

Student ambassador Khamani interviews Michael Cash

Khamani:

Hello everyone. Today I'm pleased to be talking to Michael Cash who is a Product Specialist at Voiceitt. Voiceitt has developed speech recognition for people with non-standard speech. Michael also has cerebral palsy and has non-standard speech so he will be using Voiceitt technology for this interview. Hello Michael thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. How are you?

Michael Cash:

I am well thank you. How are you?

Khamani:

I am well, thank you. I want to first talk about by starting to going back to when you were born. You were born with cerebral palsy due to a lack of oxygen at birth. How old were you when you began physiotherapy and speech and language therapy?

Michael Cash:

You are right when I was born I wasn't breathing properly and my parents knew I wasn't making the regular milestones of a normal toddler.

So, they so they went and sought advice and established I had cerebral palsy and when I was about 18 months I began having physio therapy and speech therapy.

Khamani:

Right, OK, Wow. And also, that's a very I can relate to that myself actually and in the early 1980s you were one of the first pupils at your school to have a BBC Micro computer is that correct?

Michael Cash:

Yes, I was very fortunate because of my cerebral palsy and lack of fine motor control and I'm unable to write so technology has always been a great vehicle for me to produce non-verbal communication and I was one of the first pupils in schools with a computer.

Khamani:

And how did you feel when you got it and was it easy to use?

Michael Cash:

It was my first computer, so I didn't think about whether it was hard or easy it was just amazing to be able to type. But I would say I do find the normal keyboard quite cumbersome and it's much easier to use a smaller keyboard.

Khamani:

I can understand what you mean about the big keyboard being a lot bigger to have that I can understand you saying it's easier smaller.

And you had a very supportive Headteacher at secondary school. How much of an impact do you think having a supportive Headteacher had on your gaining a place on a BTEC National Computing Course?

Michael:

It was very important because when we first spoke to the examining body they didn't want to allow me to use a computer in my exams or give me extra time but that was the easiest way to type my answers also I needed extra time in my exams and the teacher thankfully made some calls for me to enable me to use the computer and get the extra time that I require.

Khamani:

That must of made a massive difference. I know that when you're able to just get your answers down rather than having someone else to write them out for you it gives you that much extra time and makes it more flowing, and easy to do.

And then you went on to complete a Bachelor of Science Honours degree in computing. What support did the university put in place for you to succeed?

Michael:

My university lecturers were also very supportive and often I gave me more time to talk things through or they gave me copies of the lecture notes because I couldn't write my own notes quick enough and they again gave me more time in my exams.

Khamani:

That must have been a real help. I can see it definitely helped, you to succeed as you've said.

And now you currently work for Voiceitt. Am I pronouncing it correctly as Voiceitt?

Michael:

Yes that's right.

Khamani:

And you work as a Product Specialist. How does Voiceitt's speech recognition technology differ from voice assistants such as Amazon's Alexa or Apple's Siri or Google Assistant?

Michael:

Voiceitt really allows users to use their own voice to interact with technology to write email and work-related documents but we also integrate with chat GPT so you can ask questions.

Khamani:

That's very good keeping up with current trends more people are starting to use this AI and especially Chat GPT so that's really good.

And is there anything that stands out to you as the biggest game changer in assistive technology?

Michael:

Being I think the current technology that Voiceitt has being able to use your own voice to interact is amazing and it makes video conferencing call much more productive because other people can see what I'm saying and don't need to worry about asking me to repeat myself.

Khamani:

Definitely it can be frustrating sometimes. I get it Voiceitt like you said it saves more time and helps you to be more productive.

And you've also have travelled around the world. Where is the most interesting place you have visited?

Michael:

One of the most interesting places was we did a safari in Tanzania and we went to places like the Serengeti and being able to see all the animals was amazing.

Khamani:

Wow, I know I've heard Tanzania family and friends go there and they've said it's a really nice place. It's very hot especially.

Michael:

It is but it can be quite nice depending on the time of year.

Khamani:

And of all the countries you have visited what's been the best one at supporting people with special needs?

Michael:

I think I think everyone got their advantages, but I have been to River in North America where they got a special organization to take people with disabilities.

Khamani:

That's very good. That's what every country should have really. There needs to be definitely more of those organisations.

And for people watching what advice do you have for other people who struggle to be able to understood due to not having regular speech?

Michael:

To just take your time and and breathe and try and make yourself understood

Khamani:

Definitely breathing is one thing I always use even with my condition it definitely helps, and I can understand what you mean about taking your time don't rush and you will get there in the end.

And what advice do you have for people supporting someone experiencing barriers to communication?

Michael:

I think someone needs to have a lot of patience and be a good listener and support the person to get their own answers. People may want to talk things through, but they don't always want an answer. they often just need a sounding board.

Khamani:

Definitely, well said. Well Michael it was very interesting talking to you and hearing about your early life and education despite your barriers you managed to succeed and end up working at Voiceitt, which is an amazing organisation, doing amazing things for people who have a barrier to speech. Thank you guys for listening. Bye for now.