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## Web Roundup: Accessing Assistive Technology

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By Emily Goldsher-Diamond

This month, a brief look at some new initiatives meant to erode many different barriers to access when it comes to assistive technology for people with disabilities. There exists a tendency for popular media to approach innovation in assistive technology with the kind of techno-optimism pervasive in writing about consumer technology, where the stakes are arguably lower and motivations are clearer. It is one thing to make an iPhone, for example, more responsive or with a longer battery life, in order to sell more phones; it is an entirely different endeavor when advancements in assistive technology are introduced, as they engage not only market concerns, but also health, policy and economy in complex ways.

[Reuters released a video](#) about a new prosthetic arm in Argentina that is available for a much lower price (approximately 50% less) than most nerve responsive arm prostheses. This is especially significant, as this type of prosthesis is not covered by insurance in Argentina, and developers hope its low price point might encourage a shift in policy. [Animal New York reports](#) on young inventor Easton LaChapelle's use of 3D-printing to produce a "brain-powered prosthetic arm" for *only* \$250. The [accompanying video by Uproxx](#) goes into LaChapelle's mission and design process.

[Just as 3D-printing appears to be changing the organ transfer landscape](#), so too does it seem to be gaining ground in the prosthetic sector. Companies and innovators like [Open Bionics](#), [Pink Perfect](#), [TeVido](#), [BioDevices](#) and [William Root](#) are all using 3D-printing techniques to produce more affordable prostheses. By making the technology more affordable, they are making their work—much of it not just dynamic and technically sound, but artful—more accessible to users previously restricted to the prostheses covered by insurance companies or what they can afford out of pocket. On top of price concerns, 3D-printing requires less time and labor, meaning that more can be produced for more users. [Much remains in the way of these designs gaining ground over more common models, generally in the way of funding and distribution](#), but perhaps these lower-cost options can help erode the current high-cost/high barrier to entry environment.

Another democratizing move in the area of assistive technology comes from the adaptation of open source principles in universal technology design. [Mitsubishi recently awarded the United Cerebral Palsy \(UCP\) Life Labs initiative significant funding](#) to increase and develop universal and open source design. Life Labs has partnered with iTunes U, a collaboration meant to introduce the principles of universal design in education, including K-12 and university settings. [Hackaday blogs about a design team offering plans for an open source haptic robotic arm](#), a promising technology for people with mobility impairments. With the open source model, individual users and makers can build and modify the arm to their particular specifications. This is certainly a shift from the tightly controlled copyright model, where designs are both protected by patent law and subsequently slow and difficult to evolve.

Finally, it is worth asking whether the crowdfunding model (of sites like Kickstarter and Indiegogo) can be considered crucial to lowering barriers to access when it comes to assistive technologies. A quick search through [Kickstarter](#) reveals that [many projects are made by and for people with disabilities](#). When funding is relocated to the maker, to the imagination and will of the designers, dreamers and innovators, agency is also shifted to spaces that are considerably more plastic, if not more democratic and accessible.

*More Links of Interest:*

[“Science for the People”](#) – Mosaic

[“Military Life”](#) – AnthropologyNews

[“Global Health Doesn’t Exist”](#) – Limn

[“Why The Theory of Everything is a Disappointing Depiction of Disability”](#) – Slate

[“Netflix’s Secret Special Algorithm is a Human”](#) – the New Yorker

[“Humans & Nature Can Co-Exist in “Cyborg” Ecosystems”](#) – Nautilus

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