

Independent Perspective #1895 with Rick Woods

Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Welcome to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living.

00:00:06 Speaker 1

Changes in technology take place rapidly in our current society.

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For businesses, understanding and adapting to trends in technology is vital.

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But individuals outside of business often struggle to keep up with changes in tech, leaving you with the question of what to do to make sure that you don't get left behind.

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Joining us today is WNYL's Intelligence Technology Coordinator, Rick Woods, to offer some tips and tricks to help you in keeping up with the latest technology.

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Welcome to the program, Rick.

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Thanks for having me, Ernie.

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It's our pleasure.

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Let's start with some of the most common challenges people often face when it comes to technology.

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What would you describe those as?

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Well, Ernie, one of the biggest challenges that people with disabilities face when using technologies is that most systems and products are designed with a very narrow idea of what a typical user looks like.

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Many platforms and systems automatically assume users can see clearly, hear audio cues, can use a mouse or a touchscreen precisely, can remember complex steps, and can process information quickly.

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Because of that, we often see several common barriers for people with visual impairments.

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Small text, poor color contrast, and unloadable or unlabeled images can often make websites or documents extremely difficult to use.

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For individuals with mobility or motor disabilities, interfaces that rely heavily on precise mouse movements or small buttons can become frustrating or even near impossible to navigate.

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There are also challenges with hearing accessibility.

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Many training videos, online meetings, educational materials, and other sorts of video presentation can lack captions or transcripts, making them

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inaccessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

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And another major barrier is complexity.

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Many systems require multiple logins, authentication steps, or confusing navigation.

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For individuals with cognitive disabilities, brain injuries, ADHD, or memory challenges, this complexity creates a significant barrier to accessing information and completing tasks.

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If you haven't already mentioned them, what are some tools that exist to overcome these challenges?

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Fortunately, there are a lot of tools that are out there to help people overcome these barriers

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and make technology more accessible.

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Starting with visual impairments, there are screen readers and AI-powered applications that can read text aloud, can describe images, or even identify objects through a smartphone camera.

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Tools like Microsoft Seeing AI or other similar accessibility apps can help people navigate the world and interact with digital content.

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For people who have difficulty using a keyboard or typing, voice recognition can convert speech directly into text, allowing them to control computers, write documents, and send messages

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using nothing but their voice.

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Real-time captioning tools are improving on a regular basis to provide accessibility for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

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Applications can provide live transcription during meetings or conversations, which allow users to follow along even if they can't hear the audio.

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There are organizational and cognitive support tools to help people simplify tasks.

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Tools that can break down complex instructions into step-by-step processes, provide reminders, or convert complex text into plain language.

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In many cases, Ernie, the accessibility tools people need are already built into modern devices even.

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Smartphones, computers, and tablets now include features like screen readers, magnifiers, voice control, captioning, and high-contrast displays.

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The key is helping people learn that these tools exist and how to use them.

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Would you believe we're down to about a minute because you've been so thorough in your answers?

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Where should someone turn if their regular resources are not available?

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Are there places or websites you would recommend and what are some good contact numbers?

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One of the most useful resources is a network of Independent Living Centers similar to ours.

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Organizations that provide peer support, information, and assistance with things like assistive technology, housing resources, and even navigating benefits.

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These exist

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In communities and across the country and are designed specifically to help people with disabilities live independently.

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Another helpful option is the Disability Information and Access Line, DIAL, the national hotline that connects people with disability-related resources in their area.

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There's also organizations to provide legal and advocacy information for people with disability rights that fall outside the scope of this but can also help people navigate through technological barriers.

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And last, there are places like usa.gov or 211 resources

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resources that can help people find further assistance.

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The most important thing is that people don't have to navigate these challenges alone.

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There's networks of organizations similar to ours, technological tools built into their day-to-day items that they need, that they just need to be given guidance on how to find, and advocacy groups that exist specifically to help individuals with disabilities access this information.

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Rick, we're totally out of time.

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Is there a contact number in Buffalo that you'd suggest people try?

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211 is a phenomenal resource, Ernie.

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It will get you a resource directory of all the other places that can help you.

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Thanks so much for being with us.

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Thank you, Ernie.

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You've been listening to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York independent living.

00:05:16 Speaker 1

Our guest today was Rick Woods, WNYIL's IT coordinator, and I've been your host, Ernie Churchwell.