
Thank you for being a friend: Assistive Technology can be that Friend for Life

Going by the title one might allude that I am a dedicated fan of the American TV sitcom show 'Golden Girls' and lived for the catchy jingle at the outset of the programme that began with the lyrics 'Thank you for being a friend...'. If you are unfamiliar with the show, it centred around the lives of four dynamic mature women who shared meaningful friendships as well as weekly escapes in their home in the beautiful Miami, Florida.

These characters had diverse personalities but as a group had the traits that created lifelong friendships. These characteristics can be summed up as their ability to be open, to reach out and connect to one another, to be curious about each other as well as their boundless gratitude that all fostered a deep and lasting connection as they shared celebrations and overcame obstacles.

You may be asking yourself, where am I going with this train of thought? Good question! These qualities that make lifelong relationships and contribute to deep connections take time and work and when it comes to building and fostering positive relationships this isn't just needed with people but with technology too. More specifically, I am referring to nurturing a rapport with Assistive Technology (AT). Just like a deep friendship with people, the benefits from a lifelong relationship with AT does reap rewards.

To begin, every friendship starts with an introduction and in AHEAD, we have created an [Assistive Technology resource, called 'AT Hive'](#), to introduce, encourage and continue a kinship with AT. It has information about different types of AT ranging from support reading, writing, organisation, collaboration, communication as well as magnification and much more. This resource has been co-created with the education community, which we are incredibly grateful to, as we want to acquaint people to the kaleidoscope of AT and how these amazing, powerful and abundant technologies can assist our diverse population.

Then to deepen this relationship with Assistive Technology, we have added a section called [Discover your Assistive Technology](#) that has 3 questions for you to answer as we want to enrich your curiosity about AT. By answering 3 simple questions about your interests, devices and account types, a list of AT is created that are starting points to help begin your AT journey. Each AT has a dedicated webpage with text and videos to guide and support you. Some of the content has been contributed by our Education community who have been generous to share AT write-ups and [we openly invite you to contribute to our knowledge and insights](#) to help others deepen their knowledge and relationship with AT.

This AT tool is approachable and accessible to everyone as we want all types of people from all walks of life to try it and delve into the world of Assistive Technology and to uncover the ways in which AT reveals new ways to empower us whether it's with reading, writing, organisation and much more.

This is a time to celebrate Assistive Technology, it has never been so bountiful as it can be found in all our devices, in the form of apps, browser plugins, digital ecosystems like Microsoft and Google and more. AT is everywhere but just needs that introduction, that handshake or elbow bump, to begin an awareness that can ignite an interest and

lead us to connect with technology in a personal way.

Friendships, like Assistive Technology, require regular time to be dedicated to them so they can flourish. When you find an AT that fits your needs, this is the spark that needs to be fanned. The more energy and time you spend uncovering its nuances, the more fluent you become with its possibilities. Think about the everyday tasks you experience and give AT opportunities to build itself into your daily habits and routines to compound that connection you can create with AT. The gains of AT aren't just technical but emotional too, as confidence and self-esteem can be the unexpected gain as our capacity to do and belong are more possible.

AT is the friend that we all should know. Its capacity to give is tremendous, its possibilities are endless and now it's time for AT to be known by everyone. Are we all talking about this amazing friend called AT and what it offers? How can we let everyone know about AT and its nature to help us? Whoever you are, whether you are a parent, teacher, lecturer, student, employer, employee, policymaker, librarian, career guidance teacher or a nurse or any role or profession, you have the power in your role to raise awareness of Assistive Technology.

Assistive technology exists to help people and we want to help people connect to AT and what it has to offer so explore our AT resource. We invite you to try it and share it with others as there are so many possibilities with AT and how it can help people of all ages and backgrounds.

So, while you have that cup of tea or coffee, as you have that pint, as you talk to your friend, co-worker or neighbour you can share this friend called AT. Even now as you read this, I'm sure there are AT possibilities within your arms reach so reach out to AT. Please, take a little bit of time to get to know AT, it's ready to meet you, and in time we may all be singing 'Thank you for being a friend'.



Trevor Boland

Dublin City University

[@BolandTrevor](#)

Trevor Boland is an experienced Assistive Technology Officer working in Higher Education supporting Students with disabilities. He previously lectured in the Access programme for non-traditional students in TU Dublin.

Trevor was previously the Digital and eLearning Officer in AHEAD and has been involved in the National rollout of the UDL Badge with UCD and the Teaching and Learning Forum.

This article appeared in the AHEAD Journal. Visit www.ahead.ie/journal for more information
