# Chats about Apps – An Introduction Transcript

Voiceover: This podcast is brought to you by the RNIB Older People and Complex Needs team and the RNIB Technology for Life team and is part of our Chats about Apps series. The information in this podcast will be helpful for people with sight loss, sight loss and complex needs and for people who are supporting someone living with sight loss.

Linzi: Hello and welcome to our first podcast in our podcast series Chats about Apps. I’m Linzi and I work for RNIB: The Royal National Institute of Blind People in the Older People and Complex Needs team and I’m delighted to introduce to you a colleague, Hannah, who works in the RNIB Technology for Life team. Hi, Hannah.

Hannah: Hi, there!

Linzi: Hi, how are you?

Hannah: I’m really well, you?

Linzi: Good thanks, good. Thank you so much for joining us for this podcast series. I’m excited to learn a lot more about apps. As you know already, I don’t know that much about them. So, and for our listeners as well – some of you may know a lot about apps, some may know not so much so hopefully this will help. We’ll make the podcast short and sweet if that’s possible once we start chatting, Hannah?

(Laughter)

Hannah: I don’t know, not about apps! We could be here for days!

Linzi: We’ll be here for days, exactly – exactly! So, what I thought would be a good idea is we’ll just have a chat about what apps are and what you can do with them. So, some of the main features, and we’ll start from there. That’s a good place to start if that’s OK with you?

Hannah: Sounds great.

Linzi: So, for some people, the thought of maybe downloading an app is a bit mind-boggling, like I said, and for some people that’s every day; that’s what they use. So, if we could start with thinking about what an app is really? Because technology is advancing so much and constantly changing – there’s so much jargon, so if we start right from the very beginning, Hannah – can you explain to us what an app is?

Hannah: Yeah, absolutely. So, an app is a little programme – so it stands for ‘application.’ So, a little programme that has been designed to do a specific thing. So, for example, ‘Calendar’ app is designed to be like a calendar.

Linzi: OK, so that’s good to know. So, it’s an application and all phones have apps already built in to them or does every device have an app?

Hannah: Not all mobile phones or devices have apps. Apps are available on smart devices – so smartphones or tablets. ‘Smart’ just means that it connects to the Internet. Not all mobile phones have them but smart ones do.

Linzi: OK, yeah, that’s good to know. Why couldn’t they just call them phones with Internet?

(Laughter)

Linzi: So, we hear people talking about some apps for Android, some for iOS. A lot of jargon – just for some of us who don’t know what that means – what is Android and what is iOS?

Hannah: Yep, so it is, it’s so complicated, isn’t it? Android and iOS are what we call the ‘operating system.’

Linzi: OK.

Hannah: So, that’s just the software. That’s the software that runs on a smart device. So, maybe think of it a like a car and the operating system or Android or iOS is the engine of the car. It’s what makes it run. iOS is an operating system that runs on all Apple products – so an iPad or an iPhone - and Android is made by Google and runs on lots of the other devices, so a Samsung or a Galaxy or those sorts of products. There's not much difference in what they do – just in what they look like, so things might look slightly different.

Linzi: Like if you have a Ford or you have a Ferrari. Both cars!

Hannah: Yes, that’s right.

Linzi: Just different.

Hannah: Different colours, different engines, different sorts of seats. But they’re still cars. Yeah, so the device is whether you have an Android or an iOS or an Apple device, they’re still smart devices and you can still get apps on them – but the way you go about it is just slightly different.

Linzi: That’s a really good way of explaining it! Now I understand, thank you, Hannah. So, is iOS the same as Apple?

Hannah: Yes, so iOS is the operating system that runs on Apple products.

Linzi: OK, great, that’s made it a lot easier, thank you. So, what do you use Hannah – is it iPhone or Android? Is one better than the other or for different features – why would somebody buy an iPhone over an Android or the opposite?

Hannah: So, it’s completely personal preference – so they do the same things. They just look slightly different, so there’s no right or wrong – it’s just what is best or what the individual prefers. So, personally, I have an iPhone – I just like that a little bit more than the Android but there’s no one is better than the other.

Linzi: Yup, that’s good to know because I’ve got a Samsung and I think it’s because – the kind I’ve always had for years! – so I’ve just stuck with it, I’m one of those people, if I know how to use t then I’m happy just to get the same again. (Laughs) Rather than changing to a completely different phone, so that’s good to know, one’s not really better than the other – it’s just personal preference.

Hannah: Yeah, yeah. If it’s going to be easier for you to use, then that’s the one to stick with.

Linzi: That’s it – what we know. So, what can apps do and where do we get them from? So that’s probably quite a big question, is it?

HANNSH: Well, you name it - you can get an app to do it! From anything – from identifying birdsong, to communicating with your friends and family to social media to watching videos to – you name it, you can get an app to do it.

Linzi: Online dating?!

Hannah: Anything. There’s an app for it. There are so many different apps and we would be here for days if we were talking about all of them so today we’re just going to mention some of the ones that are – kind of - the most used.

In terms of where you get an app from, on your device, you will have an app store. So if it’s an Apple device – so an iPhone or an iPad – then that’s what it’s called, it’s called the App Store you can go to, a bit like an online shop that lists all the apps that you can get. If it’s an Android device that you have, then it’s called the Play Store and again, that’s a little shop that you have all the different apps and you can browse through all the different categories to find ones that you want.

Lots of apps are free, which – I don’t know about you, Linzi – is my favourite word?!

Linzi: Yes, we all love a bargain, don’t we?!

Hannah: But some apps you do pay for and it will tell you at that point when you find it on the shop, sometimes it’s a one off payment – an upfront cost – other times it’s a subscription – so it might be that you pay for a month or a year to use the app –

Linzi: That’s good to know because I think – would it tell you that before you install it, Hannah?

Hannah: Yes, it usually does – it usually tells you that in the information. Sometimes, apps have what they call ‘in-app purchases’, so you can download the app for free and you can get a certain amount of features for free – but if you want, maybe an added extra, the you’ll pay for that add-on. So you do that inside the app and it tells you that at the point when you’re finding and buying the app from the App Store or the Play Store.

Linzi: Yeah, because we’re all a bit wary of that, isn’t it? Clicking a button and then thinking ‘oh no, has that charged me?’ or ‘what’s it doing?’ so that’s good that it kind of, tells you that right form the beginning really, that’s really good to know.

Yeah, so what would be your top five things that apps can do for people living with sight loss, Hannah?

Hannah: OK, so the first thing is, there are lots of apps that can help with independent living. So, there are some great apps that can, for example, read your post to you, so lots of people with sight loss find this to be a real challenge in getting letters through the post and they can’t see the writing, see who it’s from – and so the app – you take a picture of the letter – and the app will then read aloud the contents.

Linzi: That’s great, yeah.

Hannah: You can also get some apps that will identify colour. So, if you’re maybe losing your sight, find it difficult to distinguish between the colours, you want to know if what you’re wearing matches or that you’ve got two black shoes on instead of one blue one and one black one – then there are apps that can identify colour and help you that way.

There are also apps that act as magnifiers, to turn your device into a video magnifier, and that’s just really handy if you’re out and about. I don’t know about you, Linzi – but my bag is heavy enough already without carrying around four or five pieces of equipment! –

Linzi: Yes! Definitely, yup. We don’t want to be buying bigger bags – save our backs.

Hannah: Absolutely, so just having the one device that does everything is really handy.

There are also apps that can act as sighted assistance. So, you can call somebody, a volunteer, for support and they can use the camera on your app to help you with whatever it is you’re looking for.

Linzi: Ahh, OK.

Hannah: So, there are loads of different, wonderful features like that, that can just help every day with those little things to support you to live more independently.

Linzi: Brilliant, yeah – that sounds great. So, if you’d sat something down somewhere and think: ‘Where have I put it?’ – would an app help with that?

Hannah: Yup, absolutely. It would, so there are apps that you can use in that situation.

Linzi: That sounds great, so that’s a great feature. So, some of the things you mentioned there about independent living – that’s the first one. What would be your next feature?

Hannah: So, for me, it would be communication.

Linzi: Uh-huh.

Hannah: So, we all like to keep in touch with people – send messages and talk to people. So, there are some great apps for that, sending messages and sharing photos, as well as video calling, so, we all like to see the person that we’re speaking to – or, if if you don’t have the sight to see that person, at least your family or your friends can see you. I had a customer the other day who said that, you know, it meant so much to her family who weren’t living close to her, for them to be able to see her.

Linzi: Yeah.

Hannah: Even though she couldn’t see them so there are some great apps for just, kind of, keeping in contact with people. We know how important that can be and lots of people with sight loss are very isolated, so using technology for communication is fantastic.

Linzi: Yeah, anything that can reduce isolation, Hannah, yeah, that sounds great and, like you say, if somebody’s not living nearby – I've even heard some people say about the video calls, that actually, they can have dinner with family or friends because they end up putting their iPad or whatever device they’ve got at the other end of the table and it’s just as if they’re sitting at the table with them having dinner and I thought: “That’s a great idea!”

Hannah: That’s it, and there are also apps where you can join lots of different people together so you can have people all over the country, coming together online, to maybe do a weekly quiz, or, like you say, just have dinner together, even though they’re all over the country in their separate houses. It’s really powerful and there are so many great apps that can have such a big impact in that way.

Linzi: Yeah, that’s it, just to feel like there is somebody there to listen and you’re not alone, that’s great. So, what would be your third feature, then, Hannah?

Hannah: My favourite - entertainment. Apps for fun.

Linzi: What kind of things does that cover? I know that might be huge question again – but what are the, kind of, top features for apps for entertainment?

Hannah: So, I’d definitely say reading. So, reading in lots of different ways and enjoying and consuming books – so that’s a classic way to spend leisure time. Also, things like catch-up TV – I’m not very good at, kind of, knowing what’s on and my friends are always talking about these great programmes they’ve seen - and I’ve completely missed it! So, catch-up TV is definitely my friend, where I can go back and watch a programme I’ve missed. So, I then feel like I’m in on the conversation.

Linzi: Uh-huh.

Hannah: And we’ve also got things like listening to music and enjoying the radio or podcasts, or videos online, so definitely really important in terms of, kind of, how we spend our leisure time and being connected to what’s going on in the world.

Playing games is also a great way to spend your leisure time on these devices. So, from things like doing word games and puzzles, so maybe a jigsaw, word searches, there’s loads of different ways to while away those hours.

Linzi: Yeah!

Hannah: And before you know it, you’ll have lost several days on your device quite soon!

Linzi: Days – that’s it!

Hannah: Trying to beat your best score! But yeah, they’re also, these games are really good for, kind of, stimulating the mind- keeping yourself going.

Linzi: And for a bit of fun as well, yeah.

Hannah: Absolutely.

Linzi: Because I didn’t realise you could even get an app for, like jigsaws and things like that and, do you know, I thought, that’s super if you didn’t have, you know things like that to hand but you had a device or a tablet that you could use and you could have, you know, the large pieces of jigsaw, for somebody with sight loss, that’s for all ages isn’t it? And I’m sure a lot of apps are like that, that a lot of them are suitable for all ages.

Hannah: Absolutely and things like crosswords, quite often – I now that my grandparents used to love doing the crosswords in the paper – but then as they started to lose their sight, they found that much more difficult, not just to see the print – but also to get the words in the boxes that were quite small in the paper. Yeah, whereas on a device, like a tablet, they can be made a lot larger and you can, you know, choose an app that works well for you that you’re able to see well.

Linzi: Such a great idea and I guess a lot of those apps as well, you could change things to make it more accessible for that person? So, if they needed more contrast, or like you’re saying, larger print, that could be adjusted through the phone or through the app and maybe – am I right in saying that, Hannah?

Hannah: Yes, absolutely. So smartphones and tablets come with built-in accessibility features and these accessibility features are there to make the device easier to use, from changing things like you say, the colours and the contrast, but also they have features built into them like the ability to magnify or zoom, meaning that you can do that on top of an app – if you’re in an app and the writing’s a bit small, you can zoom in to make it larger or you can have a feature called VoiceOver or TalkBack which is a screen reader that will read back to you some of the content.

Linzi: That’s such a great idea! And we’ll all be playing our word games and crosswords now and have them accessible to us – that’s super! And I like your idea as well, saying about catch-up TV and I know for myself as well, you hardly ever watch anything now in real time, do you? It’s always catch-up so that’s great to know there’s apps for that as well.

Hannah: Yeah, we all now binge, don’t we? We binge-watch our TV. We like to watch all the episodes, one after each other.

Linzi: That’s great, good ideas. So, that’s us got – how many now? – three already. Yup, so three top features - independent living, communication and entertainment. So, what would be your fourth one, Hannah?

Hannah: Well, my fourth one would be what I like to call “life admin.” So, these are all those boring little things that we have to do in our life and technology just, can make them a little bit easier.

Linzi: Anything that makes it easier - that’s what we want!

Hannah: Absolutely, and especially if you have sight loss because doing some of these things can be a little bit challenging. So, for example, just really straightforward - a calendar. It might be that you’re struggling to see the, kind of, old-fashioned printed calendars – I say old-fashioned, lots of people still use them!

Linzi: Still, yeah.

Hannah: But a printed calendar quite often people with sight loss can find it difficult to read back their handwriting, to know what they’ve written, so having it stored electronically, and as we’ve just mentioned, the accessibility features that mean it can be read back to you or you can zoom in to make it bigger, mean that setting up something like a calendar where you can add in all your appointments, even have the device remind you that that appointment is going to happen, can be really helpful.

Linzi: Yes, reminders are always a great thing – and I know even for some appointments, the doctor's surgery or the dentist, may message you but also, if that doesn’t happen, or if that’s not set up, then to have your device to remind you that’s a great option, as well, Hannah, isn’t it?

Hannah: Other features include things like an address book where you can keep all your friends and family’s details, or just very simply a note app, where you can write down any little things that you would have previously written on a piece of paper that you now can’t see, you can make a note of in Notes or your shopping list, and things. I would also add shopping to that as well, I love a good shop but not necessarily for groceries!

Linzi: (laughs) Yeah.

Hannah: But not necessarily the funnest thing to do.

Linzi: Not the fun part of shopping!

Hannah: No, definitely not! But that can be done online, lots of the high street grocery stores – so Tesco’s and Sainsbury’s and Asda, all have online apps where you can do your shopping that way and as well as all other high street stores, you know, M and S and John Lewis and all of those shops all have an online app presence where you can browse at your own leisure as to what you want to buy.

Linzi: Yup, so I would sometimes use their own website for that, Hannah but would there be advantages then, of using an app for that?

Hannah: The apps tend to be less cluttered.

Linzi: Ahh, that’s good to know.

Hannah: A straightforward way of browsing information. The websites, if you think, have everything on them – they’re full of information, whereas the apps tend to be a more stripped down, simple version. This also makes it a lot easier if you are using the accessibility features, just because there’s les information to browse through and it’s quite often easier to find things that you want, just because there’s less information.

Linzi: Yes, that’s good to know, that’s great. So we’ve got shopping – so things like calendars, shopping - anything else for kind of, life admin features?

Hannah: Well, I also like using my devices for my banking. So I have their banking app on my phone, which is fantastic for me again, reading bank statements can be really tricky but accessing it on my phone means not only to I have to not wait a month to get my statement – I can have access to it whenever I like –

Linzi: Yes.

Hannah: But also it can be read to me using the screen reader on my phone or again, using the Zoom feature, so that it’s in a format that’s accessible for me.

Linzi: That’s a great idea and, like you say, not having to wait until the bank statement comes in or not having to wait in a huge queue, in the bank itself, or actually getting to the bank itself wherever you may live, so that’s a great option as well.

Hannah: Absolutely. Yeah, you can do it from the comfort of your sofa!

Linzi: Ahh, even better with a cup of tea! Even better! ( both laugh) So what would be your fifth top feature of apps?

Hannah: For me, it would be travel. So, it would eb getting out and about – there are lots of apps that can tell you, for example, where your nearest bus stop is, and when the next bus is coming along and what it’s number is, or apps that can tell you what platform your train is due in on, which is really handy. Personally, I have sight loss and I can’t see the overhead bar but my vision is enough that I can navigate to the train station, I can’t read the overhead board.

Linzi: Yes.

Hannah: So, for me, that’s a brilliant app in telling me where to go, in order to get my train. There are also some apps that act as GPS so, when you’re out and about and you have the app switched on, it can tell you what street you’re on, or maybe what street you’re coming up to. So, just a little help with getting out and about and navigating around.

Linzi: Yes and I’m sure that’s helpful for everyone as well, isn’t it, Hannah, not just for, you know people with sight loss and complex needs or if you’re supporting someone living with sight loss and complex needs it’s always good to know whereabouts we are or if we’re trying to navigate to somewhere, like you’re saying, it’s always great to have help with that and if that’s from a device then that’s great. And you were talking there about train platform numbers, that’s such a great idea as well because I know, so many times the platform number will change, and you’re maybe not aware of it and you can’t maybe see the platform numbers clearly on the board, so to have that on your phone can be so helpful.

Hannah: Yes, it can absolutely and sometimes you don’t hear the announcements or you’re just in the wrong place at the wrong time and it can be very, very good.

Linzi: Yes, so helpful because we could be buying our cup of coffee, we maybe have a bit of hearing loss as well and it’s so easy to miss your train platform, isn’t it?

HANNSH: Yup.

Linzi: I’m sure that’s happened to a lot of people, so that’s a really good one to know about, thank you, Hannah. So, would you say that's your, sort of, top five features covered, Hannah?

Hannah: I think so, yeah, we could be here for days! There are so many more apps and so many more features they can do and you can spend a lot of time just browsing through the app store on your phone, just getting inspiration about what else is available and what you can do, you know, in your life and your independence.

Linzi: We’ll all be browsing now to see what we can download! So, just as a little summary then, your top five features of apps are: independent living, communication, entertainment, life admin and travel – but like you say, there’s many, many more. And I think this has been a great way to start the series of chats about apps, Hannah, and we hope you’ve all enjoyed listening to our chatting as well! I know I’ve learned a lot, Hannah, from listening to all your knowledge about apps and we look forward ot chatting more in our future podcasts and in future podcasts, we will focus on some of those features that Hannah has mentioned and we’ll share some more examples. So, just to finish up, Hannah, for a bit of fun, if you could choose one favourite feature of all the apps that you use, what would it be?

Hannah: Oh my gosh, that’s so difficult- you’re gonna make me choose just one?!

Linzi: Just one! Only one.

Hannah: I think probably the most useful to me is being able to read my post.

Linzi: Yes.

Hannah: I could pick something like, you know, online shopping or something like that but I think that’s probably the one that’s the most useful.

Linzi: Most useful and the one that you use most days, I would guess?

Hannah: Yeah, every day.

Linzi: Every day, that’s great. So fascinating to hear all about those features and thank you everyone for listening and we look forward to the next podcast on chats about apps! Thank you.

Voiceover: If you found this helpful, listen to our other podcasts in our ‘Chats About Apps’ series. We have further information and support online related to technology and apps, from our Technology for Life team. You can find this by typing ‘technology resource hub’ into the search bar at the top of the RNIB page. For more information about what we do working with older people with sight loss and complex needs, go to the RNIB website and search ‘complex needs.’ You can also call the RNIB Helpline on 03031239999. We are the Older People and Complex Needs team. Thanks for listening.

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