# AT Update: What’s New in 2023

## [Introduction]

**TRACIE DeFREITAS:**

I'm so sorry. Looks like I was muted.

Welcome, everyone. Thanks for joining us for this JAN webcast entitled "AT Update: What's New in 2023." My name is Tracie DeFreitas. I'm the Director of Training, Services, and Outreach for JAN. Today I'll be your moderator.

This JAN webcast will be presented by Teresa Goddard, JAN Lead Consultant for Assistive Technology Services and Sensory Team Lead; Matthew McCord, Senior Consultant on JAN's Motor Team, and Jose Gonzalez Lopez, Consultant on both JAN's Sensory and Motor Teams. Thank you all for sharing your expertise with us today.

Let's get started with the usual housekeeping items, and then I'll turn the webcast over to Teresa to get us started with the AT update. If you experience technical difficulties during this webcast, please use the question-and-answer option located at the bottom of your screen to connect with our webcast tech team. You can also use the Live Chat at AskJAN.org or call 800-526-7234.

You may also check our webcast for an FAQ for some answers to technical questions. That link is included in the login email that you received today or go to the webcast series page at AskJAN.org.

Your questions for presenters should be submitted using the Q&A option. All questions will be gathered into a queue and answered, time permitting. We will check those throughout and get to those at the end if we have some time.

You may download the PowerPoint slides using the direct link found in the login email that you received today. The link is also posted in the chat, or you can go to this webcast event from the training page at AskJAN.org.

To access live captioning, use the closed caption option at the bottom of the webcast window or view captions in a separate browser using the link shared in the webcast chat.

This presentation is being recorded and will be available later this month at AskJAN.org.

Finally, at the end of the webcast, please do complete the evaluation. If you're seeking an HR CEU, the approval code will be provided after the webcast evaluation is completed.

Okay, Teresa. I'm going to turn it over to you to take it from here.

**TERESA GODDARD:**

Thanks, Tracie. Thanks for that great intro.

So today I'm going to begin our discussion with a brief overview on JAN, just in case we have a couple of newcomers, and then I will discuss some AT basics as well. We will discuss a little bit about the interactive process and how to choose an accommodation, followed by some situations and solutions that are AT-centered. Along the way, we'll review some interesting new AT that's either fresh on the market or currently in development. Finally, the floor will be open to all of you to ask any questions on what you would like to know more about regarding what we've discussed today. Because of this, we would appreciate it if you could hold any questions that arise until the end of the presentation.

Next slide, please. Thank you, Tracie.

## [About JAN]

For those of you that are new to JAN, welcome. We are a free consultation service that helps people understand job accommodations, federal employment-related disability rights laws, the resources an individual with a disability can tap into to start a small business, and more. We have been around since 1983, so even longer than the ADA has been around. We are just one office in Morgantown, West Virginia, but we provide our services to the entire US and its territories. So if you ever have any questions, we're more than happy to help.

Next slide, please.

## [What is Assistive Technology (AT)?]

Now let's begin by defining what we mean when we say "AT" or "assistive technology."

Next slide, please. There is some debate in the accommodation and AT communities on this point, so here is the definition that we use here at JAN. To us, "AT" or "assistive technology" means any sort of device or service that helps a person with a disability to achieve or maintain functioning. Some prefer to limit the term to only mean things that are designed to help people with severe needs, but we feel that AT can be simple and ubiquitous things too, not just specialized equipment.

Now we're going to be talking about a lot of different products during today's presentation. I do want you to take note that JAN doesn't endorse or recommend any specific products or vendors. We do however maintain a database of products and vendors to assist people in finding solutions to their accommodation needs.

Next slide, please. Matt, would you like to tell us a little bit about traditional and mainstream devices?

**MATTHEW McCORD:**

Sure. Practically speaking, there are some good reasons to separate more traditional forms of AT and more mainstream devices. For instance, traditional AT tends to be devices that are designed to complete a specific task for a person with a disability, so they tend to be more specialized pieces of equipment with one or two intended functions. Like, for example, Microsoft's specially designed adaptive controller for Xbox users.

Meanwhile, a mainstream device like a computer, a cell phone, or an iPad are used by many people, and their functions are designed to be useful for much wider audience. These mainstream devices can and are helpful to people with disabilities, but they're not designed specifically for their needs. I think the key here though is that accessibility in mainstream devices has become a much more prominent concern, and because that we have built-in accessibility features for these devices right out of the box. Features like speech recognition, word prediction, color contrasting, and others are all standard features now, and because of that, the line dividing traditional AT and mainstream device gets more blurry as time goes on. In a sense, the goals of traditional AT are being incorporated into our everyday technologies. Because of that we see both as forms of AT. We don't separate them.

Next slide, please.

Teresa, would you like to take them through a discussion on low-tech and high-tech AT devices?

**TERESA GODDARD:**

I certainly would. Thank you, Matt, for that great outline of mainstream versus traditional AT. I'd like to build on your remarks just by saying that we also see, in terms of apps that run on mainstream devices, we do see some apps that are designed for people with disabilities specifically or for those who support them, but many mainstream apps can be used as an accommodation as well. So I think that's an interesting development in terms of where software development has been going.

So now I'll take you through just a brief overview of high-tech versus low-tech. If you do contact the Job Accommodation Network and we talk with you about assistive technology, we're very likely to talk with you about a range of products and services. Those could include higher-tech options, which are often more expensive, as well as low-tech options. Ultimately, the employer will choose what accommodation gets implemented, but we try to provide a range of options for each case.

Now, when we think of assistive technology, we may automatically think of high-tech, futuristic devices rather than just simple modifications. In this slide, we have a picture of a meeting where people are communicating with a coworker through a telepresence device, which is a newer technology that could be used for someone who works remotely while still needing some sort of physical presence on-site. We do see this used more frequently in education and in medical settings. Other higher-tech options could include alternate input devices, specialized software options, or alternative and augmentative communication devices. Sometimes these are called AAC devices or speech-generating devices. An important distinction is not all AAC devices generate a synthetic voice, but those that do can be called speech-generating devices or SGDs. If you see those acronyms, now you know they mean.

But it's very easy, when it comes to assistive technology, to be caught up in the newness and in the cool factor of new technologies. Low-tech accommodations, though, can be absolutely just as effective, and they can often be implemented either by purchasing at a low cost or even making them from materials on hand or modifying something that already exists in the workplace. So low-tech AT can often be and implemented fairly easily. There are all kinds of inexpensive devices such as the gripping aid pictured on this slide.

AT might also be a custom-designed or modified product, and customization doesn't always translate into high cost. Removing the legs of a computer desk can be a very low-cost custom modification for an individual of short stature, for example. I originally became interested in working at JAN because I wanted to get more knowledge of high-tech AT, but I'll never forget in my first year of working here, when someone asked me, "Is there a device to help a person with limited use of their hands "or only one hand to close trash bags? " And I was searching far and wide for such a device. I couldn't find one so I went down the hall to ask my coworker Eddie, who has since retired. He looked at me like I had never heard of the most basic ideas in the world, and he laughed, in a gentle way. He said, "Have you ever heard of tape?" So that's an example of how something already existing in the workplace could be used to do a task. He explained to me exactly how he would explain to a person how to use pre-torn or pre-cut pieces of tape to perform the task, and I was blown away at the elegance and simplicity of his solution.

Next slide, please.

I also would like you to keep in mind that, in order to achieve an effective accommodation for an individual with a disability, you may need to combine options. So, what I mean is Assistive Technology might be the right fit for the individual you're serving, however, to achieve an effective accommodation, you might need to add some other options. For example, it might make sense to modify a policy to allow a person to use something like a cell phone or tablet in an area where they aren't usually used for communication purposes. Or you might get some standard equipment, but it needs some sort of modification to be useful to the person.

Keep in mind too sometimes there's another accommodation that's simpler to implement. For example, it might make sense to restructure a job rather than acquire expensive equipment. Or you might restructure a job temporarily so that someone else can do that particular job function while you're looking at all of your options. So just keep in the back of your mind there is more than one way to accommodate, and your individual situation might require multiple solutions.

Next slide, please.

Next I'd like to show you a screenshot from JAN's website. We recently updated our resource on technology to reflect our assistive technology focus. Here you can find detailed information on a process for how to select assistive technology to accommodate an individual with a disability.

You can also find additional resources and potential referrals, including state vocational rehabilitation agencies, which may be able to assist with on-site needs when you're looking at accommodations. State AT projects -- You might wish to contact a state AT project to see if they can lend you a piece of equipment to try in the workplace before deciding what to purchase. Also, RESNA, or the Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America, can be a helpful resource when you just can't find exactly what you need. They've come up with some very exciting custom solutions, and they also have many people with deep knowledge of assistive technology. I also want to give a shout-out to the QIAT community, which is a grassroots organization having to do with checking on the quality of assistive technology and making sure that we're all using high-quality items for our accommodations. They do have more of a school focus, but they could still be helpful in employer-based situations.

Next slide, please.

Matt, would you please tell us a bit more about the MyJAN portal in case people would like to add some of JAN's resources today to a portal of their own?

**MATTHEW McCORD:**

Absolutely. So we want to just highlight how convenient this feature is, and since it's one of the newest features on our site, seemed like something we should take a little bit of time to discuss them with you all. MyJAN is a feature that allows you to register an account with the AskJAN.org website, and you can use that account to customize your experience with the site. It allows you to create your own hub page where you can keep all of your favorite or most-utilized documents in one place.

One big benefit of this feature is that when documents are updated with new information or corrections are made, your MyJAN portal will also update, so that way those corrections are already there waiting for you. They get updated at the same time. Another great benefit is that when a link itself to a document is changed for whatever reason on our end, your MyJAN will update with that new link as well, so you never have to worry about losing your favorite publications if you use MyJAN. It's a very simple process: you just log in, you just register an account, and you start finding the things you want and adding them in. It's a very quick and easy way to get everything in one place.

Next slide, please.

Jose, would you like to discuss some of these up-and-coming conferences with everyone to see where they can get some more information?

**JOSE GONZALEZ LOPEZ:**

More than happy to. So now that we've got a good foundation of what AT is, I'm just going to discuss some ways of keeping up with what's new and up-and-coming in the AT world. So here you see the logos for four prominent AT conferences that we'd just like to mention.

The first one is the Assistive Technology Industry Association, or ATIA. They strive to be the collective voice of the assistive technology industry to help ensure that the best products and services are being delivered to people with disabilities.

Next is the California State University, Northridge, or CSUN. This university put on an annual conference on assistive technologies to share knowledge and the best practices to ensure inclusion for everyone.

Next would be the Assistive Technology Advocacy Center of New Jersey. They will be putting on their sixth annual New Jersey Assistive Technology and Community Living Summit. Their summit focuses on empowering people with disabilities to increase their independence by connecting state agencies and community living professionals with them.

And finally, Closing the Gap has a conference coming up on October 11-13th, and they discuss assistive technology but have more of a focus on special education and resources to enhance classroom experiences for teachers and their students.

Next slide, please.

Now we are going to go through some examples of cases where assistive technology would come in. Matt, would you like to start us off with that?

**MATTHEW McCORD:**

Absolutely I can.

Next slide, please.

## [Finding Your Path]

So for our first example, we have a bank teller who is a little person and was using a stepstool to be high enough to work at the teller counter and help patrons who came into the bank. However, the employee informed the employer that the constant climbing up and down with the stepstool was causing them some severe back pain. So the employer reached out to JAN to see what options might be helpful for this employee.

Next slide, please.

A typical way that a need like this could be addressed would be by modifying the teller counter itself. Some counters have areas lower to the ground to accommodate wheelchair-using customers, so allowing the individual to work in that specific spot might be helpful, but altering the counter to include a seated station where customers can sit down and perform their transactions can also work well too. With this approach, the counter would not only be accessible to the employer and the individual with a disability, but it would also require -- it would also make it so it would be accessible to clients who might be elderly or otherwise can't stand for long periods of time. And also just by moving the chair, it could also be accessible to people in wheelchairs as well.

But, if the counter can't be altered at all, then providing a different chair for the individual to use while working could help. Elevating lift chairs are designed to raise the user up much further than a typical office chair is. Their height is typically electronically locked in place and rise up and down as needed by a motor. Locating one that is ergonomically designed for a little person can be tricky, but this is a valid solution here.

Next slide, please.

But what if none of those options are possible in a given situation? The counter cannot be altered as the bank does not own the building, for instance, and the building owner won't allow this modification, there is no seated station at the counter, and what if the elevating lift chair is just too expensive?

One alternative would be setting up a separate desk and chair in the lobby area for the employee to use. That could be effective, but it will require the individual to do more walking, because the equipment they need to work with will still be behind the normal counter, and it might not be possible to provide additional equipment for that new desk.

What other solutions could be helpful here?

Next slide, please.

There is the possibility of providing a lift table and a chair as a combined accommodation. Lift tables are devices used commonly in factory settings. They can carry very large amounts of weight and keep them in set positions or raise them up and down. So providing an electronic model that can be raised with the push of a button and placing a chair on top of that lift table could be effective here. With this combination, a chair specifically designed to be ergonomic for a little person can be provided, and the lift table can do the work of raising them up and down whenever they need to do so.

Next slide, please.

Speaking of customizable chairs, we found these free-form back kits, and we wanted to share them with you all today. They've been on the market for a while, over five years now, but not enough people know about them -- I certainly didn't know about them until recently -- so we wanted to give them a spotlight today. These kits allow a healthcare professional to assemble a customized back support for a user. They are designed to be used by people who are using a wheelchair, but the idea of a customized back support like this certainly has applications in all sorts of situations. Nothing could be more ergonomic than a chair specifically designed and made for your specific body, after all. If you're interested in this, the vendor is Symmetric Designs, and they have some videos on their YouTube channel that showcases all of their products.

Now I believe Jose has a vision-related example to share with you all.

Next slide, please.

**JOSE GONZALEZ LOPEZ:**

Thank you, Matt. So in this scenario we had a human resources manager that returned to work after having a Traumatic Brain Injury or TBI. And those could happen for a variety of reasons, like if there was an accident or if there was some sort of cardiovascular issue in the brain. Due to this injury, he developed a visual processing disorder which causes the employee to take longer reading emails, and this was resulting in delays in the operations of the HR department.

Next slide, please.

A typical solution for this would be looking at things that would not rely as much on the employee's vision to access that same type of information. So a screen reader could be an option to help the employee work through emails faster as they were still able to process auditory input with no issue.

Next slide, please.

There could be some additional options to consider. Another option would be getting a qualified reader if, for example, the screen reading software was not available. And there are some services that do provide qualified readers, but if there is someone else in the office that could read emails to the employee verbally, that would be an option.

You could also seek assistance from the State Vocational Rehabilitation or, if a screen reader was found but it might not be working as well with the software that the company uses, looking at a scripting vendor to be able to modify things in the back end of the programs to make them more compatible would be an option.

There could be additional more physical options for assistive technology like the Orcam, which is a little camera that can be used handheld, put on a stand, or attached to someone's glasses. It would look at the text that's in front of the person and read it out loud to them. When it comes to specific devices that are being provided as accommodations to employees, it is important to have them in a secure and accessible location, as you wouldn't want them to be misplaced or be in a difficult spot for the employee to be able to reach them.

Next slide, please.

So, after the first accommodation was provided, the employer still had some concerns about the employee's ability to respond to the emails in a timely manner, because they received a lot of emails being the manager of this department, and the employee is -- was having trouble typing their responses quickly.

Next slide, please.

So this comes back to finding additional solutions that would be compatible with the first one, because now there's multiple areas that need to be addressed. So a solution in addition to the screen reader could be including a speech recognition software. That way the employee can dictate their emails to the computer and get through them quicker, or having a typist or assistant available to type what the employee -- what the employee would like to respond with would be another option.

And I believe Teresa has -- The next example is from Teresa, and it's about a hearing impairment.

**TERESA GODDARD:**

Thanks, Jose. I really enjoyed your example, by the way. I think it's a really great example of how you might apply multiple solutions to an accommodation scenario.

Today I'd like to talk to you about a situation that was brought to our attention here at JAN involving a welder who was deaf. Now, it's not often in my job here at JAN that I get a question that is totally new to me. So I didn't call this one a typical situation, because it definitely isn't. This was a question I got in the past year that I had never had before. That's one of the most exciting things that can happen for us as JAN consultants.

So in this particular case, a welder who was deaf really wanted to feel more included at the worksite. So, one of the things that the workers did, just to kind of make time go faster on the job, is that they were allowed to select music to be played over the loudspeaker. Everybody got to have a turn choosing. Well, this welder also wanted to choose some music, and why shouldn't he?

Next slide, please.

So this is less of an accommodation issue and more of an equal access issue. Employees with disabilities absolutely should be included in social activities in the workplace. This is part of how we create a welcoming environment for our employees and applicants with disabilities. Part of an employer's obligation can even extend to providing an interpreter to assist with communication at employer-sponsored social events like holiday parties. So of course it pleased me greatly that the employer allowed the employee to participate in selecting music. However, as with all of our situations and solutions today, there was a twist.

Next slide, please.

Unfortunately, to the dismay of administrative workers who were on the opposite side of the wall from the welding shop, the employee who was deaf had a special way of enjoying his music. He wanted to listen to music loudly enough that he could feel the vibrations. Now this makes perfect sense. This is a perfect way for an individual who is deaf to enjoy music appreciation. Unfortunately, this required a volume that was unsurprisingly found to be disruptive to the other workers. Not only in the shop, but in adjoining rooms. So someone from the HR department contacted JAN in preparation for setting up a meeting with the employee and an interpreter just to talk the situation over and try to come to some solution that would work for everyone.

Next slide, please.

Next I would like to share some basic tips for communicating through a sign language interpreter. A lot of times when an employer chooses to bring an interpreter, they might not have a lot of experience handling meetings that take place with this type of support. So I would say the most important thing you can do is work with your employee to understand their needs and choose an interpreter that will be effective in interpreting for your situation. That might include choosing an interpreter who has certain skills. For instance, if you have an employee who is DeafBlind, then you might need an interpreter who is skilled in tactile forms of interpretation. If you're in a medical setting, you might need an interpreter who is experienced with medical interpreting and who has the appropriate vocabulary for the situation.

There are some things you can do to help an interpreter along like sharing information about names, topics you're going to discuss, key vocabulary, but choosing your interpreter is a very important step. So don't neglect to choose someone who is effective. You want to prepare your settings so that lines of sight are good and so that there's not excessive background noise that would interfere with the interpreter understanding what is being said. Prepare the participants so that they know they should address the individual who is deaf directly. Consider notetaking assistance for the individual who is deaf so they don't have to worry about taking notes while participating. Again, interact directly with the individual who is deaf. Relax and use a normal tone and speed when you're speaking. Make sure to respect the interpreter's professional judgment and ethics. If you are told, for instance, that your event requires two interpreters rather than one, you should trust that judgment. And understand the interpreter will be interpreting everything that is said. It's not appropriate to ask them not to interpret part of what is being said.

Also, as a backup, you might consider using captioning in addition to interpreting in some video calls. Even if a person does normally use interpreting, there could be times when a video link may drop or freeze. If you also are providing captioning at the same time, it's more likely that the captioning may continue so that during that hopefully brief gap when interpreting isn't happening, the person can still follow along. Of course it's a good practice to watch for this and pause the meeting briefly also if you are able to detect that interpreting has stopped due to some sort of technical glitch.

All right. Next slide, please.

I want to talk with you about some of the solutions that I came up with on the spot during this conversation and afterwards. One of the things we discussed -- because JAN consultants sometimes have to think very creatively -- we discussed a device called the Chattervox. If you're able to see the slide, it's pictured toward the top middle of the screen. This is a speaker that's worn on a belt, and it's normally used with a little plug-in headset. But the jack for that headset could be plugged into other things too like an MP3 player, certain phones, etc.

So the Chattervox is usually used to amplify someone's voice, so I first learned about this as a speech-language pathologist. And speech language pathologists -- If you didn't know, I used to be one in the public schools -- one of the things we are very concerned about is vocal hygiene, protecting our voices and the health of our vocal cords. Well, as a first-year speech-language pathologist in the public schools, one of the things that I was assigned to do was work in the lunchroom and monitor students as they were eating. So -- Part of the reason I needed to do this is because I had some students with swallowing disorders, and I needed to be present to observe how they were using their skills. But it was so loud! I don't know if you've ever been in an elementary school or a middle school, but in the cafeteria, even if you're asking people to stay quiet, it gets loud, and I was really concerned that if I needed to raise my voice loud enough to be heard, especially if I did that repeatedly, I was going to damage my voice and be a very bad example to my students who needed to learn good vocal hygiene techniques. So I started looking into the Chattervox as a way to amplify my voice.

Thinking creatively, my idea was that if you were to turn the Chattervox around so that it were facing the body instead of facing out, you would probably be able to feel those vibrations. And the reason I thought this is because, when you do wear the Chattervox, if you have it cranked up, you can hear vibrations -- you could feel vibrations even from the backside. So I thought if you turn it around, it would be even stronger.

Some other ideas that we came up with on the spot as I was talking with the employer were a product called Neosensory. Again, this is pictured on the slide towards the edge of the slide. It's a wristband, and the wristband picks up on sounds in your environment and vibrates on your wrist to give you tactile feedback to let you know about sounds that are happening in your environment. I thought, you know, that probably wouldn't be as satisfying as something like the Chattervox where you could really feel the vibration. If you are just feeling it on your wrist, it would be something -- This is a product designed for this purpose.

Another product we talked about was called the Sensate. This is pictured on the slide. It's sort of a pebble-shaped plastic device, a little bit smaller than a hand. It can be put on a lanyard, but this is designed to be used while relaxing. The idea is you would put it basically resting on your chest wall, and then it connects to an app that plays soothing music and vibrates along with the music playing to create a deep sense of relaxation. So, I mentioned it because we like to give the broadest range of options possible, but in my mind I was thinking that's probably not to be what they go with, because it only plays selections from the app, and I bet this guy is not listening to nature sounds and violins when he's picking his track in the welding studio. But we do like to give you all the options. So this was a situation that I had not heard before where a JAN consultant had to think creatively about giving somebody another way to get that tactile feedback that they craved.

Now we didn't hear back what they chose, but if, Tracie, you bring up the next slide, I will show you an option that we later found that is really designed to do what this person wanted.

So this is the Woojer Strap 3. It's a haptic feedback device, and it's designed to let you feel sound from music, video soundtracks, etc. It's just one example of a haptic feedback device. And there are also other types such as things like vests. And I also just want to briefly give a shout-out to Beth Randall, who teaches occupational therapy students. I was talking with her students about this example, and one of them turned me onto another product called to the BioMat, which you can read about at BioMat.com. I don't think it would have worked in this scenario, because you kind of have to sit or stand on the mat to receive vibrations, and I kind of wanted this guy to have a solution that would move around with him, but if you do have someone who -- for relaxation purposes, let's say -- needs to feel music as they're listening to it, it could be another option. So shout-out to Beth Randall's class. Her students are awesome, and I really appreciate their feedback.

Next slide, please. Okay.

Next we're just going to just talk about a few trends and product updates. So, Matt and Jose, if you would like to jump in and get some banter going as we go through this next slide, please feel absolutely welcome.

**MATTHEW McCORD:**

Sure.

**TERESA GODDARD:**

So some of the hot topics we've been getting at JAN, some of the trends we're seeing, there's a great interest in artificial intelligence. I've talked to some people who think it has no place as an accommodation or that it isn't ready for accommodation, but the fact is, people have been using products that have an AI component as accommodations for a long time now. particularly things like speech recognition products. People are already using AI as an accommodation in some form. However, what we are seeing more recently is an increase in interest in using things like large language models, for instance some of the more famous ones like ChatGPT, as an accommodation.

Now how would you use something like that as an accommodation? Well, I've heard from some individuals with ADHD who are using large language models as a type of virtual body doubling. Body doubling is a technique where someone is there with you, either in person or virtually, while you're doing a task. This can assist a person with ADHD or other forms of neurodivergence to stay on task and focused. By having a chatbot open to bounce things off of, some people can experience something similar to that type of support but in a -- I don't want to say virtual, because it's not another person at a distance, but almost in a synthetic way.

Also -- Also, there are some products that are similar to what we've seen in the past that, in terms of things like captioning, that are now including words like "AI" in their actual names. So, for instance, Verbit, that's an AI-based transcription and captioning service, and they claim to have very high accuracy and a fast turnaround at a low cost and that the reason they're able to do this has something to do with the incorporation of AI. We're also seeing questions about how AI may influence hiring. Matt, Jose, anything to weigh in here?

**MATTHEW McCORD:**

One thing that comes to mind for me is that I think that artificial intelligence definitely does have a place as an accommodation, and a good example of that would be for those of us who know of or who have things like Alexa from Amazon in their house. I've seen several of my friends who have ADHD really get a lot of mileage out of their Alexa, because as soon as they remember something that they need to do or that they need to buy, they can just be like, "Alexa, add this to the list," and then they can move on. And that's the sort of thing that simple AI like that can make a huge difference in someone's life. Another good example of that would be the virtual assistants that you have on your cell phones like Siri. You could just hit a button and be like, "Search for this," or, "Do that," so that way someone who has attention problems can take care of things quickly while it's on their mind before they get distracted. Things like that can be very helpful as accommodations even though they are all over the place in our everyday lives. They're still accommodations too.

**TERESA GODDARD:**

I agree, Matt. I used to be opposed to smartwatches as an accommodation in terms of reminders because I thought they would be too distracting, but they do have an advantage in that a person can program the reminders independently because it's so easy. Whereas with something like the WatchMinder, a lot of people are going to need assistance to program that. And if your reminders get wiped out, it takes a long time to rebuild them.

I just want to talk briefly too, we're still seeing a lot of questions about hybrid work and returns to on-site work. One interesting thing that has come up is a lot of people who have been working remotely during the pandemic are either coming back to the workplace or moving on to other jobs, and we've had questions about, "How about their equipment?" For example, someone was sent a sit/stand desk to use as an accommodation at home, and it proved to be very expensive to ship that back. So the employer contacted us with a question: They were going to gift the equipment to the employee rather than pay the cost of shipping it back, and they wanted to know do they have to tax the employee on the cost of that sit/stand desk? Of course that is not something JAN can answer, because it's a tax question. We had to refer them. We talked a little bit, and they wound up deciding that instead of gifting the equipment or shipping it back, they had identified another employee who could use that sit/stand desk and arranged to have it shipped directly from the leaving employee's home to the home of the other employee who was in need. So that was a good, practical solution that sidestepped the tax issue.

We're also getting a lot of questions about hidden disabilities. I'd say it's really a hot topic. Some things that we have always considered to be obvious here, they can have an element of being hidden for remote workers. So what I mean by that is we had a question recently about whether deafness should always be considered obvious, because there was an employee who was oral deaf and speaking, and the employer did not know about their deafness, having only ever interacted with them by phone and email. So that was an interesting development. Something that we're still learning about.

## [Trends and Product Updates]

All right. We're running short on time, so I want to move ahead, if I may, to our new products. Sadly, sometimes great products don't last forever. So gone but not forgotten this year is the Attainment VoiceCue. We had a message from someone who was looking for it and not able to find a place to buy it. They contacted us, and we weren't able to identify anyone who is currently carrying it, and it looks like Attainment may have dropped it from their lineup as well. But this was a really nice device for discreet auditory cueing. It was wearable. Some potential replacements include things like smartwatch reminders, a picture schedule, maybe something like the WatchMinder for someone who doesn't need an auditory cue but could get by with just a vibration and something to read on their wrist. You may still be able to find the Attainment VoiceCue from state AT projects or on the secondhand market. You could even check eBay. But I don't currently know of a vendor who has this in stock. It appears to be discontinued.

Next slide, please.

And here are some of those replacements we discussed. We have pictured the WatchMinder. Some additional cognitive AT options include things like a digital recorder. We have one pictured by Olympus. This could be used to record instructions for later playback. An environmental sound machine or noise-canceling headsets could be used to control noise that could be distracting. Full-spectrum lighting does help some people with focus, and of course various types of smartwatches, as we discussed, can be used as reminders.

Next slide, please.

I'd also like to talk with you about an exciting product that's currently in development. I believe their second iteration is about ready to be released. This is called the Grain Weevil. It's pictured here. It looks like a large, box-shaped black object with some augurs. It's not totally clear from the picture, but they're attached to the device. This is designed for use in granaries. And shout-out, by the way, if you're a farmer or from a farming family. If you are, you might know that granaries can be extremely dangerous. In order to prevent problems with your granary, typically you have to climb into it and physically move the grain around to ensure that it's properly leveled. This device reduces that need to physically enter the granary. It's a robotic device that uses augurs to move through the grain and redistribute it properly. This is still in development; it's not something that can be purchased, but hopefully over the next few years we're going to see this come to market.

Next slide, please.

Matt, would you like to tell us about the GRABO?

**MATTHEW McCORD:**

Sure. Let's see here. The GRABO is a handheld lifting device. It was released onto the market back in 2019, so pretty recently. It uses electric motors and suction cups to adhere to various items through vacuum pressurization. It's a handheld handle, essentially, with these suction cups on it that will stick to what you place it against. It allows the product to safely seal onto different types of materials without damaging them. Naturally, the handle makes it a lot easier for a worker to more easily grip and carry and lift items throughout their workday.

The amount of weight it can safely lift without damaging the items in question varies depending upon factors like the type of material that's being lifted and also the angle at which the user plans to lift the items. If you're going to lift it perpendicularly, like the person in the picture on the slide is where you keep it level, it can usually carry more weight than if you were to do it parallel like you were holding it at your side, like you would if you were tucking some books under your arm. It can't lift things as heavy whenever you're doing it that way. But one easy way to confirm that it's okay to use it in a particular way is on their website they have a listing of the different weights that it can handle depending upon the angle you're using and all sorts of stuff like that, and also depending on the material as well. So I would just check in on that and see what you can safely lift with it.

Next I believe Jose has a product he wanted to share with everybody.

**JOSE GONZALEZ LOPEZ:**

Yes. This is a little bit more related to home automation, but some of the accessories that the SwitchBot Hub 2 has can be integrated into the workplace as well. While they focus a lot more on home security, they do have certain add-ons that can be used to control blinds, open curtains, and particularly a little button pusher that could be attached to light switches, computer switches to automatically have them be operated without having to have any manual contact with them as well as it can connect to a lot of other Bluetooth and smart devices. And something that this new hub does is that it can receive signals from infrared devices, so anything that has what a typical remote control would be, and it can amplify them and increase the range of where the signal can go. So that's another way that it could add some additional capabilities for things that are outside of someone's reach.

Next slide, please.

I believe Teresa has a new option for point-of-sale systems.

**TERESA GODDARD:**

Yes. Thanks, Jose. I'm very excited to talk about this new option today. We found this for a restaurant owner who was looking to update the POS system, the point-of-sale system, that they used at the restaurant, and also wanting to support an existing employee, a long-term employee, who had a progressive vision loss. Her job had been restructured, because she was having some difficulty with using a sales system.

So the iTab point-of-sale system can support an employee with a vision impairment in two ways: It can navigate the order entry screen using text-to-speech technology and also provides a system of audible prompts and responses. So, for instance, all items or products being rung up can be set to be announced one by one. So this is rather new. If you are looking at the picture, it's something that runs on an iPad-type tablet and could potentially support someone with a visual impairment who needs to take orders and enter them, particularly in a restaurant setting.

And I have one more product that I would like to discuss in our remaining moments, The Eko CORE 500. If you've been following the Eko company, they do make some high-end digital stethoscopes. Some of their products were used during the pandemic to provide listening at a distance to someone's vital signs. The Eko CORE 500 Digital Stethoscope is the first digital stethoscope with high-fidelity audio, a full-color display, and a three-lead ECG. It provides both wireless listening options, like some of the previous iterations, as well as up to 40 times amplification for those who need an amplified stethoscope. I believe that's all the products that we were planning to bring to you today. We just have a few more moments if there are some questions.

Tracie, I will turn it back over to you.

## [Q&A]

**TRACIE DeFREITAS:**

All right. Wonderful presentation. So much great AT to talk about. Thank you all for that. I could maybe throw in a question. Let's see here.

Matt, there's a follow-up question here related to the back supports that you mentioned. You mentioned that free-form back support being meant for people using wheelchairs. Do you know if there are any vendors that currently use similar technology for customized back supports for traditional office chairs?

**MATTHEW McCORD:**

Oh, I so wish that there was! I would love for this to get more popular, but as of right now I have not seen that yet. There are plenty of ways to customize a chair to meet someone's needs better, though. For instance, there are chairs with wider seats that are on the market, chairs with taller backs or chairs with headrests, chairs with more-pronounced or less-pronounced lumbar supports, and things like that that you can utilize. So I'd be aware of the features that are already on the market that can be helpful.

Also, bringing in an ergonomic assessment provider into the loop can also be really helpful, as they could be aware of features or products that you might not necessarily know exist, too. But to get a truly customized office chair like this, I'd say that it is something you would need to have specially made as of right now. So if that's really what you're needing, I would get connected with some rehabilitation engineers. Potentially RESNA might be a good resource for that. They might be able to help you make something more custom like that.

**TRACIE DeFREITAS:**

Okay. Very helpful.

**TERESA GODDARD:**

Back in the day people used to do things with expanding foam that was very interesting.

## [Conclusion]

**TRACIE DeFREITAS:**

All right. It looks like I only have about a minute left to go ahead and close out, so unfortunately we don't have time for questions, but you provided so much information. I think we certainly got our money's worth out of this webcast for sure. All right. So that is all the time we have. Teresa, Matt, and Jose, great information. Thanks for updating us on some of the latest AT that could be used in a job accommodation-related setting.

Thank you, everyone, for attending this JAN AT Update 2023. The next JAN webcast is "Accommodation Solutions: Substance Use Disorder," and that will be hosted on Thursday, September 14 at 2 PM.

If you're seeking a continuing education unit for today's training, we do offer one HR credit through HRCI. To receive that credit, you can certainly complete that webcast evaluation. We absolutely appreciate your feedback, and we do take it to heart. Please don't close the JAN webcast window when the webcast ends, and the evaluation will open in a new browser, or simply go ahead and use this handy-dandy QR code to go ahead and fill out that evaluation.

With that, if you do have any further questions, or if you couldn't get your question answered today, you can certainly contact JAN. That's what we're here for. Do that, go to AskJAN.org, and all of the contact information is easily found right there, so please do reach out.

Everyone, please enjoy the rest of your day, and Alternative Communication Services, thanks so much for providing the sign language interpreting and captioning for today. So that concludes today's webcast.