

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/tech-inspires-a-visually-impaired-innovator>

Adrian Rodriguez, co-founder and CEO of Dreamlinks, shares how his experience with innovative technology as a visually impaired person inspired him to become an entrepreneur. The technologies he used as a child were helpful but limited - but the advent of smartphones, Google Glass, and other devices changed his life and his dreams for the future.



Transcript

Adrian To be a little bit more precise about my vision, 00:00:05,130 I have no light perception in my left eye, and in my right eye, I have what's called a coloboma, which is a hole.. It's a literal hole in the right eye that regular optics can't really correct.. And so text at your readable scale is basically nothing to me.. And this was, a couple days ago, my, like, absolute best effort of writing on lined paper from a reasonable viewing distance, what would definitely be within the range of a normal writing distance.. And I just can't do it.. I never was able to do it.. And I think the real downside to being disabled in this way is that this sloppiness comes off as incompetence.. And this is something that a lot of people with disabilities face, is that if you do certain things clumsily, it really counts against you in society.. My next major influence actually is my father.. And so my father is a prosthetist..

I grew up with a garage full of arms and legs and signs about renewing human potential.. And watching him work with patients every day and creating, you know, through his hands, these molds and then pouring plaster into these molds, and then ultimately, making people walk again is something that really stuck with me and I think inspired me to try and renew or maximize my own potential.. And fortunately, there were a range of visual prosthetics that really exploded during my lifetime, during my childhood.. And I got to be a guinea pig for these.. My family and I, when we came to America, we found a public school that was willing to fund some of these experimental technologies and let me give public school my best shot.. But as you can see, it took a lot.. And I felt, often, really over encumbered by having to carry around all these things.. And actually, eventually, I had to carry so many different things that the school recommended I maybe go to a school for the blind because it just was difficult to, for example, accommodate one of these devices.. that would take up a desk and a half.. I'd have to leave class early, get to the next class a little late..

And it just, you know, as a teenager, I wasn't really willing to put up with this at a certain point, and I eventually started to kind of resign from school.. And the other thing is that these technologies are great, but in actuality, this is what I see when I look through these technologies.. I can only see a couple characters at a time.. But then this renaissance happened in consumer electronics, where everything became miniaturized, and the most valuable company in the world happened to ultimately kind of become a camera company.. And thanks to that innovation, thanks to this consumeristic coincidence that benefited me, I was able to get rid of all these devices and use these really incredibly engineered cameras to see more at once.. Right, you had better displays, but not just that.. These devices were extremely engineered to be fluid.. If you ever used

a track pad on the MacBook, you know what I'm talking about.. It took a very long time for other laptops to catch up.. And for me, the combination of the fluid responsiveness with the fluid rendering of MacOS made it so that, sure, I may just only be able to see a finite number of characters at one time, but I can move through the other characters adjacent to them so quickly that it's almost as if I have a larger field of view..

And this really unlocked me, and before I knew it, I was here at Stanford, which was really, really a plot twist, to be honest with you.. (gentle upbeat music) And then this happened.. Right as I entered Stanford, (groans) (gentle upbeat music) (icons beeping) (coffee sloshes) (alert dings) (gentle upbeat music) - You might remember Google Glass.. Yeah, I know.. 00:03:49,800 It's kind of a meme.. Voiceover Meet me in front of Strand Books.. 00:03:55,890 Adrian So I saw this video 00:03:59,880 and I thought, "Wow, this is obviously the next frontier." And I wanna be clear, this video came out in, I believe, 2011.. Google was far away from being able to deliver on this promise.. And the jury's still out on whether anyone is still able to deliver on this promise anytime soon.. However, I think that the premise, I think that the prompt, the vision of having situational computing that is aware of where you are and can basically annotate your environment for you is an unquestionable theoretical breakthrough for the blind and visually impaired community..

And so I saw this video and I thought, "Wow, if I can just help push that movement, even two degrees in the right direction, people who see maybe a little bit less than I do might end up at Stanford or might end up to go on and fulfill whatever it's that they want to fulfill." Because for me, genuinely, I would not have been able to come here, which was my dream, without these technologies.. It just would not have happened...