name it before? That was a thing, or I'm guessing it? But then now I'm curious about the origin of the word of the thing. How did that happen? I don't know. So it's like it's a rabbit hole. Maybe that's that's a side Podcast. I'm gonna I'll put that on the idea bank. I'll talk about that later. Ah, enough of this though. Hey, Ryan.

**R** Ryan Fleury 06:12

Yeah, Rob?

**R** Rob Mineault 06:14

What the heck are we doing today?

**R** Ryan Fleury 06:17

Today, we have John Melville joining us who is the Vice President of Content Development and Operations over at AMI. Welcome to the show, John.

**J** John Melville 06:28

Hi, guys. Good to be here.

**R** Ryan Fleury 06:30

And I apologize for all the preamble.

**J** John Melville 06:34

Very interesting. I've actually been to Dildo though, so my wife and I visited a few years ago.

**R** Rob Mineault 06:40

Really? Is it is big?

**J** John Melville 06:43

Oh, wait. Oh, well, careful here.

**R** Ryan Fleury 06:47  
Sorry, I didn't even see that one coming. I'm just gonna stop talking now.

**S** Steve Barclay 07:08  
Okay, and just and just because somebody said what is the origin of that word? Dill doll, an old English term taken from the Old Norse word dilla. A verb meaning to soothe. Literally, then dill doll would be a soothing doll. So there you go.

**R** Rob Mineault 07:26  
Oh my gosh.

**L** Lis Malone 07:31  
We are an educational show. Also, I'm not funny, but I just want to make sure that we bring some new knowledge to our listener base.

**R** Rob Mineault 07:46  
Right. Exactly. Okay. Okay.

**L** Lis Malone 07:49  
And you know, and there I thought John was the adult entering the room. Right into the cesspool, right?

**R** Rob Mineault 07:59  
Clearly John's the funny one. Well, yeah, you know what? I'm gonna have to put that on my places to visit. Was it nice? That's what I'll ask.

**J** John Melville 08:11  
It was. Yeah, very quaint and small. And we had great fish and chips.

**R** Rob Mineault 08:18  
Interesting. Huh. I wonder. I wonder if they do have a big tourist trade there just for people wanting to just go and take pictures of themselves in front of the sign.

J

John Melville 08:27

Yeah, they sell shirts, though. But yeah, it's and there's the in St. John's, they actually have the Dildo Brewing Company, which I think is from there. Yeah, no, it's it's a big attraction. We were there in the summer. It was beautiful weather nice, warm.

R

Rob Mineault 08:44

So before we kind of dive into talking a little bit about about what you do at AMI, maybe we could just start out by just giving us a little bit of of background on yourself in the industry and tell us how you kind of landed at AMI, because I read your bio, and it's actually really interesting.

J

John Melville 09:06

Yeah, well, I've been at this. When did I kind of get into this sort of about 30 years ago, started off in radio, took radio broadcasting at Humber College in Toronto and got a job as a night operator on a network radio show. And well, one thing led to another and I ended up behind the scenes in operations. So I had originally I kind of got into it because I wanted to do you know, the jock thing music radio, but I realized pretty early on that any job security and radio or television was probably behind the camera. So I progressively kind of met some of the right people that would, you know, be with me throughout my career and went from one thing to another so after, after that, I was involved with Blue Jays radio as an operator And then went on to the Score network, the Sports Network. We launched that in 1998, dating myself a bit here, but it's still alive and well today. Yeah, we launched it that then following that, I went to CHUM Radio where we watched another sports network's sports was pretty big in my background. So now what I was doing was both radio experience from originally, and then into television. So the television was actually launched from the ground up, we literally built the studios hired all the people, because the network came on, like, instantly. We started from scratch, literally. And that was around the same time SportsNet also launched in Canada. And then from there, just a few different gigs. The one of the coolest though was when satellite radio came to Canada, I was involved with the launch of XM Radio, which is now Sirius XM, because the the two entities merged back in, I think 2008, somewhere around there. And then I had this opportunity come up, AMI, which was originally Voiceprint Reading Service for people who are blind and partially sighted, literally reading newspapers from across Canada. They had bureaus called local broadcast centers, I think 12 of them, reading all the local newspapers for people who were blind, and broadcasting, and they had a license from the CRTC to basically put the channel on, and it had a revenue stream. So it was attached to the, to the cable bills that everybody pays, I think, four cents for Voiceprint. And then they launched in 2009, the TV channel, which became AMI TV. Originally, it was Tak TV, the Accessible Channel. And so I joined them in 2011, bringing my radio and television background to it, and essentially took over what would become AMI TV and Ami Audio and the operations role. So my original title, there was programming, and production. But we'll get into it, I guess a little bit more about what we're doing now, which reflects my current title, which is Content Development and Operations. So that's kind of where I came from and where I am now.

R

Rob Mineault 12:32

So when you were with XM, like were you involved in creating a lot of the channels and a lot of the content across all the different genres? Because it sounds like you kind of had a bit of a strong sports background until you moved to XM. Was that kind of where you sort of expanded out and started developing different content, different genres?

J

John Melville 12:55

Yeah, absolutely. It was actually really cool. So when XM came into Canada, in 2005, same with Sirius. They both joined Canada, Canada at the same time, because they'd originally launched in the US around 2001. So they'd been there for four years. So we were hearing all about satellite radio, and everyone was kind of eagerly anticipating getting it and anybody who doesn't have never experienced satellite radio is basically so in most cars, it's a subscription based model where you pay like 10 to \$15 a month, and you get access to you know, 100/150 channels. But when they came into Canada, one of the one of the regulatory stipulations from the CRTC was that they had to link for every nine channels that they brought in from the US, they had to link one Canadian channel. So in order to do that, we basically had to launch 13 channels of news, sports, information and music. And in our case, because we had the hockey expertise from the previous, so I was working with a group of people that I kind of knew before, we kind of came together at XM, it was it was launched by John Petrov, who actually brought the Raptors to Toronto, but he was a businessman and had gone for the license. And he saw, you know, the sports guys all showing up to sort of help get the production underway for all these channels. And they actually got the rights to the NHL. So we launched the back then in 2005, a channel called Home Ice, which is still going today. I think it's called NHL Live, but one of the I can't remember exactly what the branding is now, but essentially, it was hockey talk 24/7. And we also had a news channel and interestingly, a comedy channel, which I think back then was called Laugh Attack, and now it's called Canada Laughs so we literally had to, you know, get access to all the people and presenters and comedians, who were going to appear on this channel. On these two channels, so absolutely, there was a huge influx of sports and we had a studio in downtown Toronto that was built for us for the purpose of that, where the home ice channel would broadcast from we had in studio guests, all the players, when they came through Toronto, they'd be invited to come and do an interview in person or we had them on the phone or we even had a couple of visits from the Stanley Cup. So it was really cool to be involved in that. And to this day, they're still they still do all the hockey broadcasts. If you have XM or Sirius, Sirius XM now and you listening to hockey, it's essentially originated from Canada at the studios now in Liberty Village in Toronto.

R

Rob Mineault 15:45

So when, when you were brought on to AMI, is that sort of was that sort of the plan? Because I know, you know, I've sort of been familiar with AMI for around the same time, I think that I first became aware of them in the, around the 20 oughts as well. And it seems to me that they've there, they've really gone on in the past 10 years, they've really gone in a bit of a growth spurt. So when they brought you on was that sort of always part of the the idea was that they were looking to sort of build out their content?

J

John Melville 16:16



**J** Jonn Meiville 16:16

Yeah, exactly. And evolve, I think would be the word. As you guys probably aware, you know, the way we consume content today is different from what it was even 10 years ago. You know, we're streaming now back then people had cable TV, I mean, people still do have cable TV, but the number of people now the, you know, the people don't sit down every evening and watch primetime TV, you know, on the four American and three Canadian networks, you know, they're, they're streaming on Netflix, and all these things. So the the whole industry has been evolving. So when we were brought to AMI, um, and just let me identify the AMI is governed by a board of directors, because we're operated as a not for profit organization. So the board of directors, who are volunteers, governs us, because we have obviously a significant budget to deal with every year to make sure our money is spent doing the right things. And it was the desire there to really kind of ensure that AMI has a TV channel, and AMI Audio is radio stations, and then of course, our French channel, we're operating in a progressive way, so that we could, you know, can deliver our mission for blind partially sighted and persons with disabilities. But also to ensure that, you know, we were creating content that was relevant, that really spoke to the people that we are here to serve. So it was bringing on people like myself, who had expertise in, you know, radio and television, and they're the people I work with. It's a group of people that have all come from these types of backgrounds, and really applying ourselves now to create content that, you know, is going to stand apart from, essentially what we say is, if certain content is not made by AMI, it probably won't get made. You know, we're looking at involving persons with disabilities at all levels of production, wherever we can. There's training involved, there's representation in front of the camera as well. So we're really trying to embrace all that as we operate like a regular media entity in, you know, 2023. So that's kind of how it's continues to evolve, essentially, you know, we're already planning the next five years, what's it going to look like and how is AMI is going to be there to serve the audiences that have us.

**R** Rob Mineault 18:40

That, you know, I can't understate enough how how much of a challenge that must be because, you know, especially when you put it like that, because you're you're talking about you're you're creating content for a variety of different mediums, all of those mediums are changing, you're right, the shifting the shift to streaming away from traditional broadcast. And then you're also you're the sort of the only game in town, nobody else is creating content like AMI, and on top of that, you're creating, you're trying to create content for the entire disability community, which is very, very vast.

**J** John Melville 19:20

Well, it's it's a learning curve. And I think it's important that the stage we're at now, is, you know, I'm been around AMI since 2011. You know, Karen, our Director of Production came from 25 years of CHUM television. Jennifer Johnson, one of our senior producers, Michelle Duda. Michelle came from the Space Channel, Jennifer was at CityTV. You know, we've got experience, it's come from a lot of different places. And I think what what we've we understand now is like, we're the generation that got us to the dance, but really now it's about you know, people with disabilities, this is their channel, right? So what we need to do is mentor find people and we do that. We've got a an apprenticing program set up, we do have people with disabilities working on the channels, there's a lot of representation there, in front of the

camera, or in front of the microphone. But what we're also trying to do is ensure that persons with disabilities are getting involved in the production end as well. So ultimately, you know, it's not like you just go out and hire people with disabilities to work in television, because very often, you don't have that same number of people going into these programs, because traditionally, they, they haven't been recruited that way, it's it's not been a friendly environment. So we're trying to break those barriers just by showing not just ourselves, but other other content creators, how it can be done. And I would say, we're, we're, you know, we're probably about 10%, along that, that pathway right now. I was talking about planning the next five years, you know, and, and maybe in the next five years, we're, we're about 40 - 50% along the way. The idea is to ensure that, you know, it doesn't become so daunting, that you're afraid of it, you've got to get out there and just start to make things and get people working on things, you know, and things happen. And, and, you know, I can talk about different shows that we've created that have really, you know, hit it out of the park, in terms of our own expectations of what we were what we set out to do, and what actually ended up happening.

L

Lis Malone 21:42

So John, I come from a traditional radio background and also research I worked at Arbitron for years. So I'm very familiar with, with with with the broadcasting landscape, and I'm kind of curious from your perspective of coming from the commercial broadcast side. Now going into the non commercial space, it's very niche and serving a very specific market and fulfilling such a need. What sort of metrics are you using in terms of being able to gauge when your content programming is a success?

J

John Melville 22:17

That's a great question. And I'm glad you mentioned your previous experience with Arbitron. You know, if we do actually get measurement, it's now numerous here that we follow, which is the same as all the other broadcasters. And for for traditional broadcasters. they monetize their ad sales or whatever through the size of the audience that they get. AMI gets respectable audiences on Numeris. The problem is, is we don't know who's in that audience. So the way that Numeris works is essentially a, an encoder is put into somebody's home, who volunteers was asked to be monitored for, you know, a period of months or three months, and it monitors what TV shows are being watching. The problem is, it doesn't give you any specific demographic information about these people. They could be a family living in Etobicoke, it could be a single person living in Lethbridge, it could be a disabled person living in Vancouver, we don't know. So when you see a number on these measurements, it's just any Canadian, right? What we're trying to understand is, are we actually getting to the people that we're supposed to be serving, and originally, that was the blind and partially sighted audience exclusively, because that was why we were given the license to operate. But we now are expanding, you know, to reach more people with disabilities with different kinds of disabilities. And even people that don't identify, you know, because it's a tricky question, or think to answer. But, you know, what, what, what is that representation look like? The nice thing that's been happening is with, you know, digital, non linear content distribution, you get a bit more of a picture there, because one thing I think you guys are probably aware of is, you know, persons with disabilities are usually very early adopters on new technologies, because they're, they're helpful and assistance, you know, whether it's Siri or you know, screen readers or whatever. You know, the iPhone is, I think, four to one over the the Android in terms of its usage by

people in the blind community. I'm not sure if that's 100% correct. I'm generalizing, but it's definitely more. So what we're starting to see is the way we understand our engagement is two ways. One is through those metrics and starting to look and delve into that demographic data where we can get it and the other is quite simply that we're right across Canada. And as you probably know, you know, the shows that we have they travel we have people coming from communities across the country. Oh, in the morning, we have different guests on. And what we get is a lot of comments and feedback. And even from the people that appear on these shows, they become converts to AMI, you know, they may need to know about us, but we've asked them to participate in one of our shows, and hey, you know what, we've got a new audience member, or we've got somebody who can contribute to what we're doing on a day to day basis. So the metrics are, you know, the success is based on really what we're hearing and you know, the feedback and interest that we're generating across Canada, for what we do that unique type of content that up until now, you won't get anywhere else. And that's something we want to change, too. We don't want to be the exclusive distributors and creators of this type of content. CBC needs to get on board with this stuff, Bell, Rogers, Chorus, they all need to get into this type of niche to ensure that representation is taking place. But in any event, we're starting where we are, you know, and we've noticed over the years that we've really got that rep, that acknowledgement that we're we're doing the least what we said we were going to do, which is you know, at the end of the day, the best compliment I can give to the team, right? Oh, and to go back to the to the representation part of it, I think that that is so incredibly important. You guys are sort of laying out the blueprints for for, you know, sort of the other networks and the other mainstream avenues to say that, look, this is exactly how you do it. Exactly. I mean, I watch a lot of British dramas as well, in my sort of own downtime. And what we're seeing from across the pond, particularly on BBC and Channel Four, you can be watching a drama, or a crime show and a character in the crime show may have a disability. But the disability is not consequential to the plot. So they're not just plopped in there, because they have a disability and oh, look, we've got a person with a disability here isn't that great? It's like, it may be the coroner, it may be one of the lawyers or whatever the character is being portrayed. And I think we need to see more of that in, you know, the content that's being created here, especially in scripted content. The challenge for us is that scripted content, which is when I say scripted, that's like a drama or comedy as opposed to a documentary, or a factual show, like a DIY, when when you're doing scripted is extremely expensive. And we're only starting to scratch the surface, these other content creators in Canada, with that kind of representation, what I would say authentic representation, you know, we used to have a slogan on Tech TV before it was AMI, which I still think rings true today. And it was, simply put, television that includes everyone. And rather than singling people out because they have a disability, we're trying to show a spectrum of Canada with the representation, you know, the way it happens without, you know, having to sort of necessarily shine a spotlight and say, Look, we're doing this, it you know, it's authentic, if it happens naturally.

R

Rob Mineault 28:10

So when you're when you're sort of developing content and coming up with ideas of different shows, is it ever a challenge in terms of building something that's going to check all the right boxes? I mean, do you ever have to be like, okay, well, we have to we kind of have to check the advocacy box, we have to check it has to be entertaining, it needs to be educational. Or is it more that you're just you just kind of develop content, and it is what it is, and then you just try to put it through the lens of disability?

J John Melville 28:44

That's it. I suppose we probably did check the boxes a few years ago. And that was we started to realize that you can't have you know, able bodied people creating content for persons with disabilities simply by going through and saying, Well, let's get a blind person to stand up here. And let's make sure we have, you know, a quota of deaf people, you know. And I'm sounding rather rather crass here. But that's the whole point. It is crass to do to approach it that way. What we've discovered is, you know, in the development stage when you're looking to create this type of content, the content creators, the people that are coming up with the ideas and writing the shows are people from the disability community. And I'll look at Ardra Sheppard's show, Fashion Dis that was we shopped around for a production company. Like Ardra had the idea, approached us like five years ago. And she had a started with her blog, Tripping On Air. And we said this is a person that has something to say about fashion. She's got an idea for a show. We worked with production companies, you know, conventional production companies to try and team her up. And they just weren't getting it. They were saying, oh, yeah, well, great, she's disabled, we're doing a disabled fashion show. But that's not what Ardra wanted. So we eventually found a good match, the production company did understand her vision for the show. And once we were all satisfied, including Ardra, that we kind of got that formula, right, they went ahead, and we went into production with that. And we've done it again, with Breaking Character. We've got a bunch of shows that are currently in development that have a unique point of perspective. And Transcending is another show that is going to be released this year, it's being shot out in Vancouver. And I think people are going to really realize that you know, that we're taking this into places that it's never been before. And we're tackling topics, you know, normal topics that everybody talks about, you know, money, sexuality, you know, all of these kinds of things that are important to people, but from a perspective of somebody who really gets it because they live that life. And I think that's the difference is, when you hand this over to people that the channel is intended to be for in the first place, then you're going to end up getting the type of content developed that is going to resonate with the people that are going to end up seeing it.

L Lis Malone 31:27

Now, I'm probably going to be geeking out a little bit coming from the broadcast side. So when you're creating this content, and you're building your your lineups, and your all of your your programming schedules, how much mindfulness are you putting into both the actual content? And the day part recycling, if you will?

J John Melville 31:51

You mean, the repetition?

L Lis Malone 31:54

The recycling of audience.

J John Melville 31:57

That's a good question to again, an understanding of ratings and you know how linear television works. Yeah, because the content we're creating now is both for broadcasts, which goes out on a schedule, right? So it's appointment television, you know, there's a show on it this time, you got to be in front of your TV to watch it. And then we also have the same content that's going on our mobile app. And it's, you know, we have our own podcasting too that we're creating. So it's downloadable on demand. So the content is consumed in different ways by different people. We do work with a fairly high repetition factor, because we believe that, you know, on any given day, we're still getting new people coming in, or people are not new people but people are being exposed for the first time to show or an idea or something that we've that we've created. We will retire shows - and will this is kind of a radio trick, you know, where they do it in like was top 40 radio, you know, where you'd have your hit song, and they played ad nauseam for two weeks. And then it would kind of go into a into a lesser schedule, right? So it wouldn't come up as often. And then it would disappear almost for, you know, weeks or months, and then come back is what they call the golden oldies. So then it's discovered, again, by a whole new audience. So we kind of use a similar type of intuition with programming the broadcast channel, but the on demand stuff is available, you know, for anybody, anytime. So you can go in and watch, you know, Episode Five, if you want, you can pause it halfway through, go make your lunch or come back the next day and watch it. So we have all kinds of different things happening with the same content. And it's just the whole point is, well, how do people want to consume it? But as we've been discovering, I think a lot more people are going to be discovering our content on those on demand platforms, than just sitting in front of the TV and hoping that something comes on that's going to interest them.

R

Ryan Fleury 33:58

One of the questions I had John was, you know, unless you were, you know, of someone in the disability community, or maybe browsing through the channel guide and go, I wonder what this AMI channel is, you know, you guys, I don't believe advertise on mainstream media. So how how do you guys plan to build your audience out if you're just marketing to the disability community?

J

John Melville 34:27

Well, there there is a little bit of advertising going on. It's quite expensive. We've we've just developed a new cable avail which is goes on Canadian, the top and bottom of every hour, there's opportunities for cable channels to run. It's not public service announcements, but it's like channels that they carry. They'll run a promo. So we've just developed a new promo 30 second spot for inclusion, which is now running and you may see it. But that's it's a wide universe of channels and content to be able to market one brand out to. I would go back to what I was saying earlier about kind of the grassroots, because for AMI, it's about being in the community. Literally, I've got people on the ground, you know, in every part of Canada, including Dildo Newfoundland, who are able to, you know, understand what AMI is and talking about it with their friends. So we know that we're reaching people there. But it's again, it's there's more we can reach. The one sort of disturbing statistic that I always think about is, although we are mandated, you know, by the CRTC. The CRTC basically asks, or tells all cable companies to collect, you know, 20 cents for AMI TV, 28 cents for AMI tele, and four cents for AMI Audio from every subscriber. But that's just people that are actually subscribing to the basic cable package in Canada. And roughly speaking, it's probably safe to say that only I'm

going to use blind and partially sighted because that's the numbers I have. Only about 50% of blind and partially sighted Canadians with televisions in Canada, are subscribed to these cable packages. So where we reach them is only half of the potential audience is just that cohort minded partially sighted, it's going to be on cable TV. So it's really through our digital marketing, social media, all these other things that are going to hopefully connect people to what we're doing.

R

**Rob Mineault 36:30**

So how closely do you work with the disability community when it comes to when it comes to content creation? I'm sure that that regular broadcast companies, you know, they don't necessarily pay all that much attention to to listeners and their suggestions. I mean, I've had an email into NBC about creating a television show about a professional wrestler and a pet monkey that goes around solving crimes for years. And they've they've never created it. But I get the sense that that AMI - that's a true story Incidentally - you guys seem to be open to the community to coming with you with, with show ideas, and actually going through and developing a show.

J

**John Melville 37:20**

Yeah, I mean, we're very accessible that way. I mean, not everything is going to work, right. And what we try and do is, you know, work with somebody who's got an idea to develop. That's the whole point of development is to is to develop something that is going to be watchable, consumable content. So while you're I may think we've got a great idea and it may sound great, the process of getting it to a point where it's going to, you know, be presented as content that can stand up like any other content is out there is challenging. But the point that we do is we need to engage, right? So we have different things that we do, as I mentioned, you know, we have, we're like I'm going on the road at the beginning of March. So we're going to Winnipeg, we're going to Saskatoon, we're going to Regina, with my content development specialist who works that region will be having meetings and coffee shops and restaurants with content creators, so we go to them. So we're saying, you know, you've maybe pitched the idea to us, let's come and have a meeting with you. And it might be a production company where we're introducing a production company to a content creator. But we do that sort of grassroots work on on getting content creators connected to what we're doing. The other thing that we have going on has been going for years now is we have a panel of about 1500. It was originally just blind and partially sighted volunteers who basically are volunteers but they get paid a little stipend for, you know, providing us with, you know, research through watching a show or something like that. We'll give them a gift certificate or something like that. But they're essentially volunteers. And sometimes we'll even run focus groups where, you know, we'll we'll expose them, we're thinking of this idea, you know, what, what do you think, right. And we do this several times a year with, you know, right now we're running five potential development ideas past the panel. The panel is now being expanded to persons with all persons with disabilities, not just blind and partially sighted, because we want to, you know, sort of expand on what we're trying to do, obviously. It's a fair bit to manage, but we we've been doing it now very successfully, meaning that the results that we get have been fruitful in terms of giving us the intelligence we need to do to have to make the right programming decisions. I mean, you're not always going to get it right. Sometimes you need to take a chance on something that you have the right gut feeling about, you know, and sometimes things surprise us, you know, things



that we've you know, have said well, this is an okay show, it's not great, but you know, it's okay. So you really have to just sort of get things out there. And obviously, we have to work within budgets and means, but I have to say that, you know, they're in Canada, you know, the Canadian government spends a lot of money on, you know, production, all kinds of production, particularly films. That's why so many movies are shot on here, producers are given tax credits for their investments. So in other words, producer investor or money in a production and goes out and sells makes money. The producer gets all the money back that they invested. There's grants that both Rogers, Chorus, Bell, have funds that provide grants to producers. The Bell fund actually is specifically for disability related projects. So there's a lot of funding opportunities as well. So we also try and match up, you know, ideas and concepts with, you know, the funding opportunities with the right producers in play. Because at the end of the day, you're running a fairly complex business enterprise with any of these productions, right? None of them are the same. They all come from different parts of the country, and production companies are all a little bit different in how they operate, the rules of each province can be different. But at the end of the day, we, you know, what we do is call it a green light, you know, where we finally got a development idea to a point where we say, okay, we're going to now, you know, write that check for \$600,000 and produce the 10 episode series, right? So, and the \$600,000, that's invested. And it's a lot of money for, you know, anybody is only about 40% of the total budget of some of these shows, right? Because the other funding is made up through these other sources I was just talking about. So yeah, I mean, it's complex, but I do believe that we are making, you know, some good progress with the work that we've done. And it continues, as I said, to involve, you know, to evolve with some of these new shows that we're, we're bringing to people, I think, what we want to look is as mainstream as we can. And what I mean by that is the production values, right? It's, if you're watching us, it's as good as anything you're watching on HGTV or on, you know, City TV, the production values have to be there, because the same people are watching that content. People across Canada, not just persons with disabilities are watching this content. And that's the other important thing, it's about helping people to understand, you know, what all these subjects and topics are.

R

Rob Mineault 42:38

Well, and that really helps the cause too because the more able bodied people that are tuning into these shows, and they're learning and, and they're seeing that representation right in front of them. And you know, it's it that spills over into real life when they get up off their couch, and they're into the real world. And they encounter somebody who say blind or partially sighted, you know, they have they've more perspective, because they've watched something on AMI.

J

John Melville 43:05

That's right becomes more than norm than something that's, oh, look at this. And that's the point. And one of the things just to mention is, you know, we've just been involved recently, as you may be aware, in Canada, there's the Indigenous screen office, and the Black screen office. These are basically nonprofit entities that advocate for, you know, the Indigenous community as well as the you know, the Black community. And the Disability community has now AMI has been sponsoring the formation of the DSO, which is the Disability screen office. So once this is up and running, and there'll be more information about that coming out from the primetime conference in Ottawa. They're just putting a board of directors together now. They will be able to advocate more towards the industry for inclusion of persons with disabilities and content.

And that will include things like you know, all these incentives I was talking about a moment ago, whether it's Canada Media Fund or Telefilm, you know, if a producer uses, you know, persons with disability on the crew in a meaningful and regular capacity, right, with accommodations made for that, that person's requirements, they will probably get increased tax incentives and things like that. So we're hoping that's what they do. They haven't actually done that yet. But if it's the same as what's happened with the IDL, the Indigenous Screen Office, we will be seeing that kind of, you know, lightning rod into the industry to sort of get a board with this because it's helping everybody.

S

Steve Barclay 44:45

And Rob, I think your story idea your the show that you were pitching, it would have gone over a whole lot better if you didn't insist on playing the role of the monkey yourself.

R

Rob Mineault 44:54

Well, that's, well, that's optional. Listen, that's negotiable. Yeah, you're right. I probably should have put that in there.

L

Lis Malone 45:01

I don't think John is aware of the fact that this was secretly a ploy to just get his pitch to you. He's so transparent.

R

Rob Mineault 45:18

That's right, next fall on AMI.

J

John Melville 45:21

Seriously, if if you or any of your listeners have a pitch, and it has to be worked through to the point where you can talk about it as, here's what I see as the show, but if you have a pitch, go on our website, we have a whole, we have a section there that where you can solicit the pitch to us. And that protects you because once you've sent that in, we will look at it but if the show or anything else comes becomes an idea, then we've got you having submitted the pitch. On the record, but for any you know, I mean, it's the probably the best way to sort of open the door to at least having a conversation with us, right? And what happens with pitches is we'll take a look at them, and then one of our content development specialists will reach out and have a conversation and get more information about that.

R

Ryan Fleury 46:14

Oh, do we have ideas!



**R** Rob Mineault 46:16  
Oh, yeah, you've opened the floodgates John.

**R** Ryan Fleury 46:19  
I'm thinking the comedic cowboy who hula hoops and wears chaps.

**L** Lis Malone 46:25  
How about the the unfunny American Blind Girl who spends way too much on international shipping?

**J** John Melville 46:31  
You know, one of the areas that we have not really gotten into yet is comedy. You know, Steve Martin used to say comedy is not pretty. As you guys can appreciate it was so I'm Scottish. So I can tell Scottish jokes, right. But that's I'm not venturing anywhere else with my humor. It's not actually a done deal yet but just as a teaser, here, we are working on a potential comedy show in Halifax, part of the Halifax Comedy Festival this year. There'll be more details to come, but we're excited about it. So they're actually going to have as part of the regular shows that they take. And it's done by CBC. But AMI is hoping to do a special - not a special show, I shouldn't say that -- a show which will feature comics with disabilities exclusively and the venue will be fully accessible to people to come and see the show. So more to come on that we haven't actually signed the contract yet so it's it's more of a teaser at this point. But we're and I think it's happening in April. So we are getting into comedy as well.

**S** Steve Barclay 47:58  
That's it that kind of does surprise me because there is so much humor within the disability community itself. So some of the people that I deal with on a day to day basis are just truly truly funny and insightful people and it seems stunning to me that that AMI hasn't ever had a comedy bit to it.

**J** John Melville 48:19  
We did at one time. We had a show on a very early on actually was called Sharp Focus with DJ Demers. He was hard of hearing and he's very funny actually. He's now in LA but and DJ was essentially hosting a kind of variety type show where we go around and you know what a hot dog fests and bluejay games and stuff like that and interview people. Then he had his own DJ Demers show on AMI which was kind of like a scripted comedy thing, but we haven't done that for it's seven years ago I think we did that but anyway, we definitely want to get back into that that realm because while you guys have already pitched me I think two or three things I think I picked up on.

L Lis Malone 49:07  
And our ideas are protected it's on the podcast.

S Steve Barclay 49:10  
Yeah, well done. Rob You sneaky one.

J John Melville 49:17  
Increase the reach right? We want as many people to hear it as possible right.

L Lis Malone 49:24  
Okay, serious question. Very important question. Especially with John's sports background. Why do the Toronto Maple Leafs use that stupid Hall and Oates song every time they score?

J John Melville 49:42  
I do not know. I do not know and I am a long suffering blue and white fan. I said I was from Scotland and I arrived in Canada in 1968, the year after the Leafs won the last Stanley Cup. Okay, here's a little fun fact the, the PA announcer at Scotiabank arena is Mike Ross and Mike Ross is on AMA's roster as well. He was originally the host of Live from Studio Five. And now is doing the morning run for us, the news run. But he also is the voice of the Maple Leafs down at the Scotiabank arena. So you know what? I'll ask Mike.

L Lis Malone 50:30  
You know that? That's a question that's come up on this podcast we really need to know because it's really, it's really bugging us. Maybe it's just like, it's bugs me a lot because --

R Rob Mineault 50:41  
Yeah, I'm gonna have to correct you on that. And that's you, like change all the us to you. And it's only come up on the podcast because you keep bringing it up.

L Lis Malone 50:51  
Because I want I need to know.

- J** John Melville 50:55  
I don't mind hearing that song as often as they want to play it because it means a score.
- R** Rob Mineault 51:04  
Oh, gosh.
- L** Lis Malone 51:05  
But must you suffer through those victories?
- S** Steve Barclay 51:10  
There is no suffering like Canadian hockey fans.
- J** John Melville 51:14  
We lose to the Habs this season on Saturday night. I was just like, no point. Yeah, that's not the point.
- L** Lis Malone 51:24  
I hate that. Oh, you got one point like tip. I didn't want one point. I want the two points.
- J** John Melville 51:30  
Because they're playing Ottawa on Friday, so ...
- S** Steve Barclay 51:34  
Hey, dude, I'm in Vancouver.
- J** John Melville 51:37  
Yeah, I know. Yeah, the only half the guy there is Bruce Boudreau. Right. Oh, probably finally released from that. Oh my gosh, that was that was unpleasant to watch. I love the Canucks there is too bad that they've had some rough times. But they've got some time.
- R** Ryan Fleury 52:08

They'll be back when they figure out the problem isn't the coach?

R

Rob Mineault 52:12

Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute, I'm thinking of a new idea. What about a hockey coach ends up being a chimp that takes his team to the playoffs?

J

John Melville 52:26

You guys made it to the Stanley Cup. I know you didn't win. But you made the Stanley Cup a lot more recently than the Leafs hav, so I only have a certain amount of sympathy for you.

S

Steve Barclay 52:37

I suppose that's fair.

L

Lis Malone 52:40

What you know, I'm gonna be in Toronto this year, and I'm going to stop by the AMI offices and I want to get a little tour of your digs. And, and I want I need to track this gentleman down because I need a face to face answer on this.

R

Ryan Fleury 52:55

Stalk Mike Ross.

L

Lis Malone 52:56

Now I am going to stalk him. Oh, no. And I'm gonna videotape it. And I'm gonna put it on our on our face on our Facebook feeds and Twitter and stuff like that.

R

Ryan Fleury 53:05

Do that he'll never come on our show.


J


John Melville 53:07


You know, Mike's great, Mike is absolutely fantastic. And he'd love to do your show. Probably.


L


Lis Malone 53:16


 Lis Malone 53:16  
it would be a great teaser.


 John Melville 53:17  
Yeah, is a tour waiting for you. We'd be more than happy to show you around AMI. So I would


 Lis Malone 53:23  
I'd love to see it. If I if I'm going to be in Toronto, how can I not stop by AMI?

 John Melville 53:29  
And yeah, there's a fun group of people to meet in there. So we look forward to your visit.

 Lis Malone 53:35  
Well, yay.

 Rob Mineault 53:37  
Awesome. Well, John, listen, I want to thank you so much for coming on and taking some time out to talk to us. If people are, indeed do want to reach out and pitch an idea, or help out and volunteer in any way, what's the best way to do that?

 John Melville 53:55  
You go to the website, and we have on our landing page or homepage, whatever we're calling it, there's a drop down menu, and you can contact AMI, that contact us is the best place to start. There's also drop down as part of the same drop down there's there's a menu item called Independent Producers. So if you go on to independent producers, that'll take you to the pitch page. But I would just suggest if anybody's interested in finding out more to reach that contact AMI and Janice or one of the marketing communications team or Greg will begin to get back to you and help you you know, discover a little bit more about us.

 Rob Mineault 54:45  
Awesome. All right. Well, thanks again, John. And listen, I like I'll give you the wrestling and the chimp idea for free. Like it's going anywhere anyway. Yeah the idea for free but I still have to produce this thing right? Just give me an associate producer credit and I'm happy.

 Steve Darden 55:05

**S** Steve Barclay 55:05  
And let him read for the chimp.

**J** John Melville 55:10  
On casting. Perfect. Thanks, guys. It's been a pleasure.

**R** Rob Mineault 55:16  
Thanks, John.

**J** John Melville 55:18  
Bye now.

**R** Rob Mineault 55:19  
No, I'm liking the hockey the chimp hockey coach idea better actually. You know, they have 150 shows.

**R** Ryan Fleury 55:28  
And it's growing all the time.

**R** Rob Mineault 55:30  
Yeah. And constantly evolving across all these different mediums. Like, that's got to be just so incredibly challenging to maintain and to continue to build. So doing incredible work there. And, you know, I do like, the representation aspect of this can't be understated either. It's so incredibly important right now especially, you know given the frustration that that we have in terms of disability justice and rights and representation, and inclusion is something like AMI is so incredibly important right now.

**R** Ryan Fleury 56:04  
And it's one of the things that thought about asking, but didn't really know, the right place to squeeze it in. But, you know, we are seeing more representation in TV and film. But you know, how often is that conversation taking place at CTV or CBC? You know, the film studios? It'd be interesting to, you know, have somebody on from one of those, to talk about their inclusion.

**R** Rob Mineault 56:28

Yeah, well, listen why can't there be a blind anchor? Why can't there be, you know, whenever a weather person, you know, that's, that's in a chair? I think that John had a really good point, the main reason behind that is that the broadcasting schools aren't, are kind of not super inclusive or accessible. It's hard for people to get broadcasting degrees. So where do you where do you hire from? So, you know, I can understand that there's a lot of things that I guess need to change before we really, we really start to see a push maybe into the mainstream. But, you know, hopefully, AMI is going to help change that because at least they're creating the blueprint to show mainstream broadcasts that it's, it's definitely possible.

R

Ryan Fleury 57:30

Well, like you said, they have an apprenticeship program as well, right and provide training.

L

Lis Malone 57:34

So the tough thing about broadcasting in that industry, is that, before they get to primetime TV, or even sitting behind the anchor desk, or even being the weather person, they have to cut their teeth and really small markets, doing kind of the not so awesome assignments, and being the one who's standing in the middle of a storm. So I think, because of the way that broadcasters enter into the business, makes it even more challenging, because there's even more barriers, just in the actual job itself and what they require before you can get to some of the, I guess, more comfortable environments, broadcasting.

R

Ryan Fleury 58:21

Sure enough, I wonder if that's changing, though, and shifting, you know, because we're seeing more and more stuff go straight to streaming. And, you know, I still get stumped as to why terrestrial radio is still a thing. When there's so many more options for listening to music, radio, news, weather sports. So, you know, is that shift changing? And if it is, it's happening pretty slowly, but I would think in time, it is going to disappear. And we're going to have all of our content online, you know, right.

L

Lis Malone 58:58

The thing is that the importance of broadcast is, aside from the fact that there's always going to be that availability of free content. But also what if what if the servers go down? Broadcast, you know, antenna, you know, radio might be the only way of getting important information out there. So they can never really take it down, you know, especially with like, you know, the emergency alert systems and whatnot. So, you know, just that aspect of the accessibility of that medium in terms of, you know, being lower tech. We'll probably keep it alive.

R

Ryan Fleury 59:35

That infrastructure, though, everything is getting better to like, it's tough to say, because, you know, I Rogers just had a massive outage last year, right? Where basically all of Canada on

Rogers had no connections. You know, yeah, there's definitely some holes in the systems that need some something to fall back on. So maybe you're right, maybe radio is the way to go. Maybe we'll end up back shortwave.

**L** Lis Malone 1:00:01

Now we're gonna be, you know, sitting there at home and saying, why didn't I buy that stupid hand crank radio on Amazon for 20 bucks?

**R** Ryan Fleury 1:00:08

Got one in my camping bag.

**R** Rob Mineault 1:00:13

Yeah, that's interesting. It is really interesting. The I mean, we could have gotten down to a whole other hole. That'd been a whole other podcast episode you were talking about broadcast models and what they see in the future. And whether or not you know, live broadcast is on its way out. I think that I would have said that maybe it is at one point, but I don't know if it is anymore. I think that the streaming honeymoon is over?

**R** Ryan Fleury 1:00:39

Well, I don't know. John said only about 50% of his audience is cable subscribers. And that's, that's low. I'm one of those buyer, you know, I'm not that, you know, demographic, right. The Gen Z years are probably all the ones who have cut the cords.

**L** Lis Malone 1:00:59

I but I was, you know, I was watching a TV show and somebody brought up the fact that they had cut out cable, and they went just streaming. And then with all the different layers of this company, you got to pay for that you got that they were and plus having to navigate between the different platforms through your Smart TV, that consistency. And they kind of made the joke of saying, oh my god, maybe I want to go back to cable.

**R** Rob Mineault 1:01:30

That's 100% a concern.

**R** Ryan Fleury 1:01:31

Sometimes it's more expensive to go go streaming.



**R** Rob Mineault 1:01:36

I think that in a way, all the streaming companies and everybody jumping on that bandwagon. You're, they're kind of you're kind of wrecking it. It used to be when there's only two or three, okay, you can live with that. But now when there's four or five that you have to, you have to subscribe to to get all the content that you might want. Then you're paying close to what you were paying for cable anyways. And you're absolutely right, Lis, you have to you have to navigate for different apps to try to find the show that you want to watch.

**L** Lis Malone 1:02:08

And you have to wait for the new app to load sometimes. And it's you gotta go through the menu.

**R** Rob Mineault 1:02:13

And you don't know what's on what?

**L** Lis Malone 1:02:17

So that yeah, so there are definitely a lot of, you know, barriers to, to that so called convenient way of streaming content.

**R** Ryan Fleury 1:02:27

So well, that's not even necessarily, bringing up all the accessibility issues, you know, like, we have a fire a TV with fire OS on it. And you know, it has voice view, which is the screen reader on Amazon's operating system. Some of the apps it'll talk in and some of the apps it won't. We need some standards, we need some accessibility built in. And that just adds a whole other dimension to it.

**L** Lis Malone 1:02:51

Yeah. And then each platform gets their exclusive for this, that or the other thing and then it's just, it becomes so complicated to figure out.

**R** Rob Mineault 1:03:03

And there's a little bit of nostalgia like you there's a part of me that kind of misses like that, you know, Friday at eight o'clock. It's Miami Vice.

**L** Lis Malone 1:03:13

L Lis Malone 1:03:13  
Wow you pulled that one out of the dungeon.

R Rob Mineault 1:03:21  
Hey, listen.

S Steve Barclay 1:03:22  
Those were a formative years.

R Rob Mineault 1:03:25  
Right.

L Lis Malone 1:03:29  
Oh, Hill Street Blues.

R Rob Mineault 1:03:31  
Knight Rider. Greatest American Hero. Dukes of Hazzard. Yeah.

L Lis Malone 1:03:39  
All American shows, by the way.

R Rob Mineault 1:03:41  
Yeah, of course. Yeah. I mean, we didn't have any good shows.

S Steve Barclay 1:03:44  
We didn't expect you even recognize the Beachcombers.

R Rob Mineault 1:03:50  
Beachcombers. Don't even ask.

—

R Ryan Fleury 1:03:56  
It's probably on YouTube.

R Rob Mineault 1:04:00  
Yeah, yeah. The 80s and 90s weren't kind to Canadian TV shows. We didn't really have very many. Degrassi I guess it was probably our big one that made a little bit of a breakthrough. Although maybe I'm wrong about that. I don't know. We'll get email.

R Ryan Fleury 1:04:19  
Stop talking about TV.

R Rob Mineault 1:04:23  
How dare you forget things.

L Lis Malone 1:04:27  
The things Rob's gonna be allowed to talk about is gonna become more and more narrow.

R Ryan Fleury 1:04:31  
Right. We'll have to pick up our socks and start learning to host the show.

S Steve Barclay 1:04:39  
I'm afraid.

L Lis Malone 1:04:42  
Ryan can do it. I'll take over cowbell duties.

R Ryan Fleury 1:04:44  
It'll cost me too much to ship to you.

R Rob Mineault 1:04:50  
Right? 80 bucks to ship your cowbell. All right. Anything else to say about any of that?

**R** Ryan Fleury 1:04:57  
No, check out [www.ami.ca](http://www.ami.ca) For all their content, TV listings and AMI audio, it's all there. Love it.

**L** Lis Malone 1:05:05  
You know, I really am doing a trip to Canada. I'm doing a trip to Toronto. I don't know exactly when but I wasn't kidding about that. Take some fun video for sure.

**R** Rob Mineault 1:05:17  
Ah, hey, Lis.

**L** Lis Malone 1:05:17  
Hey, Rob, you moron. I'm carrying what our listeners say. Or listener.

**R** Rob Mineault 1:05:41  
That was that was one listener. So there might be more. Yeah, maybe there may be more next week. There are people other people want to get on the bandwagon. They're all thinking that they will get mentioned on the show if they call us names but it's very true.

**R** Ryan Fleury 1:06:04  
I want to go eat dinner.

**R** Rob Mineault 1:06:06  
Oh, yeah. Wait, where are we? They can also drop us a line if they so desire at [cowbell@atbanter.com](mailto:cowbell@atbanter.com).

**S** Steve Barclay 1:06:42  
So hey, if they want to find us in other places, they can do that too. And you know how they would do that. Rob?

**R** Rob Mineault 1:07:08  
How would they do it?

... ..

**S** Steve Barclay 1:07:10

Well, they would just go to Twitter and or Facebook and look for us there.

**R** Rob Mineault 1:07:14

Hey, that's an idea. All right. Well, I think that is going to do it for us this week. Big thanks, of course to John for joining us this week. And we will see everybody next week.