

Making friends with Dragon has made it easier to adapt to my new working life



Technology is my lifeline

Born in the 60s, Katherine Beavis has seen computers come of age and now Dragon, alongside her other assistive technology, helps her deal with her busy working life.

Like many others, she is working from home and her job has changed quite dramatically in lockdown. But Dragon keeps her on top of her workload.

“Dragon makes me more efficient. I can work three times faster dictating emails and documents. There is no excuse for me to make mistakes now I have the technology”

— Katherine Beavis, Executive Team Assistant, Business Disability Forum

I was born with a condition called congenital right-sided semi-hemiparesis with spasticity bilateral schizencephaly with partial epilepsy (similar to a stroke). It seems amazing because strokes are what old people have. I was born at home as many babies were at that time. This was before ultrasound was around so my mum had no warning that things might not be going too well and it took a while to work out what had happened.

My strengths

As it turned out, I had what I call ‘a split brain’ My right side is weaker than the left but, on the upside, my left side is pretty amazing. I can type at 30 wpm just with my left hand.

I had the sort of seizures where you are just ‘absent’ for a while. I have had more serious ones: the last one was in 2005 and I still check in with a neurologist twice a year. I have a lively mind, I like to be busy and to do things at a gallop. I have dyslexia but then I also have a phenomenal memory for numbers, so I never have to look up someone’s extension at work. I can remember a surprising number of mobile numbers, even after a long interval.

Early days with assistive technology

I used to have a golf ball electric typewriter. It let you delete the last line of your text so it was a first step towards a word processor in that you could correct a mistake – so long as you spotted it straightaway.

I also had a Dictaphone. This is still one of my best friends because it lets you keep going back over things and checking till you get it right. These days I have a special keyboard that lets me do Copy and Paste with a single key press and an upright mouse. I type with my left hand and just uses my right hand for Enter and for Function keys.

“With Dragon I can be even more effective and most days I feel I can cope with anything.”

— Katherine Beavis, Executive Team Assistant, Business Disability Forum

Enter my Dragon

I went to work for the Business Disability Forum in 2007. It is a not-for-profit that opens doors for disabled people to find employment through its links with businesses and government.

Dragon's my mate

Les, my trainer, gave me three scripts to read aloud to train Dragon so it would recognise what I was saying and be more accurate. He also gave me some great advice.

‘Get to know Dragon as if it is a new friend at work,’ he said. ‘Talk to it at break and at lunchtime about anything you like.’

It worked! Even if I am talking fast or using slang, chatting rather than dictating, it recognises what I am saying. It even copes well when I am tired, and my speech is a bit slurred, whereas the built in speech recognition on computers just gives up.

Life in lockdown

Now we are in lockdown, I have my workstation set up at home just like my desk at the office but my day-to-day life has changed dramatically. I am carer for my mum and my cats have replaced work colleagues.

As a front office person, I used to be first point of contact for couriers and dealt with packages, parcels and messages. I pass on answerphone messages to team members but I don't have that face-to-face reception role now the office is shut.

I still manage diaries and organise internal and external meetings. But these days I work more closely with the Membership Research team and help the Events team with their webinars. I recently organised a webinar for over 250 delegates and each week we are getting more traffic and reaching out to bigger audiences.

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