[Narelle] Hello and welcome to

another episode of the Digital Access Show.

Again, like a number of shows, I've said I've been

wanting to interview this guy for quite a while.

Now Santiago Velasquez, is that - I've pronounced

it correctly, have I, Santi? [Santiago] Ah,

Velasquez, but don't worry. [Narelle] Velasquez, yep, sorry.

[Santiago] [laughs] [Narelle] He's, um,

based here in Brisbane. He's originally

from Columbia, and he's doing some

really innovative stuff in the accessibility area.

And that's why it's important for people to meet Santi. And hear what he's got to say

and talk about what he's doing, because Santi - [stumbles]. Santi, I'm having

one of those days. Santi actually has

lived experience himself. So I'm going to let Santi

tell you about himself, so everyone, please

meet Santi Velasquez. [Santiago] Hi Narelle, thank

you very much for having me. It's an absolute pleasure

to be here and yeah, so.. As you said, I'm

originally from Colombia and from a very young

age I always loved technology and I figured that it can be used

to improve our world, but it needs to be

done appropriately. [Narelle] Yep.

[Santiago] And... what that led me to was to

develop a system called Hailo to improve public

transport accessibility. So, in a nutshell, I was

frustrated that because I couldn't see a bus, because my guide

dog Trey couldn't tell me which bus it was or because,

you know, I move around and each bus stop is

different. Oftentimes I would be left behind. And that's

just not acceptable. And oftentimes even if I get

on the bus, I would get dropped off at

the incorrect stop. And we can keep

going down this list of inaccessibility

with public transport. And I thought, no,

no, no, no. Let's fix it. So we came up

with Hailo. And, Hailo is basically

a system that allows you as a commuter - doesn't

matter your disability - to rock up to a bus stop,

a train stop, a ferry stop. And, select the vehicle

you want to get on. And select where

you want to get off. And you basically are sending an electronic hail

to the bus driver, train conductors, so

that when they get to your stop, or actually one

stop before, they know you need to get on at the next

stop. Nobody's going to be hailing. And you might have, if

you choose to share your access requirements, they

will also know, ah, they use a guide dog, they use a

wheelchair, with the whole objective of making

public transport just better. They just, we're not allowed

to drive, surprise, surprise. [Narelle] Yeah, I don't know

what their problem is, you know.

[Santiago] [laughs] [Narelle] Driverless

cars are coming. we keep being told.

[Santiago] They are indeed. [Santiago] And not

only that, we're not allowed to drive,

but I don't know many people that have $100 plus a

day or $50 a day or $20 a day, even to just catch taxis and

Ubers, even with subsidies from NDIS, from state government.

It doesn't really matter. So I figured, well, public

transport just has to work. So that's where Hailo

came from. And I figured, if nobody else is going to

do it. And I can, why not? [Narelle] Yeah. Santi, what

were you using before Hailo? What were the tools you were

using that weren't helping you? [Santiago] Honestly, I tried

everything. I would stand at the bus stop

and just wave my hand just constantly. I would

use my phone and just try to time the

hails appropriately. I would wave my

cane in front of buses where it was very

busy to make sure that everybody would stop. I had the little books that

you would flip the numbers for. [Narelle] Yep. [Santiago] I tried

everything. I tried everything. And, you know, when you get on

the bus, you obviously ask the bus driver, hey, can

you let me know when we get to stop number seven

and Google Maps, Apple Maps. Everything. And the

system just didn't work. Obviously, I also

called up in advance and I said, oh, tomorrow

I'm catching a bus here to there. Could you

let that driver know? And, the difficult

part is, it's not the driver's fault. It's

just the infrastructure. It hasn't been designed to help people

with disabilities. And it hasn't been

designed to help drivers because they don't

have an easy job already as it is. And now we're

just asking them to, to do more. So, it's not

a well-designed system. [Narelle] Yeah, I actually

agree with you because I, obviously I live in

Brisbane. And for me, there's a couple

of streets that I've learnt that I'd rather

walk an extra half hour, and go and catch a ferry to get where I need to go,

and take twice as long. Than try and catch

a bus because, you know, you just can't do it. It physically is an

impossibility. And also, the number of times

that like you, the bus thinks there's not

going to be anyone at the bus stop, so

they just keep cruising. And then suddenly that,

oh, there's already, there's someone there. Well,

they're already past it. They can't stop in time. Otherwise, they'd

be causing accidents and all these things, bus

drivers don't have an easy job. [Santiago] Well, last year, I was

fortunate to travel around the world on a Churchill Fellowship.

And I visited 11 different countries, upwards of 25 major

cities looking at their public transport infrastructure and

a few things stood out to me. You know, every city does public transport a little

bit differently. [Narelle] Yes. [Santiago] But, it doesn't

matter where you are. The problems are

exactly the same. So in Berlin, for example, a bus - and in Japan - a bus

is supposed to stop for you if you're at the bus stop,

regardless of whether you hail or not. It's not, you

don't have to hail them. And I thought, great, that's

fantastic. That's brilliant. Let's do that. I just have

to stand there, and great. Now, the funny thing about what

happened in Berlin is that I didn't know that there was

a tree in front of the bus stop. So I just stood at

the bus stop, that's where it was. And

thought, well, we'll try it. And the bus went by

because I didn't know that I was standing

in front of the trees. So by the time that the bus

would have seen me, he would have been past the bus stop and it's like,

I can't reverse. [Narelle] Yeah.

[Santiago] And... It was surprising because

when I gave a lecture at TU Berlin, the University of

Technology Berlin, people thought, oh no,

this doesn't happen here because we don't

have to hail a bus. And I'm like,

well, actually, how about this story from yesterday? And they were all

surprised because, again, lived experience. It's

extremely important. So when we develop

something, it doesn't look accessible.

It is accessible. [Narelle] Yeah. So what has

been the response from government

here in Australia, from the people that-

like Translink here in Queensland, what

has been the response? [Santiago] Honestly, the

response is mixed. So drivers love it. We have piloted Hailo in New South

Wales and the drivers, the feedback has

been, 'this is great.' 'Just make it available

to everybody. We get their appropriate information, we

get it on time and brilliant.' Depot managers say

this means less complaints for us and we just

provide better service. The issue is the people

who approve budgets. To them, they

don't see the issue. They're like, oh, is

this genuinely an issue? Or if they know

the issue, they're like, oh, we just don't have

enough funding for this. [Narelle] Yeah. [Santiago] So,

you know, we did a pilot in New South

Wales, for Hailo. And it was a three month pilot.

It was in Tweed Heads, in Queanbeyan,

and in the B line in Sydney. And we learned lots.

We learned lots. But, um, the Transport for New

South Wales at the beginning didn't

allow us to talk about it. And we said, we've got

to publicize it because that way people will

know. And they're like, 'oh, just talk to Guide

Dogs and Vision Australia and Blind Citizens Australia. And just do it that way.' And

we're like, okay, we can do that. That's no problem. But we

need to go broader than them. [Narelle] Yeah. [Santiago] And then it wasn't up

until we were doing the trial, they realized, well, we don't have enough people. You know, we had

probably 20, 30 people and they're like, wow,

why don't we have more? And we're like, because

people can't try something that they

don't know about. [Narelle] Yeah. [Santiago] And going down that

same road, you know, it's really hard to see

that there are more progressive governments

overseas with worse public transport systems than

we have in Australia. But they're more

progressive because they have an accessibility team. And the people who

are making those decisions have lived experience. So for example,

again, using New South Wales as an example,

they don't have an accessibility

team running anything in transport for

New South Wales. Queensland has

one and we've been trying to approach

them because, you know, hey, it's Brisbane

and they're like, 'eh, we'll get to

you. No worries.' We have had more progress

overseas, which is sad. But it's fantastic. [Narelle] It is, one of the

things - I'm agreeing with you, because people don't

know what they don't know. I was in a meeting last week. With, it was some people from a

government department. And they were

telling me how they're accessible and da da da.

And, I'll be honest, it was the Queensland

Government Department. And they said,

oh, you'd use this. And I said actually I don't. And they said, why?

And I said, most people with vision impairment

don't use them. A classic, okay, is Translink.

Do you use the Translink app? [Santiago] No, the fact that

it's a containerized website makes it

terribly inaccessible. [Narelle] Exactly.

And, you know, I said the same

thing. And they said, well, what do you use? And I

said, well, we use Google Maps. We use Apple Maps.

We'll use BlindSquare. So there's tools

that we use, that people don't know about. And they said, but we

didn't know about these tools. And I said, well, get people. I felt like saying, just get

people with lived experience in. You know, for anything

with accessibility, digital accessibility,

physical accessibility, people with the lived

experience are the ones because

they're living it daily. [Santiago] The biggest thing

that I would love for people to know - regardless of

where you are, right? A lot of people

say, oh, accessibility is just a chore we

have to comply with, rules. And it's expensive. It's like people who have

a disability are the best and most loyal

customers because we don't have a

lot of options, right? It's not... Like, when we find

something that works, we will stick by it until

the day we die. Now, that's not the

only reason, right? It's good for

business, but the key thing that I also need

people to know is it's important to

have lived experience, but it's also important to

be able to communicate how that translates into

properly designing products. And not everybody can

do that. So, one of the things

we have found is when I've done

some consultancy in the past for governments

and overseas, I've done some stuff for Sonos, some

stuff for the UN and whatnot. Oftentimes they say, oh, we have

heard that this is an issue. Our website is not accessible

here or it's not accessible there. But developers don't

know how to fix that. And the reason why sometimes

they don't know how to fix that is because,

at universities, we don't get taught -

there's no teaching about that. So, unless you pick a

master's degree on digital accessibility in four or

five universities across the world, you know

about the Web Accessibility Standards. And that's

fantastic. That's a great start. But the nitty-gritty of,

oh, there is a difference between writing an app

in React Native or Flutter and how do you do

accessibility labels so that the button and the label are read at the same time by

a screen reader. That is not known.

It's very hard. And as a user, it's very

difficult for you with lived experience to be

expected to know, hey, this button, the label and the

button aren't combined. Therefore that's why

it sounds this way. And that's where

we find the issues. People just don't know.

[Narelle] I agree. [Santiago] They just don't know. [Narelle] They don't know. And I look back to

when I initially did uni and it was actually way

before the WCAG standards. And, I mean the internet

wasn't even developed then, so then we're talking the

80s when I initially did uni. So the progress of

technology has been so quick. To the point

now where they're talking about how AI is

going to solve the issue. And I keep saying it's not going to fully

solve the issue. It can't. Because

people use the tools. The moment you add that

people factor in, you know, it becomes an

exponential problem, doesn't it? Because everyone

will do something in a slightly different way. That means it may

not be accessible. You can try and

aim for the most. But I do think it

should be the basis of every uni course now,

document structure. [Santiago] Well, not only that.

[Narelle] It is taught, [Narelle] and people know how to

apply the document structure. [Santiago] Absolutely. Absolutely. And there are very basic things that you can do

to make things accessible. You know, use the

accessibility checker in Microsoft Word if you're

working on Microsoft Word. Make sure that you

do alt text and images. I'm not saying go 110% because you might not

know how to do that. And it's not the responsibility

of one person within a team. It's the responsibility of the

company or the organisation. But another factor, and

it's interesting, you're bringing up AI when it

comes to accessibility. The AI models, they get trained

on a lot. Whether it's a large language

model or a large function model, whatever type of model. You get so many models. We have to also

make sure that as people with disabilities,

we're involved in the training of set models to make sure that

there are no biases. When those models

are being trained because I can

guarantee you right now that if I were to

sample a group of 150 people just on

the street randomly, not a perfect

scientific study but, if I were to sample

them and say, what's the likelihood that I can

cook a really good steak? Most people that

have never dealt with disabilities, they

will say you're blind. You will just burn

yourself, let alone burning the

whole house down. [Narelle] Yeah. [Santiago] I'm not saying I'm a

perfect chef, but I can, I can feed people and I like

how my steaks turn out. Little things like

that can, if not dealt with appropriately,

can mean that in the future if

we are relying on whatever model for

artificial intelligence. If we don't take care

of the biases, the model might say, oh,

don't worry about it. Let's just call a volunteer. You can't read that or you

shouldn't walk down that street or - whatever it

is that it's helpful with. [Narelle] And I,

yeah - and that's it. And I suppose the

one thing for me, I keep saying to people, never

make an assumption. When you're sending

an email, don't make an assumption

that the person at the other end

can read it in exactly the same way as you,

everyone's different. [Santiago] Absolutely.

Just ask, right? Just ask. If you don't know, and

if you genuinely don't know, I know that I

love to, 'oh, absolutely. Let me show you.' I know that there are some

people that don't like that. I know that some people

just assume that people should know how their

disability works and whatnot. I don't think that's fair,

but each to their own. And to be fair, most

people when they realize, oh, I can ask, they're

really comfortable. They're like, wow, that's cool. But if you don't

ask, you don't know. [Narelle] And the other thing,

it is also, I think, incumbent on

people with disability to actually take that

breath and not be cranky if someone

asks a question. Yeah, you do have your off days. But the more we talk about our

disabilities and the ways that we've used it as an opportunity,

because it is an opportunity. [Santiago] Absolutely. [Narelle] To learn something

different, the better off the whole

society is really. [Santiago] It's... The world

isn't going to change overnight. And we know that. But slowly, slowly,

and slowly, we will make changes

that in 20 years' time, in 50 years'

time, whenever it is, we will say,

you know what? I remember when I was young

and I couldn't do X, why is it? I remember when the

iPhone first came out. I'm like, ooh, I wonder how I'm

going to be able to use that. iOS didn't have a screen

reader on iOS 1, right? And then now, if you

ask anybody, what phone would you get for

accessibility reasons only? iPhones are the top of the list.

Android is good. But iPhone, there is

no arguing that Apple does very good

accessibility, right? [Narelle] They do

great accessibility. [Sanitago] Correct, so, it's all these things that

slowly but surely we can change. And we can make

things accessible. And a big change

might be big for you, but might be minuscule

for somebody else. And the impact might

be immense regardless. [Narelle] And with Hailo, I can

see such a need, not just for people with

disability, the elderly. Oh, gosh, that mom

with two or three kids. You know, all those

people, the difference it will make to people's lives. In the pouring rain! When we have these big storms

here that we get in Queensland. There's so many

times that you could see where having

such a simple tool. It probably took a

lot to develop, but a simple tool can make

a big change to society. Just like the typewriter

did, just like Siri did. Just like... there's

so many - captions! Look at the difference

that captions make. [Santiago] Well. [Narelle] It's a simple tool,

but it's used by many people. [Santiago] For me and for the

team, the biggest thing that always

comes to our mind. When I started my company, I

said we have to develop something that isn't going to be a niche

product and will help everybody. Precisely so that - A) didn't

become extremely expensive. And B) it would be

able to be used anywhere. And you're correct, right? If you don't speak the language,

how do you ask the bus driver, 'can you please let me

know when we get to this stop?' If you're a child, it's

much easier to just say, 'I'm getting on this

bus, getting off there.' If you have a

mobility impairment, and if you want to

tell the bus driver, 'hey, I need a wheelchair

ramp when you stop.' If you're getting on and off the train and again,

you need a ramp. If you're a parent,

if you're visiting a new city, it doesn't

really matter why. You know, that's why we

did it, that's why. And this is the key

thing that we're talking to... With transport agencies

and all the governments. I'm not trying to, you know,

I'm not trying to scam you. I'm trying to save you money because at the

moment, you know, the NDIS spends

$700 plus million dollars on literally transport

subsidies alone. I'm not saying everybody will

be able to use public transport. But when you imagine that

we're spending upwards of $50 an hour for somebody to

driver us around, that's insane. Not many people get that. And if we weren't

a developed nation with lots of money,

that wouldn't happen. And Queensland or New South

Wales, Victoria, they spend upwards of $30 million a year

on just taxi subsidies alone. So, you keep adding that

and that's roughly, you know, nearly a billion dollars on

subsidies that... They help a lot. I use

them sometimes, absolutely. And I know that there

are a lot of people who might be listening who

use that here in Australia. And I'm sure that there

are things similar to that in other countries, but

that's not sustainable. You know, what if

you want to catch up with your friends after work? What if you can't

call a support worker? It's just not sustainable. [Narelle] Oh, I agree. So what's the

future for Hailo? What's next? [Santiago] What's next? [Narelle] How can

everyone listening help? [Santiago] Two simple things. Two simple things. If you want Hailo in

your area, go to our website or email

us at info@hailo.co and Hailo is H-A-I-L-O.CO. And send us an email. Say, hey, I'm in this area. Please, I would like Hailo. Because we can

use that data to go to government and say,

hey, people do want that. And the second portion

is if you work in the transport industry, if

you work in government, if you work in anywhere

that has a hand in public transport infrastructure,

get in touch with us. We are trying to improve

public transport for everybody, for drivers

to be more efficient, for passengers to

use public transport more often, to be more engaged. And just for the general

public, you know, if you see more people with

disabilities out and about, and they're working, the

general society benefits. And if we, as people

with disabilities, go out and about more

often, then we benefit. [laughs] [Narelle] Yeah, I'm not even

asking for takeaways, you've just said it

so brilliantly, Santi. Santi, how can people get

in contact with you, yourself if they want to find out more

about what you're doing? It's actually a remarkable

journey that you've done so far. And you've only just started! So how can people find

out about you? [Santiago] Simple, so

obviously our Hailo website, and we're about to update the website, it's going to

be all nice and much prettier. And don't worry,

it's all accessible. [Narelle] Oh, thank you.

[Santiago] I test it myself. [Santiago] [laughs]

[Narelle] Thank you. [Narelle] Have you tested

everything, all of WCAG? [Santiago] Oh man, don't get me

started with that. Absolutely. And we were trying

to go above and beyond WCAG because,

yes, they're 13, y'know. Um, I digress. That's a whole other podcast.

[Narelle] [laughs] [Narelle] That's

another podcast. [Santiago] But absolutely. So Hailo, HAILO.CO. And then
info@hailo.co. And then follow me on LinkedIn. LinkedIn is my most used

platform, Santiago Velasquez. And again, hoping that we can

add the show notes at the end. And I'll share my

links to all of this stuff. And if you do want to reach out

to me, LinkedIn is probably the best way, just because it's the platform
that I post

or use the most. And if I can help in

any way, anybody. And/or if you want to

help, please do reach out. [Narelle] Yeah, look. I can only encourage

everyone because it is something that's going to

help the whole of society. And not just in more

efficient public transport. We're talking

better use of money. [Santiago] Oh, absolutely. [Narelle] If that billion

dollars is not getting used... Even if a half of the

billion dollars is not getting used in

public transport, it can be used elsewhere. To provide other

resources for society. Well, Santi, thank you. Thank you for

giving us your time. So this is Santi

Velasquez from Hailo. And yeah, you

will find how to contact Santi at

the end of the video. We always like to add that. And I can only

encourage everyone. Go and find out about Hailo

because Santi, I want Hailo. I would seriously love Hailo

after my experiences last week. I'm like you, I have a

severe vision impairment. And getting on a

bus is not fun. So thanks again. [Santiago] Thank you,

Narelle, for the invitation. I'm looking forward to

connecting with more people. And again, I'll bring Hailo

to the whole of Australia. We will change

public transport around the world so that

anybody can use it. [Narelle] Yeah. This is the latest episode

of The Digital Access Show. Look, please like, subscribe,

share, share it with everyone. Tell everyone, because

we are about how to help the community understand

about digital accessibility, physical accessibility. And the opportunities

that people with disability have that some normal

people will never get. Just because we

can't see properly or we can't hear properly

or whatever it is. We're everywhere, we're like.

So we're pretty common. You can find us all

around the world. And after all, a figure I heard the other day in

US dollars, people with disability

in the world have six trillion spending dollars. [Santiago] Yeah, actually, we would be the third

largest economists in the world. [Narelle] Oh yeah, we would too. [Narelle] So yeah.

[Santiago] Yeah, pretty big. [Narelle] Come and join,

we are a big economy. So we'll see you next time

and thanks again, Santi. [Santiago] Thank you. See you next time.