

AT Banter Podcast Episode 330 - Mike Buckley & Virtual Volun...

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ai, technology, voice, people, volunteer, assistive technology, app, community, ryan, blind, gpt, human, smarter, eyes, question, talk, launch, customer service, beta testers, rob

SPEAKERS

Rob Mineault, Mike Buckley, Ryan Fleury

R Rob Mineault 00:20
Hey and welcome to another episode of AT Banter.

R Ryan Fleury 00:24
Banter, banter.

R Rob Mineault 00:26
Hey of course this is the 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 00:42
I'm back. I know you can't get enough of me.

R Rob Mineault 00:45
I don't know why you keep saying you're back. You never leave.

R Ryan Fleury 00:47
That's true

R Rob Mineault 00:49
You're like me. It's those other two we have to worry about.

R Ryan Fleury 00:54
Well, it's okay.

R Rob Mineault 00:55
Well, speaking of which, yeah, we don't have no Lis and No, Steve today. They are - they out. They're out doing stuff. They're busy.

R Ryan Fleury 01:04
Indeed.

R Rob Mineault 01:06
How are you doing today, sir?

R Ryan Fleury 01:08
I'm doing well. Thanks. Kind of looking forward to this episode for sure.

R Rob Mineault 01:12
Yeah, actually me too. I'm really excited about to be talking about this, because we've been we've been talking about this particular topic - well, not this particular topic. But as a sort of an offshoot topic for a while. We've been wanting to talk about a certain topic. And now we get to do it. So why don't we, without further ado why don't you just go ahead and tell people what the heck we're doing today and what we're so excited about?

R Ryan Fleury 01:39
Sure. So I'm very thankful that they've reached back out to us and agreed to come on this week's episode. We have joining us from Be My Eyes, the CEO, Mike Buckley. Thanks for joining us, Mike.

M Mike Buckley 01:52

Mike Buckley 01:52

Thank you very much, Ryan. Although I have to admit, I am already intimidated by the resonance and depth of your voice. So I'm gonna need a new microphone or something like a new voice or something like that.

R

Ryan Fleury 02:05

So I'm on a mission to find the perfect microphone. And it's just never ending as a musician. I'm sure you can understand.

M

Mike Buckley 02:11

The search for tone is never ending.

R

Rob Mineault 02:14

Well, listen, that gives me an idea, Ryan. Maybe you should launch an app called "Be my Voice". And people can call in and get you to, you know, give birthday greetings and stuff for people.

R

Ryan Fleury 02:26

There you go.

R

Rob Mineault 02:28

Well, we do want to thank you for coming on. We have a few things to talk about, but before we sort of take a bit of a deep dive into Be My Eyes and some of the features that you guys are going to be rolling out soon, can you just give maybe the audience just for anybody who's like lived under a rock for the past five years, and don't know anything about Be My Eyes, can you just sort of give us a brief overview of the app and how it works and what it does?

M

Mike Buckley 02:56

Awesome. It was launched in 2015, by a Danish furniture craftsman who is losing his sight, and got frustrated with having to call family and friends all the time. So he launched a free app into the world where a person whose blind or low vision for free would get connected with a sighted volunteer. And literally in the first 48 hours of its launch, there were there was some press attention and in 48 hours, 10,000 people were using the app. Then fast forward to today, there are nearly a half a million people who are blind and low vision on the service, and an astonishing 6.3 million sighted volunteers, which I think is the largest digital volunteer army in the history of the planet. And I'm just gonna keep saying it until somebody tells me that's not true, because I think it's true. But it's really cool. Also, because it operates the service operates

in 150 countries, and 100 native languages, we have a 90% successful call resolution rate. And the thing that makes me proud to work with our founder hands and our team is, you know, he just he brought this this very simple and beautiful thing into the world. That was the merging of technology and human kindness to solve a whole host of accessibility challenges and it's just it's, it's it's an absolute privilege and an honor to work with him in a responsibility I take very, very seriously.

R

Ryan Fleury 04:24

So I quickly want to ask, how did you get involved with beamer is because you came from San Francisco Lighthouse for the Blind, did you not?

M

Mike Buckley 04:30

I did not, although I had some connection with them. But one of our board members, Brian Bastion is on the San Francisco Lighthouse for the Blind. I've worked in technology for a couple of decades out here and I've invested in a number of companies and through some of that investment activity, I was introduced to Be My Eyes because I had invested in a number of other Danish startups and I just, I thought the service was amazing. And so in 2018, I joined the board and I invested in the business, because there was this beginning traction of a real business model right where Be My Eyes was charging large companies to improve their accessibility efforts primarily in their customer service contact centers. And so I got involved as a board member about five years ago.

R

Ryan Fleury 05:19

And so that's how the app is able to maintain its free status is with these partnerships with other companies?

M

Mike Buckley 05:25

Exactly. So Microsoft, Google Procter and Gamble, Sony, they pay us a yearly fee recurring. And we deploy some basic technology into their customer service center, that through our app, and one push of a button or one voice command, you get connected with our customer service center, but on a video call, which enables much better customer service. And so we have a over 90% satisfaction rate on those calls as well. And what's interesting is that the customer service agents, they're, you know, these are their favorite calls. Right? So it's it's kind of a win win all around.

R

Ryan Fleury 06:05

Yeah, there's definitely been some interesting stories of you know, there was one, I recently heard you on a podcast, where a woman was, I think, going to be doing some baking and the volunteer who had answered the call said, "you want me to just hang out for a little while?", and they just started a social chat, like 20 minutes. So it's very cool.

M

Mike Buckley 06:22

It's an amazing thing, Ryan, like when you talk to the volunteers, and they talk about that call as the best day of their week, right? And most of them are just three minutes, right? Like solving a quick problem finding the green sweater, is the milk expired, am I at the right gate in the airport? But again, the volunteers love it, and the calls are successful. And so it's, it's just it's, it's, I don't know, it's humbling. It's, it's, I'm just proud to be associated with it.

R

Ryan Fleury 06:54

Absolutely.

R

Rob Mineault 06:55

Well, and it's really interesting, too, because, you know, you know, at the beginning of all of this, I mean, I'm sure that nobody could have really predicted that it would end up like that. It's really that sort of that human element. That's, the X factor in all this. I mean, the tech can work like as the tech. Smartphones or smartphones. It's really it's that it's that human interaction and sort of the power of sort of human connection that's really making the app and the experience are really kind of special.

M

Mike Buckley 07:24

I agree. And, you know, if you haven't signed up, please do either as a volunteer or as a user, obviously. But, you know, I think you're right, Rob. You know, I took a call were in December where I read a woman her holiday cards and just described the pictures on it. And it was, it was awesome. Like, it was better than my own Christmas. Right. I mean, it's just no offense to my family, if you're listening to this, I apologize. But it was it was, you know, it was moving right and fun at the same time. So I think you're right.

R

Rob Mineault 08:02

Okay, well, that's a good segue to get into what we brought you on to talk about, which is, in particular, the, the part of the app that you are currently working on that it sounds like it's pretty far down the road, which is the virtual assistant that is going to be using AI technology from Chat-GPT, I believe, right?

M

Mike Buckley 08:25

Yes, exactly.

R

Rob Mineault 08:27

And so you're going to kind of roll that into the app. So can you sort of explain a little bit about the virtual assistant and how it's gonna work?

M

Mike Buckley 08:37

Yeah, so this is we're calling it virtual volunteer. And it is the first ever kind of visual digital assistant powered by open AI technology with Be My Eyes involvement as well. And what it allows a person to do is take a picture of just about anything, and within a matter of a couple of seconds, get a vivid and depth, depth of specific description of what's in the picture. So this isn't like the applications that are out there right now, where, hey, this recognizes that this is a cup or hey, this recognizes you know, the words that are a piece of text. The image recognition is just so far superior, that it's hard to describe unless you use it. And by the way, we will need to make sure we get you involved in the in the beta testers group. So the first thing is really this this unbelievably superior image recognition. The second issue is there's this analytical and contextual layer that makes it more useful. The technology adds context and nuance. So it doesn't just tell you it's a dog. It can tell you the breed of the dog and if the dog is sleeping, or it looks comfortable, or if it's on a bed. It can tell you the brand and color of the sunglasses. It can describe details of clothing and or details of consumer products or the food in your refrigerator. And after it tells you what food is in your refrigerator, it can tell you based on that, what meal you can make tonight based on the ingredients that you have in your fridge. And then there's this conversational element where you can probe and ask more questions and say, you know, oh, do you have a recipe for, you know, chicken cacciatore, or whatever it is, and it will give you a recipe. And so this contextual, and conversational layer just is kind of a leaps and bounds ahead of the assistive technology that's on the market right now. And, and what I've said this a bunch of times, I'm really wary about the artificial intelligence hype cycle right now. And I'm really wary about over promising. But if you talk to the beta testers who are using this product, they're using phrases like 'life changing'. They're using phrases like I have my independence back. They're using, they're saying things like, this is profound. I will use this every day. And so there's something real here. Now we have to perfect it. And we have to make sure it's, it's a continually fantastic experience. And it's easy to use, and it's safe. But I am incredibly optimistic about the power of this technology and the power it will give back to our community.

R

Rob Mineault 11:27

Well, it is really interesting, because, you know, we've we've sort of been at, everybody really has had a ringside seat in terms of, you know, hearing about Chat-GPT. I have to kind of remind myself, really the first time we we actually really heard about Chat-GPT in the mainstream news cycle. I mean, what it's been, what, two or three months. And it's just you know, and so now we hear about AI everywhere. And, you know, my initial reaction when I started to hear about Chat-GPT and AI in general, was okay, well, how is this going to benefit assistive technology? Because there's got to be some huge ramifications about this technology. You know, right now, we're just hearing about it like about college students writing their essays about it, and it being able to generate sort of dynamic art and stuff like that. But you know, what's the real meat and potatoes of this technology that can be used to really superpower some assistive technology that's out there. And so that's why we've kind of been excited to talk to you because I feel like you're you guys are one of the first pieces of assistive technology that's really leaning into this technology and trying to sort of incorporate it into the app. So you know, having said that, I

guess I'm curious to know, how did this come about for you guys? Why, did you decide to sort of embrace AI into Be My Eyes? Or is this something that you've kind of been working on for a while?

M

Mike Buckley 12:58

It's something that we've we tried to work on a little bit. But I called Open AI late last year and said, I'd love to find a way to work together. And we kind of talked back and forth. And the discussions weren't, weren't especially productive. And then they called me in early February and said, Hey, Mike, can you keep a secret? And I said, I hope so sure. And they told us about the technology. They asked us to play with it. And they said, Would you like to be our launch partner? And as a matter of fact, in terms of the visual recognition product, you will be our exclusive launch partner. So no other companies and I'm not talking about other companies that help people who are blind and low vision, I'm talking about any company. So they asked us to be the exclusive launch partner and, and I said, give us a little bit of time to test it. Like we want to make sure this really works. Want to make sure it's safe, we want to make sure it's giving accurate information. And we did, and we were blown away. Absolutely blown away. And so I went back to them. And I said, what we're in, but you have to know that a huge philosophy and the foundation of our company is providing these products, tools and services to our community for free. Are you cool with that? And they took about three seconds and they said, yep, let's go, which I think speaks volumes about them and kind of how they view the technology's place and importance in the world and how it needs to be deployed. And so that was great for us. The second question, Rob, which is kind of why. Like why go here? We did an extensive survey of our the people who are blind and low vision that utilize our platform, about what are the barriers to usage. Like why aren't you making calls or why aren't you making more calls or why? Why haven't you signed up at all? And the top answers were, I don't want to take a volunteer away from someone who might need them more. Which speaks volumes about the humanity of our community. And also, that clearly we have a communications failure is with over 6 million volunteers, we can handle the call. So please, if you're listening call, the volunteers want to hear from you. But that was number one. The second barrier was, I have some discomfort calling a stranger, whether it's just a volunteer or paid agent. And we probed a little further and it's kind of like, maybe I don't want someone in my house. Maybe my kitchen is messy. Maybe I just want to get some help in a way where I don't feel I have to rely on someone, another person. And that leads to the third thing that our community mentioned was, you know what, if I call another person, sometimes I feel like I've lost independence. And so when you take all those, those top three barriers, it screams out for a product like this, right? It screams out for a piece of technology that can serve some of these basic needs, without disrupting, you know, the daily flow of a person's life. And so that really underscored the need for us and made this something that was hugely interesting in pursuit in terms of us pursuing it.

R

Rob Mineault 16:28

So how closely with the blindness community are you working in terms of of the beta and? And what kind of initial response have you been getting?

M

Mike Buckley 16:39

I really appreciate the question. We are working extremely closely with our beta testers, we

talked to them every day, there is a thriving Whatsapp group have both praise and requests for more features and what's working well, and what's not working? Well. And, you know, Ryan, you mentioned the San Francisco Lighthouse for the Blind. And one of our board members, who's a brilliant guy named Brian Bastion was the head of that. And he said, Mike, if you're gonna go do this, you better not launch this on us. You better do this with us. He's like, I am sick and tired of people launching products FOR me rather than WITH me. And that's really stuck with me. And, you know, the other thing that Brian said, and I repeat this every day to our teams is our job. And our responsibility is to help this community bend this technology to their needs, right? And so every day I every day, I have some communication with the the beta testers, and we're getting a lot of feedback. And it's great. The your second question Rob was about the response, it's, it's overwhelmingly positive I, I won't say the person's name or what it was about. But in that Whatsapp group, a gentleman posted a quick 35 second video today where he was tearing up about his ability to get very extensive descriptions of photos that he has that he's never been able to see before. And he talked about the his ability to participate in his friend groups again on Instagram, because he can he can like, understand and get the context of the photos. And so like, we got a lot to do. And, and, again, I don't want to over promise, but the initial reaction has been amazing.

R

Ryan Fleury 18:32

And I think I heard on a previous episode, you did that anybody can currently join the beta program? Is that correct?

M

Mike Buckley 18:42

In theory, yes. Because we've got to figure out how to police it, but we want it to be for people who are blind and low vision, Ryan, right. But anyone who's blind and low vision without question. And so what we'll do as we expand the program is, it will be kind of a first come first serve. But we will give a little bit of priority to people who are oh, I don't know, podcasters. And, of course, to blindness organizations, right, who, who want to test it out with their employees or their teams and things like that. So we'll give them a little bit of a bump in the queue. But everybody else will be first come first serve?

R

Ryan Fleury 19:18

Well, I'm totally blind. So I fit the bill. Maybe give us just a quick walkthrough on the app, because one of the questions and I'm sure has been a feature request, is I believe, currently you have to prompt the AI volunteer with a query and then follow up that same if you had a follow up query. You still gotta press a button and and ask the volunteer again. Well, we have like a natural speech.

M

Mike Buckley 19:48

It's all voice enabled. Ryan, that was the first there's the first thing that Be My Eyes engineers built. We said what the hell was the point of launching this thing if it's cumbersome and the UI is terrible? And so it's a really good question. And I'm glad you brought it up because it's it's

completely voice enabled now, which is, you know, it's feels mandatory to me, right?

R

Rob Mineault 20:12

Have there been challenges technologically in to bring this technology into to Be My Eyes? Or is it has it been pretty seamless?

M

Mike Buckley 20:21

It wasn't challenging to bring it in. As you probably know better than I, when you're designing any assistive technology is making sure that the user interface is great, right. And it's easy. And it's, it's, it's joyful and seamless. And so that will be a constant element of continued iteration, I would think, but but the challenges were much more on the design side, right, and making making that experience simple, rather than kind of deeper technological challenges. Now, as we advance the technology, and as you import, you know, pictures from other sources, or as you start to think about, well, this is really awesome. Isn't the next step going to be live video? Right. And we hope so. And that will create a probably some significant technological challenges, but, but really, it was about wanting to the bigger problems, were making sure that it was easy to use.

R

Rob Mineault 21:23

And, you know, it is really interesting that, you know, again, this is kind of driven by human response, because, you know, I can totally see, you know, be my eyes users, you know, thinking along those lines of, oh, you know, I don't want to bother a volunteer for this, or I don't, I don't necessarily want to connect with a real person. So you know, that this, the virtual volunteer is going to be perfect for them. Is it the same on the other side? Do you think that there will be people who be like, well, I don't want to I don't want to talk to an AI because that's creepy. And so they'll specifically go for a human volunteer? Do you sort of see the app really serving a several different needs?

M

Mike Buckley 22:06

I think it has to, right, but I agree with you. 100%, right. Like, I don't know what the percentages are of our community that will prefer a human versus AI or vice versa, right, but I guarantee you, there will be ardent supporters on either side, right or on both sides. But what I view as our role, the Be My Eyes responsibility is to give the community choices. To empower to serve their needs in the way that they want. And again, this goes back to design with the blind rather than for the blind. And so my suspicion is more, a majority of people will use both. But there are people that will gravitate a little more towards one side or the other. So they think, but what do you think? What do you think about that?

R

Rob Mineault 22:58

Yeah, I think that that's, that will probably most definitely be the case. I mean, I think that AI right now, people are a little bit wary about. But really, beneath, like, for example, ChatGPT, just

right now, people are a little bit wary about. But really, honestly, like, for example, Spotify, just last week, rolled out this AI DJ they call it. And it's really incredible. What it does, is you don't it's an algorithm that interested, it looks at your playlists, and looks at your listening habit habits. And it will build like sort of a radio station that is geared specifically towards you. And that's not even that's not the amazing part. The amazing part is that there's a DJ, that's completely AI driven, that will announce the songs like every about every four or five songs that will break in and tell you who that just was, and who is who he's got lined up and some info facts about some of the songs.

M

Mike Buckley 23:46

Can I get Ryan's voice as my DJ?

R

Ryan Fleury 23:48

I'll go to 11 Labs and sample that.

R

Rob Mineault 23:53

But it's really incredible. You can you literally like I would challenge anybody to listen to this thing and have any clue at all, that it's that it's not a human. So, you know, I think of this technology being leveraged for things like, you know, screen readers, like, you imagine if something like JAWS had completely flawless voice, like somebody was reading to you, I mean, that's, that's a huge implication. And even, you know, the fact that this technology really, if if we push it forward, this is going to make the internet completely accessible, because any sort of graphic or image or anything, this thing, you know, AI should be able to describe flawlessly and that that can be a real game changer for the blind and low vision community.

M

Mike Buckley 24:39

I mean, isn't that exciting, though? Just thinking about that. I mean, what a pain in the ass shopping for certain people, right? Or deliveries, whatever. I mean, if you can use your voice to go on and this is where we're going with this app, right? I'll telegraph it like this is you know, the race is on we're going to go build try to build the world's greatest Digital Visual assistant for the community to do anything, that's what we want to do. But like, just imagine that you can do and that power, the ability to do whatever you want to do that you used to have to struggle through the screen reader, right? Or other assistive technology. And if you can use your voice to solve that, and his game changing, right? It's profound. And so, it's so exciting to me, by the way, I love the Spotify feature, and thank you to Spotify, they are a customer of ours, and we appreciate your business, Spotify.

R

Rob Mineault 25:36

Yeah, it's amazing. I've been listening to it all week, I just absolutely love it. So you know, and I'm sure that you know, AI, we're gonna, we're gonna see soon, it's really going to be injected into most of our day to day living. I suspect that, you know, as soon pretty much call centers,

it'll all be AI driven. You know, who even knows, like, where this, I'm sure that there's a lot of work being done now, with companies trying to figure out how they can leverage this technology to either streamline their processes or, you know, make it make a better customer service experience for people. And, you know, I'm sure some are probably looking at how can we how can we cut our human our human workforce.

M

Mike Buckley 26:27

I think it's true on both fronts, right? Yeah. I mean, that, you know, someone asked me this question the other day, and I am by no means an AI expert, right. I mean, I try to learn a little bit each day, just just enough to be dangerous at the dinner table, right. But the, you know, if you think about the ability of customer service, whether it's a Chatbot, or you know, a much smarter version of a Chatbot. Imagine that, that that bot it has, through the its AI operation operating system has ingested kind of every piece of information in the world. And I know that sounds like hyperbole, but that's where this is going. So if you have a computer problem, it will have ingested every user manual and fix and prior customer service record of problems on the disk, the exact same type of computer issue you have, and should be able to solve that with a reasonable degree of accuracy. And high speed. And so it's, it's, it's, it is crazy to think about, and it will be, I think, incredibly disruptive, right? In both good ways, and bad, by the way.

R

Rob Mineault 27:37

Yeah, exactly. You know, I think I really do think that it's going to be one of these pieces of technology, that's a little bit of a game changer, you know, just like, say, the development of smartphones, where, you know, in the in the mid 2000s. It completely transformed, you know, the technological landscape. And, you know, for and for, you know, better or worse, I mean, you could sort of argue for both sides of that. But I also think that attitudes towards AI right now are going are very different than say what it's going to be in even probably like two years, because I think that people will get used to it, we'll figure out a lot of uses for it. And I think people will become a lot less wary of it. That's my prediction anyways, because, you know, you look at some, even something like smart speakers, when they first came out, people were like, oh, I'm creeped out, I don't want to have a sort of an open microphone in my living room all the time. And now people have like four or five in their house. So, you know, it's just a matter of people sort of, you know, getting used to the technology, I think and before they really, really start to embrace it.

M

Mike Buckley 28:47

Yeah, they're always a bit, you know, adoption curves, right? on anything, although, like, you know, better than me, there's still, there's still many members of our community that don't trust, you know, their Alexa, you know, you know, I went to a friend's house the other day, and there were a number of people there who were blind or low vision, and one of them came in and said, Can you please turn off all your Alexa? And, you know, the host was like, come on, man. Give me a break. But but but we turned it off.

R

Rob Mineault 29:17

Rob Mineault 29:17

Yeah.

R

Ryan Fleury 29:18

Well, that's kind of one of the nice things I think you guys have done in the early stages of the beta is you've given people the choice. So if the Virtual Volunteer, you know, comes back, I think you guys have said you have a button only, it has about a 95% accuracy rate. If, if they if a user is questioning those results, they can still call a sighted volunteer as well.

M

Mike Buckley 29:42

Exactly. So so, you know, our engineers have built it in so that the tool will offer that frequently to the person using this service. So there are times when the tool will say, "I'm 90 or 95% Certain would you like to make sure with a Volunteer" or you know, or "Would you like to check with a Volunteer?" And so it is a feature that we built in and, again, you know, Ryan, to the point you're making, it's got to go back to the person's choice, right, of how they want to obtain and consume information. Yeah.

R

Rob Mineault 30:12

So what's kind of the roadmap for this, then? Do you guys have sort of an idea of when this will be rolled out of beta? And kind of what is what's next for it once you want to do?

M

Mike Buckley 30:24

Yeah, I hope it's a couple of months, but I don't know. And the reason I don't know is because we're going to be directed directly by the community, you know, this is going to be a function really have safety, accuracy, and overall efficacy. And if we see high scores, on all those fronts, we may accelerate deployment, but that's really going to be directed by our community, and our blind and low vision beta testers. And, you know, there's, I'm torn on this, though, Rob, right, because, you know, I see what this is already capable of doing. And I want to get it out there for millions, millions of people, right. But by the same token, we've got to be smart, right, and I think some caution is appropriate. And prioritizing safety is a must. And again, we're going to be directed by the experience the direct experience of our beta testers and making sure that it's working for them. But I hope in a couple of months.

R

Rob Mineault 31:22

And that must be the kind of the, the real benefit of having such a large beta testing community is because you can really throw so many different scenarios at this thing and see how it responds. Because I would think that dealing with something like this on paper, it might all look good. But you know, human beings, we're complicated, and you know, we can we can throw things at something like an AI, where it's, it's even if it misjudges a certain context,

there's a huge difference in the results. So I mean, that must be a, like a real big learning curve for you guys, because, you know, you're having all these humans really interacting with, with the AI.

M

Mike Buckley 32:06

100%. I mean, every night, you know, right before I go to sleep, I try to break it. I try to make it you know, give me a political opinion, I try to get it to tell me it loves me, or I try to you know, whatever, whatever the big Sorry, I'm maybe I'm oversharing now, but But you know, like, I'm trying to I'm trying to get this thing to screw up, right. And about the worst I've seen it do is identify a product incorrectly, where I took a picture of an Amazon Web page of toasters, and it told me it thought they were slow cookers. But literally, that's the worst mistake it made. But like, we still don't know, we don't know, right? I can't assume that my you know, hundreds, or however many queries I've done is the full universe of possibilities of things that in theory could go wrong. And so, you know, your points, well taken, Rob, that, that, that, you know, more and more data more and more test, gradually getting this, you know, these testing grew bigger and bigger, is kind of where the rubber is gonna meet the road.

R

Rob Mineault 33:05

Right? In terms of that particular technology, how fast is it developing? Is it getting better and better, literally, every day? Are you guys having to kind of redevelop certain things, because it's just the the technology's always sort of evolving and changing?

M

Mike Buckley 33:20

it is getting better every day, we've already seen improvements in the in the weeks that we've played with it, you know, better prompts, better recognition. You know, and this is all about, you know, ingesting the data from the tests and tweaking the models, right? And, and much the same as, you know, when Google launched, every time an additional search was done, the search results got better and better, this will function the same way, by it will get smarter and smarter and the mistakes will will get lower and lower over time provided the you know, that that the you know, the the prompts and the instructions up front, you know, are really, really well designed.

R

Ryan Fleury 34:05

Could it tell me what type of guitar I'm pointing at and what year it was made and where it was made?

M

Mike Buckley 34:10

So I have a vintage guitar book. And it did identify one of the guitars is a Les Paul, but it did not know that it was a 1959. So, but it did, they did identify the guitar and the brand. Yeah.

R Ryan Fleury 34:28
Very cool.

R Rob Mineault 34:29
Man. It's amazing. I'm while I'm excited. I really am. And I'm excited to see sort of where this technology how it gets leveraged in other assistive technology. So it warrants being cautious, but then again, you know, machine learning is, again, not anything new. Machine learning is all what this technology is based on. We've had that for ages. So I'm really the new part of this is just sort of the outwardly facing stuff. It's being able to really, you know, have that voice element and really sort of interface with it in a way that we we haven't been able to before.

M Mike Buckley 35:01
100%. And I mean, you know, it's no longer kind of some sort of, you know, unrecognizable far off sci fi dream, I think we're in the low single digit number of yours where there's a wearable, that is a remarkable Digital Visual assistant that becomes affordable, ubiquitous, and like awesome at helping interpret the world. I think we're really close, you know? Now, whether that means two years or four or five, I don't know. But I know it's common.

R Rob Mineault 35:42
Absolutely. I mean, you know, just look at, you know, the Google Glass. I mean, that, you know, they tried to roll that out, it was way ahead of its time. But I think you're right, now that now you take some of these new technologies and combine them together, and you have a game changing device that can really make a huge impact to, you know, millions of people around the world.

M Mike Buckley 36:04
Yeah, well, you know, we're talking to the Envision guys right now. Have you guys use that product at all? What do you think about it?

R Ryan Fleury 36:10
I used the Envision app, and I have it. I haven't used it in a while. I haven't used the glasses. So I don't know, I have no experience with that at all. The only real experience I have, you know, with object recognition, Scene Recognition is the seeing AI app. Really, that's kind of been my go to.

M Mike Buckley 36:29
Right. Yeah. And I think what, by the way, the SR app was pretty good, right? I think the

right. Yeah. And I think what, by the way, the SR app was pretty good, right? I think the Envision app was very good as well. And you know, this is just kind of like a it's like that app, you know, times 20. Yeah, and then no offense, but by the way, the folks at Microsoft have been great to us, they're really supportive, where we're probably going to be doing a number of things with them. Same thing with the Envision guys, but like, it's just, you know, this tech is advancing so rapidly. But it's interesting that that you have used it. I haven't met a lot of people who have used the Envision glasses, but a lot of folks have good things to say.

R

Rob Mineault 37:03

Yeah, but I mean, I but I think you're very right about the price point. I mean, part of the problem with a lot of wearables, in the past, historically, it has just been the price point is very expensive for people. And the the technology that has been in place for it, to be honest, it's a little bit clunky. It works, it works for sure. But it's you know, it's certainly hard to justify maybe like that big of a price tag for what you're getting out of it. So that's why I think that this and plus that affordability aspect, and really, in terms of assistive technology, generally what needs to happen in order to bring that price point back down for something for assistive technology is for it to be within the mainstream so that you have that, you know, manufacturing. You can be you know, they can be manufacturing enough for them to bring that price point down. So really, that's where something like a wearable that's in the mainstream that can also be used as a really powerful assistive technology tool. That's always what to shoot for.

M

Mike Buckley 38:10

Yeah, 100%. And I do think price points will come down. And we are absolutely at Be My Eyes committed to doing everything in our power to work with governments to subsidize the costs of those those wearables, companies as well. We are pretty close to a deployment with a company where with our kind of software, and another wearable, we're going to give all of their blind and low vision employees a wearable for on the job. And I'm really, really excited about that. Not only for the for that company, but also for the potential longer term benefits when you think about employment, right? Workplace productivity and things like that. But I do think that you're right, the price points will come down, but at the same time, we're going to we're gonna work hard to pressure governments and our corporate customers to kind of pay the bills here in the near term.

R

Ryan Fleury 39:07

You know, I think as soon as this is done, I need to open up my Be My Eyes up and click the Beta button.

M

Mike Buckley 39:15

Get in the game. What right? Well, I think I have your email already. But I'd love to, I'd love to get you on sooner rather than later. And, you know, and just give you just get your opinions on it as well. I think, you know, people who've given back to the community in many forms are, as

I said, folks who are going to move up in the queue and that includes the blindness organizations and people who've, you know, helped educate the community through podcasts and a number of other means so so we'll get you in there.

R Ryan Fleury 39:42

Well, I'm a musician also and I've got gear all over the floor and walls here that I need to get scanned in so Chat-GPT gets smarter and can tell me what's what.

M Mike Buckley 39:50

So do you want to know what it wouldn't do? You want to know what it wouldn't do for me? What's that? It wouldn't read sheet music.

R Ryan Fleury 39:58

Oh interesting.

M Mike Buckley 39:59

Which struck me is really odd, right? Because it's linear. It's lines and black dots. I mean, that's basically math of another form. I think it'll get there. But it just surprised me that on this iteration, it didn't read the sheet music. It was weird.

R Ryan Fleury 40:12

Interesting.

R Rob Mineault 40:14

Wow. We want to thank you so much for coming on taking this time out of your day to talk to us about this. I'm really super excited. We'll definitely be in touch. I mean, we'd love to have you back on maybe once you guys roll it out.

M Mike Buckley 40:28

Absolutely. Happy to do it. I appreciate the opportunity. And we'll do it again, guys.

R Ryan Fleury 40:32

Yeah, good. Thank Lindsey for helping coordinate this as well. Alright. Thanks, Mike.

M Mike Buckley 40:37
Take care. Bye, bye.

R Rob Mineault 40:39
Take care. Man, I love to Be My Eyes.

R Ryan Fleury 40:43
It's great. We have a carbon monoxide tester on each floor of our house. And there was one day, I heard this beeping sound. Where's that coming from? So I finally located where the beep was coming from. And it was one of our carbon monoxide testers on our upper floor. And of course, it has an LCD screen on it, so I can't read it. So I actually called a Be My Eyes volunteer to say, hey, you know, my carbon monoxide tester is beeping, can you tell me what the screen says? And so she said, you know, whatever the screen said, and I said, Okay, we need to reset it. There's three buttons on the front of it, can you tell me, which is the reset button? And she said, the one on the far left? So I pressed it, you know, she was able to walk me through all that. And I couldn't have done that. I could have pressed buttons and hoped I hit the right one. But not being familiar with what each of the buttons did, or what was on the screen you know, I had no independence there. So they were able to help me out. So they're great. I love what they do.

R Rob Mineault 41:45
Yeah, I do, too. I mean, it really is assistive technology done right. Even from the concept of it was brilliant.

R Ryan Fleury 41:53
It's finally people wanting to help people.

R Rob Mineault 41:57
Yeah, that's exactly it. It's not even that it's such great assistive technology. It's not the technology that makes it powerful. It's it is this human connection. And it really does sort of reinstate your your faith in humanity.

R Ryan Fleury 42:12
Well, it's coming together working together for the better good of everyone.

R

Rob Mineault 42:16

Yeah, that's great. I love it. I love it. And this technology, you know, initially when I heard about this, I my fear was like, well, I don't know is are they are they aiming to just kind of do away with that whole human volunteer aspect of this, and it's all just going to be an AI driven app? But I'm so excited to hear that that's not at all the plan that's really just adding on to the power of the app. And making it is something that's going to everybody's going to be comfortable with, no matter which side of the fence that you know of AI that you fall into.

R

Ryan Fleury 42:50

Well, it's just that you listen to the community, not everybody is comfortable with a smart device in their home. You know, even though your smartphone is probably listening to you right now, if you have a smartphone. You know, there's there's so many cameras, microphones all around us all the time. And there's a lot of people that are uncomfortable with that. So being able to query something on your own, you know, is great for some people, but you know, there are others who want to talk to a person. And we've seen it on the news is that there are AI tests being done, where they are cloning voices, and people are being scammed. You know, there was a news story where a woman was called by a scammer, I guess, who had somehow used her nephew's voice saying, Grandma, I'm at the police station. They need some money. Baba, can you send some money? Yeah, this was on the news a week or two ago. And they had somehow gotten this nephew's voice. Whether it you know, maybe was off Facebook or Tik Tok or whatever. And used his voice and she fell for this scam. So there are deep fakes happening all the time. With a Yeah,

R

Rob Mineault 44:10

yeah, you're right. That is something that's but you know, in any technology, you know, you're gonna have people who try to use it for for evil.

R

Ryan Fleury 44:17

Yep, for sure.

R

Rob Mineault 44:18

You know, that's you can't blame necessarily the technology. But no, you're right. I mean, stuff like deep fakes and fake voices and stuff like that, that is going to be a problem going forward, they're definitely going to have to build some sort of a tools that can detect all of that stuff.

R

Ryan Fleury 44:35

While like you mentioned the DJ on Spotify. My wife and I listened to that after you emailed me the link the other day. Yeah, and it's really good. Now, if you listen closely enough, you can tell it's not a real voice. But it's pretty good. It's pretty good. I could tell. But then again, I listen to

synthesized sound all the time while it's true, right?

R

Rob Mineault 44:58

That's true. I mean, if you listen to some of the inflections, I think occasionally they'll get it wrong. They'll put the wrong emphasis on the on the wrong word. But I mean, that's it. But so I but I mean, really, I mean, AI is here to stay. It's not like it's brand new. I know that, you know, everybody's, everybody's talking about it right now. But, but really machine learning, we've been talking about this for a while, and it's been going on - you know, Google's had machine learning and algorithms and stuff driving, searching engine results, and you know, any given program probably, for quite a while, so...

R

Ryan Fleury 45:44

I just can't wait for smarter chatbots.

R

Rob Mineault 45:51

I'm convinced call center agents are, are like you're done. Like, they won't be long. Yeah, the completely AI driven.

R

Ryan Fleury 46:00

There might still be a human component, maybe the second level support or sales or whatever. But at some point, yeah, it can be replaced with all the data that's been fed daily. Yeah.

R

Rob Mineault 46:10

But actually, that's part of that I'm kind of annoyed about because I'm already annoyed that you can't call anywhere now without getting a phone tree. And you can't just phone somewhere and have someone pick up. It's that's annoying in and of itself. And then if you layer on to that, well, now I've got to go through an AI who answers the phone. Although, here's what I will say, if that means that I don't have to wait for 25 minutes on hold for the bank, then maybe I am okay, with with call center AI. If they can improve the wait times, then I'm down? Anyways, that was very cool. I would I would love to have to dig around and see if JAWS, is looking at this stuff.

R

Ryan Fleury 47:02

Well, I'm sure they are. They have you know, a voice not a voice assistant. It's actually called voice assistant in their Utilities menu. So you can talk to Jaws now. And you can say, you know, JAWS turn up the volume, turndown the volume. There's there's a list of commands and stuff that you can use and say, so they've looked at it, and they're looking at it. you know, they are, at some point, you know. Well, even Dragon Naturally Speaking, right? Once it's installed, and

you've kind of gone through the training, you can just use your voice to open Word, close Word, save Word, open the Internet. So voice queuring is nothing new. It's the contextual stuff that is going to revolutionize the way we interact.

R

Rob Mineault 47:48

Well, I think also, I mean, especially for something like JAWS, or any screen reader, for that matter, if you can, you can improve that synthesized voice and make it smooth and make it like really sound like it's somebody reading to you, I would think that that's a that's a pretty big game changer too.

R

Ryan Fleury 48:04

As long as you can speed it up still, because a lot of people like to crank their voice up. Right. As long as you can still understand what it is saying at high rates of speed. But yeah, but yeah, think about it. They're talking about using AI for, you know, audio narration right. Yeah. Audio Book creation.

R

Rob Mineault 48:31

Well, and even you know, even you, we talked about, you know, synthetic voice versus human voice in terms of audio description. That would be a game changer too you know, if you could make if you could have that synthetic voice sound human.

R

Ryan Fleury 48:45

Yep. Wow. Yeah. Cuz as it stands now, we can tell when it's, you know, the synthesizer, doing the audio narration. So, yeah, if even if they were to use like, the DJ, Spotify voice, you know, it's getting there. It'll get there.

R

Rob Mineault 49:01

Yeah, yeah, it really will. So, you know, we're gonna see some big changes, but I think that, you know, a lot of them are going to be really positive.

R

Ryan Fleury 49:07

We will have to get Descriptive Video Works to talk about AI.

R

Rob Mineault 49:10

And, yeah, I mean, I am curious to know what they what they think about all of that. I think I have a feeling we'll be talking about AI again, very soon.

R Ryan Fleury 49:22
Well, I reached out to Open AI to see if they'll come on the show and talk about Chat-GPT.

R Rob Mineault 49:30
I'm sure they're pretty busy right now. They have 1000s of irons in the fire, I'm sure.

R Ryan Fleury 49:36
Yep. So we'll see. Hey, Ryan. Yeah, Rob?

R Rob Mineault 49:40
Where can people find us?

R Ryan Fleury 49:41
They can find us www.atbanter.com

R Rob Mineault 49:44
Hey, they can also drop us an email if they so desire at cowbell@atbanter.com Hey, maybe we can do we can add like a fifth podcast member and make it an AI. Alfie the AI.


R Ryan Fleury 50:05
I wonder how you do that? We need a bot. Yeah.

R Rob Mineault 50:10
I mean, huh I would love it. I would I listen, I would pay a \$10 subscription fee a month to listen to Lis, argue with an AI for like 45 minutes.

R Ryan Fleury 50:23
We should take a voice sample from her from one of our podcasts and throw it up on 11 Labs. Because we we could do something with that.

 Rob Mineault 50:45
We don't need you Lis, we got Lis Bot now.

 Ryan Fleury 50:51
It'd be interesting to have a Lis AI interject some comments.

 Rob Mineault 50:54
Oh, yeah. Well, I think that is going to do it for us this week. Big thanks, of course, to Mike for joining us. And we will see everybody next week.