

Community NVDA in Spanish



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Interviewee
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nvda.es/



Palmar: Who are you and what is your relationship with the Spanish-speaking NVDA screen reader community?

José Manuel: It's a pretty long story. I have been completely blind since birth. I don't see anything. I've always liked computer science, ever since I was a little kid. So I decided to study computer science once I finished high school. I studied Software Engineering and from that moment on I began to realize that screen readers at the time when I was studying at university were very expensive. I had it for free thanks to the help that was given here but they charged me for the fact that I could access the computer screen, to be able to see the screen. And I thought then that it was unfair and that we had to look for an alternative. Then I found the NVDA and started using it. At one point I installed it and later, as time went on, while I was studying the Master's degree in Computer Engineering and shortly after leaving a small business project that I had, because I thought I would take advantage of the knowledge I had acquired to see if I could improve the community that already existed. There was a small NVDA community in Spanish with very few people because it had yet to mature a lot. I brought together a group of people who wanted the same thing as me and that's how we started the project until today. More than seven years have passed since then.

Palmar: For those of us who have no idea what this NVDA is, what exactly is this NVDA?

José Manuel: NVDA is a screen reader. So the function of a screen reader is to read aloud using a speech synthesis or a Braille device or a combination of both. It can also be accompanied by sounds. With all this, it describes the screen of the computer or device that we have. In the case of NVDA, it's only Windows, but other screen readers are for iPhone, for Android systems, for televisions, for a lot of technological devices that can be considered intelligent or that have a complex operating system inside. What sets NVDA apart from other screen readers for Windows, and there are quite a few, is that NVDA is free, free and open source. This guarantees access to technology for everyone, regardless of their economic status and purchasing power. They just log in, download NVDA, install it, start talking from the start, and use it. And all of a sudden, thanks to that, they have access to the computer.

Palmar: Can you tell us who invented and when this open source screen reader was invented?

José Manuel: If this screen reader first appeared in 2006 in Australia, it was invented by two people who, if I remember correctly, were studying music. And I think they thought a little like me, that

something had to be done to give accessibility to anyone. Then they started programming it and created the first versions back in 2006, as I tell you; And later, in 2007, it was when it began to be talked about in Spanish-speaking communities, through the mailing lists of the time, and there were people who offered to translate it and it was a little later, in 2008, that I contacted NVDA.

Palmar: Did you mention before that this reader is used on Mac, but not on Windows?

José Manuel: No, the other way around. It is used on Windows and only on Windows because it is so specialized that it does not support other platforms and maintains its own. Mac got a really strong foothold in this area of accessibility when it came in with version 10.7 of the operating system. It came in with its own screen reader called Voice Over, which comes pre-installed on all Apple systems, Macs, iPhones, Apple TVs, and even AirPods. In other words, any device in the apple will have it installed, but in Windows that didn't happen, that's why NVDA was needed. As of today, Windows already has its own and it's pretty good too.

Palmar: Why aren't the readers accessible from the factory?

José Manuel: Because before there was very little awareness about accessibility. Accessibility is something that is moving forward, but it still has a long way to go. And years ago, back in the early 2000s, I had an even longer journey. What's going on? It didn't occur to anyone that you had to make a screen reader for an operating system and there were separate companies, so to speak, that were responsible for making these technical aids, these programs or devices and for very high prices.

Palmar: What prices are we talking about?

José Manuel: We are talking about prices that, if I remember correctly, are around 900€ per commercial screen reader license.

Palmar: And then I imagine that you have to update those screen readers, so you have to keep paying, right?

José Manuel: Yes, you have to update screen readers and you have to update that license. The license allows you, I think, two later versions and then you have to renew it; that is, to spend another 900€. There have already been models that try to mitigate the impact of that license promoted by the manufacturers themselves, but it's still expensive.

Palmar: When we talk about an open source screen reader, we're dealing with something really revolutionary, right?

José Manuel: Free software is always revolutionary because it offers an easily accessible alternative for everyone and, above all, one in which the community can contribute, either financially or by contributing with code work. It allows both types of collaborations and that's what makes it grow. It's what gives it the impetus.

Palmar: How can we access this reader?

José Manuel: Well, you can download it from our website, from NVDA.es or also by visiting the official website in English of the Australian company that

is NV Access.org. From both sites you can download the latest version.

Palmar: And before this reader existed, how did a blind person access screen reading?

José Manuel: Before NVDA, I'm not sure that Mac even had software yet. So the only solution there was, was to get the commercial screen reader, the only one available at the time OR the most popular, rather, because there were several. Then there was the one that was known here in Spain, in other countries things were much more complicated. Here ONCE gave one for Windows, it granted us a license to the people we studied and it seems to me that it was also granted as an adaptation to the workplace. And then whoever wanted it for their house had to pay for it with everything the license cost.

Palmar: Did screen reader hacking exist?

José Manuel: Yes, it existed and still exists. Some people still prefer commercial solutions because they see something better than with free alternatives, but they can't afford them. So there is always someone who takes out a crack and distributes it and in the end it ends up being pirated.

Palmar: Is there a difference between the commercial and the open source reader, or are we talking about more or less the same type of device?

José Manuel: Let's see, the essence, so to speak, is the same. Speech synthesis, support for braille lines for Braille displays and for operating system controls to read you, your web browser to read you, and the most popular applications to read you. Then there are already differences that can be more or less subtle. Now they are quite different. Now, for example, JAWS is betting very heavily on artificial intelligence AI, while NVDA is following a more classic approach because it doesn't need it. Let's say it tries to be a screen reader faithful to the operating system and it doesn't offer you more or less than what the operating system gives you. JAWS, on the other hand, since you pay for it, wants to give you a screen reader and also offers you functions that make your life easier as a user, but that go beyond the philosophy of the screen reader.

Palmar: Can you give me an example that explains why the use of AI offers functions that go beyond the philosophy of the screen reader?

José Manuel: For example, what we just said. Recently, in version 2026, they have included a function in which you visit a web page and invoke the AI and summarize what is on that web page. Before that, there were functions such as searching for a selected word in Wikipedia or looking at the weather. And that's something that, well, is very good, very interesting, but maybe it doesn't fit that much on a screen reader, right?

Palmar: So it's kind of like having a direct experience or a mediated experience. We are now going to talk about the community that is generated around NVDA, because we are not just talking about a screen reader, but about an entire community of people who use this screen reader. How is this community constituted in Spain?

José Manuel: In Spain, it started out as a very small community. I'm not going to talk to you just about Spain, but about all the Spanish-speaking countries, because in the end all of us who speak Spanish are connected in one way or another and in

the end we have all contributed to shaping NVDA. This Spanish-speaking community began back in 2010. Or at least that's the record I have. It started out as a simple movement through mailing lists. There was a list in Yahoo! groups For those who don't know, it's an email that you write to and the people who send emails to that mailbox see the answers that everyone else has written as if it were a modern-day WhatsApp group but in email. Then, the community was moving around and there were several projects to build websites in Spanish with information resources about the reader, profiles on social networks. And they were born, they worked well, they closed sometimes because people didn't want to or couldn't keep maintaining them. And this went hand in hand with communities, also in other languages, because there were also communities in English, Italian, French and Japanese. In almost any country in the world or language in the world you will find an NVDA community, which is a very nice part of this project. So what happened? I arrived more or less around 2015 in the communities. I had been using NVDA for about three years before and I saw how the community was doing and decided to contribute. I wanted to contribute and I started making add-ons. NVDA can be extended using plug-ins programmed in Python. I started programming and from there I saw how the community was doing, both in English and in Spanish. And at one point I said something had to be done to change this. I contacted the people who had helped to shape the community up until then. I called a few colleagues I had and we decided to start this project, which is NVDA. It is and since then we have provided all kinds of resources until today.

Palmar: We are talking about a community that works for the common. How do you work for that community?

José Manuel: We do everything. We manage our own community, social networks, mailing lists, and we answer people's questions. We have a support incident system in case anyone wants to ask for help. From time to time, because we don't have enough time, we provide training. We also help with translations. We make sure that NVDA is in Spanish, that it evolves in Spanish and that that translation is of quality, that its documentation is well updated. NVDA Access also launched a certification program for those who wanted to certify their knowledge in NVDA. From time to time someone comes to us who needs a translation of the exam into Spanish and we do a live translation session where we don't give them more help than necessary, but we do make sure that they understand the question being asked and the options available to them to give an accurate answer.

Palmarl Sounds like a lot of work for people who have other jobs, doesn't it?

José Manuel: That's right.

Palmarl We're talking all the time about a community, but has it become an association?

José Manuel: It did become an Association later, back in 2020. In the midst of the pandemic, we decided to make the decision and formed the Spanish-speaking Community Association of NVDA. No, it doesn't change much compared to the community that already existed, but at least we have a stronger base to consolidate all these resources and to be able to help and be able to qualify for grants that are given to non-profit entities and to be able to offer these services by helping to sustain the resources we have a little.

Palmar: And who are the driving forces behind this association?

José Manuel: It's me. A friend of mine is in Galicia. And there's another collaborator right now who's been translating NVDA since 2007. He joined us and loves the project. And then, besides, there are people from outside who collaborate. There are also founders of previous websites and then members of the community who join and collaborate doing their bit, either financially or with resources, lending a hand, solving incidents, training, helping with certifications and carrying out the tasks that we have too.

Palmar: How many people are directly involved in this association?

José Manuel: I can't tell you an exact number. I know that we have more than 400 people on the mailing list, more than 2000 per Facebook group, and I don't have many more numbers either. We are few compared to other associations or entities, but much has been achieved and what is being achieved day by day to maintain and improve NVDA.

Palmar: What does a person who becomes a member of this association commit to?

José Manuel: Well, let's collaborate as much as you can, because in the end, as you said, we have other jobs and it's hard to get to everything. It used to be easier to carry, now it costs a little more to carry, so anyone who can lend a hand is welcome to help with translation, with development, with code review, training in certifications or simply guiding users who start with an idea and need help and don't know where to start.

Palmar: And how can people join the association?

José Manuel: Very simple. Simply join the Facebook group's mailing list or write to us at contacto@NVDA.es and we can talk to us and see how they can collaborate. Any form of collaboration is welcome.

Palmar: So we encourage all the people who read and listen to us to join and sign up, right? We are then talking about a lot of users who are using this device right now. Do you know what percentage of people it is?

José Manuel: I couldn't tell you. There is a statistics page that you can consult and there they are grouped by country. I know that the Spanish-speaking version is used in a lot of countries, even in the United States. We're not the ones in the world who use NVDA the most, that's also true, but we're a lot of us.

Palmar: And is NVDA used in schools?

José Manuel: It depends, but it is usually used because it's easy, you don't have to do paperwork, you don't have to carry out business licenses. Someone goes to the website, downloads it, NVDA, installs it, and that's it. That student gets help or that teacher can teach accessibility or whatever they need.

Palmar: So educators who read or listen to us can announce this in their classes so that users can use it. I imagine you don't have time to do much more work, but do you visit schools or give informational workshops about all this?

José Manuel: We try, when time allows. But yes, we have taught some. In fact,

next week we are going to a digital accessibility event in Spain and there will be a workshop for developers there to learn NVDA. The workshops are not only focused on students, but also on people who want to audit the accessibility of websites, applications and software, or who want to develop applications that are accessible.

Palmar: When you say audit the website, what do you mean?

José Manuel: To explore, to check the website and see if it has accessibility flaws. See how to correct them and see why they occur. It's very important to make accessible content that works with the screen reader. The reader has to improve and adapt to the operating system, applications and web content. But those contents must also make it easy and accessible to everyone.

Palmar: Of course, and many times we don't think exactly about how easy digital content is to read. We need to be aware of all this when we produce content. Does anyone get paid within this association for all this work?

José Manuel: No, it's all voluntary.

Palmar: Do you have any kind of financial support to carry out all this?

José Manuel: We accept financial donations and there are users who donate monthly and thanks to this, the infrastructure is maintained, which is the most important thing and then the work we do, because we put in the will and we don't ask for anything for it.

Palmar: It's frankly incredible the work you're doing among a few people. I am thinking now of institutions such as ONCE. What role does this institution play in the development of screen readers?

José Manuel: ONCE has always done a great job with blind people, but on the subject of screen readers, all it does now is distribute the commercial screen reader that we have been around for years. And yes, it is true that lately they have been focusing a little more on NVDA and are starting to use it, to teach it and maybe, from time to time, they do some collaboration, but for now they are still betting on non-free alternatives.

Palmar: Does ONCE directly support your association?

José Manuel: No, not yet.

Palmar: Does the association have any plans to work together with ONCE?

José Manuel: At the moment there is nothing planned, but we are open. If you want we will be delighted.

Palmar: I have seen that in addition to all the work you do in the NVDA association, you have a personal website called Audiocinemateca and there you upload films with audio description. Can you explain to us how this project was born and how you keep it active?

José Manuel: Well, it's an idea that was born in 2014, because I've always liked audio description. I met her thanks to ONCE. From a very young age I have seen

movies where there is a narrator who tells you what is happening. It used to be rented on a videotape and now they circulate on the internet, even if it's in audio format. So I set out to have them all together so that everyone can come in and enjoy that content. That's why I decided to set up that website based on a website that already existed. I met the owner on social media and he told me it was going to close. I was very motivated and I was also finishing the engineering so I saw a lot of ways to optimize that, so that's how I built Audiocinemateca. At first the content was scarce and there were a lot of similar projects, but over time it started to take off and that's what it's going to be 11 years ago. Nowadays it continues to grow with a lot of content coming from a lot of platforms.

Palmar: How many movies are hosted?

José Manuel: The last time I watched, there were more than 7,000 series, about 500 documentaries and a similar number of short films.

Palmar: Do you know if there is any institution that is responsible for this work?

José Manuel: As far as I know, no. I don't know if there are similar examples of institutions. I know that there are similar pages in the United States and in other countries in Brazil, and they are almost always led by people who want the same thing as me but in their language.

Palmar: Do you think that the Spanish National Library should have a section specifically dedicated to this?

José Manuel: Of course. And hopefully it will come at some point.

Palmar: Do you accept collaborations and donations for the Audiocinemateca?

José Manuel: Yes, because it is supported by donations. There are volunteers who donate money and other people help maintain the infrastructure. As in the previous case, work is also voluntary.

Palmar: What's the best way to volunteer to work with the Audiocinemateca?

José Manuel: The Audiocinemateca has a contact form. If someone finds a film, a series that is not in the catalog but that is audio-described, they can collaborate by sending it or indicating that it is and where it is. We get hold of it and upload it. Also, if someone wants to request an audio description title and wants to finance it, because there are teams that are responsible for that, well, we can manage it and with that we can grow that catalog of content and make it possible for everyone to have access to it.

Palmar: Well, this is an open invitation to anyone who listens to us. I take advantage of the fact that we are with an expert to ask you if you think that technology is accessible to anyone.

José Manuel: Technology has come a long way in recent years. Ten years ago, it could have been adapted to be accessible, but an effort is still needed. There is a lack of awareness. The good news is that, today, that can be done. The not so good news is that there is still a long way to go. A lot of progress has been made and that progress is evident every day with devices such as the iPhone, with computers.



For example, we have artificial intelligence that can describe images with great precision. We have a lot of services at our fingertips, but there is still a lot to do.

Palmar: And what diagnosis do you make of blind people's accessibility to social networks?

José Manuel: All of them don't access it. There is always someone who doesn't want to use them, but let's just say that those of us who do it can use social networks. And then in the end everyone has their preferences. There are a lot of blind people who are on Facebook, on Instagram, who are still on Twitter. I, for example, am betting on free social networks like Mastodon. There are countless networks and many of them are accessible.

Palmar: To continue with this topic, what diagnosis do you make of the use of technology in the context of blindness in Spain?

José Manuel: As before, in general, there is still a long way to go. Technology, which is specific to blind people, is still expensive, more expensive than other technology. And in the end, we must try to overcome that gap and we must make it better and that there is no specific technology for a disability, but rather that all technology is accessible.

Palmar: Can you give us an example of something that you would like to use and can't use yet?

José Manuel: Well, soon I wouldn't be able to tell you because right now I have everything I need with the iPhone, so to speak. The televisions also have voice guidance. There are the virtual assistants, the smart speakers, the PC. If anything, the field of applications, including household appliances, could be greatly improved. For example, when I think of an appliance, I think that there has to be an app with which I can use it, because if not, it is completely useless because they have touch screens, they have a lot of buttons that I don't know what they are for. There is a problem when they remove the reliefs and the levers, the switches and the buttons and you leave everything tactile. You put up an impressive barrier. This barrier is often overcome with a mobile application. But it turns out that this application can leave you lying around either because it becomes inaccessible or because the manufacturer stops supporting it. And on top of that is the fact that the appliance is generally going to be more expensive.

Palmar: José Manuel, as a student do you remember obstacles that have been overcome with the mediation of technology in the classroom?

José Manuel: Well, I had a lot of obstacles in subjects that had a lot of graphics. I remember that when I was little and I went to school I used a lot of braille, so the books had to be transcribed in Braille. That took a long time and I remember that sometimes there were classes where my classmates accessed the book and I had to wait for the corresponding shift volume to arrive. Yes, I have seen an evolution over the years. For example, when I was already arriving at the university and they were giving me things in pdf, I noticed the difference because I could read those texts, but of course, there was a barrier to the accessibility of the documents. Other barriers appeared, such as the fact that the graphics were not accessible and a host of other things. However, this improvement was noted.

Palmar: What would need to happen in our education system to make it fully accessible to blind people?

José Manuel: [00:28:48] We still have to adapt a lot of the material we have said without leaving aside, for example, braille, because many people think that with technology it will be left out and that should not be the case, because it is the literacy mechanism that makes blind people literate, for example. And then there is a lot of awareness, a lot of awareness. Teachers need to know how to handle accessible technology, just as they know how to handle standard technology. When a student with disabilities comes to the classroom, they must know how to manage everything they handle, not only to teach them, but to monitor that their learning is adequate and is the same as that of the rest of their classmates or equivalent.

Palmar: You have been working in a company for years. How do you view the employment of blind people?

José Manuel: Badly. Although it has improved significantly, I still consider it disastrous. To this day, there are still many cases of prejudice. The blind person comes to the interview and the interviewer directly tells him that he will not be able to do the job. So directly, because he sees it, he prejudices it and is left with a “we'll call you”, which is usually translated into a “no”. There are people who are lucky like me and who come to a company where they allow you to demonstrate your abilities and admit you and see that they did well to admit you because in the end you bring great value to that company. And then, beyond external companies, because, at least here in Spain, there is the Social ONCE group with its group of companies, which is where people with disabilities tend to integrate when it comes to working, where there are usually fewer barriers to entry.

Palmar: Let us project ourselves into the future and think utopically: what would a reality look like in which technology and all the applications we have discussed were truly accessible to everyone?

José Manuel: It would be great because a lot of barriers, a lot of stereotypes, prejudices, blocks would disappear. I would love, for example, to be able to drive a car even if it were autonomous and that carried me without relying on public transport, to give you an example. I would love for that to be possible one day. In the end, technology overcomes these barriers and helps us to lead a normal life identical to that of a person without disabilities, and that would be desirable for tomorrow.

Palmar: From the Constellation of Commons, we are working to help cultivate a horizon of good news that supports meaningful systemic transitions. What developments or initiatives from NVDA can you share that align with and advance this vision?

José Manuel: Well, look, I am very happy because this year, for example, the European law on accessibility has been approved in Europe. Well, more than has been approved, it came into force on June 28 in all Member States, in Spain as well, and that law means that all products have to be accessible in certain private sectors and among them is transport, there are self-service terminals, websites, mobile applications. So I hope that with this law companies will put their batteries a little more on their batteries and everything will be more accessible. And I am very motivated by that, because I work as an accessibility consultant

and there has been interest in improving the accessibility of many products, of many applications, of these sectors and others that want to include all people with disabilities because they see that there is a real benefit in doing so.

Palmar: You talk about benefits but you're not just talking about economic benefit, are you?

José Manuel: No, we are talking about benefits for the reputation of that company, that users will be more comfortable, not only those with disabilities will benefit, but those who don't have one because they will have a more comfortable interface, they will be able to make that application compatible with more devices and in the end it is a good experience for everyone.

Palmar: And finally, one last question that we ask everyone interviewed by the Constellation of Commons: What motivates you to fight every day for equal rights in accessibility?

José Manuel: Well, look, I am very motivated by people's comments and what they say and what I see that is achieved thanks to this today. I remember a project that I started years ago to adapt an installation of Windows and I remember when comments began to come to me that there were people who simply had work after this project, after having met it. It's great to know that you're changing the lives of thousands of people and that's what motivates me to keep going and to continue to improve this.

Palmar: Thank you for speaking with us. Before we wrap up, is there anything you feel we should emphasize from our discussion, or anything we've missed that you'd like to share?

José Manuel: Accessibility is something we can all contribute to, simply by being mindful and applying common sense. Small changes can significantly improve the lives of many, and the important thing is to make the effort.

Palmar: Of course. And we're seeing that in action with the open-source reader. Thank you very much.

José Manuel: Thanks to you.