**1 April 2012: Interview with Jamie Teh**

**Roberta:** Screen readers are pieces of software that convert text to synthetic speech, giving access to computers for people who are blind or vision impaired. They can, however, end up costing thousands. Frustrated with the costly options on the market, two friends, Mick Curran and Jamie Teh, decided to create NVDA, the first open source screen reader. The project has recently hit a funding crisis and could face shutting up shop. Jamie is here to chat to us about the project’s future. Welcome Jamie.

**Jamie:** Hi. Thanks for having me.

**Roberta:** Now, what inspired you to create NVDA?

**Jamie:** Actually it was originally created by my colleague Mick Curran and he and I have been long time friends, but basically he was, as we were just saying, frustrated with the cost of really expensive print readers out there and decided to try his hand at writing his own. There had been talk from many people for years about doing something like that, but no one had actually done it.

So, he thought, “Well, let’s see what happens?” And he decided to give it a try. So, later in that year, I mean I started to take some interest in the project, and we started to see it had some real potential and got some real interest from people. And so, I guess that’s where it all began.

**Roberta:** Jamie, what’s the difference between NVDA and other screen readers on the market?

**Jamie:** The big difference is the cost obviously. I mean we’re talking free versus something that can cost a thousand dollars or more and then upgrades on top of that. But, aside from that it’s also open source which means that anyone from around the world can help contribute to the project and improve it. It’s also, it can run entirely from a USB stick, so you can take it into say, a net café or something like that or a public library and access their computers there without needing to have something installed onto it beforehand. Those are the big differences.

**Roberta:** And what have been the challenges involved? There must have been a few?

**Jamie:** Yeah, look, I mean developing a screen reader is a very tricky thing. I mean uh, it’s a very esoteric area of software development. It’s not just uh, because not everyone does it, there’s lots of sort of trade secrets going around and because obviously it’s a very proprietary industry it’s very, they’re closely guarded. And so, we have to use a lot of really strange and obscure and sometimes downright ugly tricks to access the information that we need as good as possible.

**Roberta:** It’s been reported that the project has recently hit a funding crisis – will NVDS survive?

**Jamie:** Look, we have hope. I mean funding has always been a very difficult thing for us and so we’re doing our best to try and find alternative ways. Any help would be greatly appreciated. I mean ultimately we want to keep this thing going because it’s really, really important that everyone has access to this kind of technology regardless of what they can afford.

And so we’re hopeful that something will come through, but at this stage it is looking a little bit dire. We have had a fair amount of response recently and we’re hoping that something will help us, something or someone will help us in some way whether that be getting us extra funding or even just providing advice to help us achieve a more sustainable model.

**Roberta:** Now, if people want to get involved or donate where can they go? You might have an address, a web address or phone number?

**Jamie:** Yeah the best place to go is our website which has all the details including email addresses and phone numbers and you can get there via nvaccess.org.

**Roberta:** Well, this program has been brought to you by Media Access Australia. Visit mediaaccess.org.au you can get more information there as well on assistive technology including the NVDA screen reader. But Jamie, if you’d like to give me that access address again because people may want donate to this because it’s so important.

**Jamie:** For sure, nvaccess.org.

**Roberta:** I’ve been speaking with Jamie Teh who has created the NVDA and their support is desperately needed. So, if you can help that would be really good to make a donation for Jamie and Michael to continue with this very, very important and of course, very, very inexpensive, like free, app to be able to help you to access the screen reader.

I’ve been speaking with Jamie Teh from NVDA and if you want to know more of course you can find out more at Media Access Australia, and I'm very pleased to say that Media Access Australia supports this program.