# ACCANect 2018

**Session 13: 2:10 – 2:20pm**

**Thanks a bundle: Making telecommunications services more accessible for people with cognitive disabilities – Grant Project**

**Interviewer: Julie McCrossin, MC**

**Interviewee: Dr Jeannie Paterson, Associate Professor, University of Melbourne**

**This ACCAN-funded project is developing tools to make transactions more accessible between telecommunications providers and consumers with decision-making impairments. Julie McCrossin will interview Dr Paterson about how providers can better serve consumers with cognitive disabilities.**

JULIE McCROSSIN: And ladies and gentlemen, if I could now bring forward

Dr Jeannie Paterson, Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne. What

are you an Associate Professor of?

DR JEANNIE PATERSON: Consumer law.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Fantastic. We have three images, if we could

have the images for - can I call you Jeannie, is that okay? This

session is called "Thanks a bundle, making telecommunication

services more accessible for people with cognitive disabilities" and

I'll start by saying just in a nutshell, what is the problem or the

issue that you're investigating?

DR JEANNIE PATERSON: So the problem we're investigating is it's

really hard to choose telecommunications products and it's

particularly hard if you have a cognitive disability.

JULIE McCROSSIN: And why are you pointing to the screen, what

are you illustrating with this first slide?

DR JEANNIE PATERSON: If you look at the slide if you're trying to

buy a telecommunications product you're faced with lots of choices.

People suffer from information overload at the best of times when

they're trying to make important decisions and yet the very sales

strategy for these types of products is to offer many, many different

products in many, many different bundles with all sorts of notional

add-ones associated with them that makes it hard to choose and

that's before you get to the contract terms and conditions and

things like how much will it cost and what happens if I have to break

the contract? So we had Ed before talking about how most people

don't read their privacy terms and conditions and don't think they

have a choice about privacy conditions. Actually, most people don't

read contracts full stop and most people don't have a choice about

contractual terms and conditions and the poorer you are, the less

choices you have and if you have various disabilities often less

choices you have. So that's the issue we're investigating.

JULIE McCROSSIN: I've got three university qualifications one of

which is law and I couldn't discern anything. Indeed, you're a law

lecturer, but people I know who've got money, they pay people to

be their shopper and come back with options. This is actually a big

challenge you're facing. Remind us why this is important, why is it

important to deal with it? I never let go of the mic, I can feel your

hand going for it. I usually have the mic!

DR JEANNIE PATERSON: The reason why it's important is because

access to telecommunications services is increasingly important for

participation in social life. Without access to telecommunications we

can't participate in political debate and we also pay more for goods

and services because of course they're cheaper online too and

Australia's also subject to various conventions which says that we

cannot discriminate against people with disabilities and, in fact, we

need to include people with disabilities.

JULIE McCROSSIN: I was going to ask you, are there any legal

frameworks other than international law that can be applied in this

area to try to get the people who create the websites to be more

accessible to people with cognitive challenge?

DR JEANNIE PATERSON: Can we have the next slide please. The

Australian consumer law says a lot. It provides safety net

protections so we can't mislead people, we can't prey on people, but

it says very little about information that will be accessible. So what

we try to do in the project is to think about what online information

like this would look like if it was designed with the users' experience

in mind and in particular, users with cognitive disabilities.

JULIE McCROSSIN: That's clearly designed not to be read. Let's be

frank.

DR JEANNIE PATERSON: Absolutely. If you go to the next slide

please, this looks like it's supposed to be read, but try to make

sense of those topics in red. The websites are inaccessible for

almost everybody. We're interested in principles of universal design

and principles of universal design, which says when you're designing

information and products you should be thinking about all users and

it's sometimes said indeed you should be designing from the edge

in. So thinking about the users who sometimes are excluded from

having their experience heard and understood. Think about their

experience with using information or products and then the product

and the information is going to work better for everybody.

JULIE McCROSSIN: And you want focus group testing, don't you?

DR JEANNIE PATERSON: We're doing this. So the other principle of

universal design is to talk to the people affected. Instead of making

assumptions about what people need and what information would be

useful for them you actually talk to those people about what their

experiences are. Go off, develop prototypes and go back and test it

with the people who you're trying to design for.

JULIE McCROSSIN: I have three people whom I consider friends

whom I visit regularly, by that I mean at least once a fortnight. Two

are over 90 and one is 100. When we talk about cognitive disability

or cognitive impact it's soon going to be a very significant proportion

of the population. Oddly enough, people who've probably got

money.

DR JEANNIE PATERSON: That's an important point. Often

consumer law, for example, thinks about people who are vulnerable

and people who are not vulnerable. Where, in fact, most people are

existing on a spectrum and there's points in time and in certain

transactions that everybody is vulnerable, but more importantly,

everybody can be able. Everybody can make decisions, everybody

has capacity to make decisions if they're given the right support to

do that and that's really what our project was about. It's about

thinking about the right support and the right information strategies

so that everybody can make these decisions about important, these

important decisions about technology.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Can you just give us two or three examples of

ideas that have come forward so far that you think are useful?

DR JEANNIE PATERSON: Well, one of the things we're looking at is

the scripts for sales processes so when you're having online sales or

the chat box sales which is to slow down the sales process, because

often the sales process is actually designed to rush people as fast as

possible to reduce the opportunities for decision making. One thing

is to slow down that process and actually let consumers know it's

okay to take your time and it's okay to go away and think about it

and another strategy we have is to think about decluttering the

information. So if you go back to the second slide if that's

possible - can we go back? - the second slide was a thing -

JULIE McCROSSIN: Peter, can you go back one slide?

DR JEANNIE PATERSON: That's a critical summary, a document

mandated by law to be provided to consumers and as you can see,

not particularly useful. In a digital space we should be able to make

use of everything offered by digital technology to make these sorts

of documents not text-based and linear, but visual and able to be

navigated.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Look, my job is to keep people to time so

I have to stop, but she's absolutely gripping. Get a law degree now!

Give her a round of applause please. (APPLAUSE) What did you just

whisper to me?

DR JEANNIE PATERSON: My husband has a classics degree.

JULIE McCROSSIN: That's fantastic. Keep Latin alive! I've been an

activist in a range of ways during my life, but the first letter I wrote

and had published in the 'Sydney Morning Herald' was advocating

for the study of Latin. Can you believe it? Do I seem that nerdy to

you? Anyway, I have more I could reveal, but I'll keep a grip on

myself.