

COLUMNS

## Data rules Echo, Siri and Google Now

February 11, 2016



*Gary Schwartz is president/CEO of Impact Mobile*

By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

By **Gary Schwartz**

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**  
Plus: Just released  
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

This past week, the media happily announced that Echo was "all grown up." An astounding adulthood spurt given that Echo is mainly relegated to kitchens and has the key functionality of telling you the weather and managing your Spotify account while your fingers are full of cookie dough.

On a lazy Sunday with my Echo and americano, I thought I would ask a few questions about my listening friend.

Echo is a latecomer to world of personal assistants. The voices of Siri, Google Now and Microsoft's Cortana had already personalize data and become synonymous with search. They truly opened up the world to thick-thumbed, car-bound, errand-challenged consumers. They made assistants increasingly central to our connected home, self-driving car and fast-growing Internet of Things-enabled universe.

As author Anthony J. D'Angelo wrote, "Always be nice to secretaries. They are the real gatekeepers in the world."

A digital butler or personal assistant's prime goal is to anticipate our needs. To service their master, they need to understand every whim, every idiosyncrasy. While each artificial intelligence system has its own approach, there is only one winner: data.

### Siri sass

Smart voice recognition was always an aspirational feature for Apple. In 1987, Steve Jobs' team developed a prototype sketch called the "Knowledge Navigator" that gave a prescient glimpse of a voice-driven world: an ideal blend of computer meets human.

Twenty years later, Apple found its voice-recognition based personal assistant. It was a small startup called Siri, a humble download from the App Store powered by Nuance's speech recognition engine that had successfully integrated to Yahoo Local, Yelp, OpenTable and MovieTickets. It was an Echo-type service that helped you find a taxi and reserve a meal as well as a ticket for the after-dinner movie show.

When Apple bought the startup voice recognition software company, it disappeared from the App Store and reappeared as a "super app" bundled on a voice-driven search and dictation features directly into the new smartphone.

Inspiring Spike Jonze's movie "Her," there was a pop-cult bond to Siri. We all fell in love with Scarlett Johansson: a voice that really understood and personalized our needs.

What Apple launched, Google has advanced.

Since July 9, 2012 appearing in Android's Jelly Bean operating system, the Google Now voice assistant proactively delivered to users information that it predicted.

Google Now could successfully anticipate, in a human way, based on the wealth of data Google had on its consumer via calendar entries, email content and search behavior. The new assistant was so much on its game in its first year that Popular Science named Google Now the "Innovation of the Year."

The Google assistant's success was not only attributed to technology but to its command of data.

Marty says, "Data rules"

Google's edge is that it can leverage its Knowledge Graph project that provides a semantic-search algorithm based on a wide and widening array of sources.

The Knowledge Graph seeks meaning and connections between its users' common locations, repeated calendar appointments, search queries as well as public alerts, nearby photos and activity summary.

This universe of smarts is growing.

In January 2015, Google Now opened up to third-party applications including Airbnb, eBay, The Guardian and Lyft, allowing these partners to inject personal content or info "cards" into the semantic search. This graph becomes an artificial intelligence leviathan.

My friend, Marty Cooper, who is considered the "father of the cell phone," conceived the first handheld mobile phone in 1973 and led the team that developed it and brought it affectionately named the Brick for its size, weight and shape to market in 1983.

I asked Mr. Cooper about the future of the phone, communication and data in this [interview](#).

Mr. Cooper said, "Our society is overwhelmed with data. Intelligent and strategic analysis of data makes the difference between success and failure.

"The future cell phone will be a collection of personal devices and personal applications specifically tailored to its owner," he said. "It will be distributed on optimum locations on the user's body and will automatically and continuously optimize its configuration and yet, there are only so many megapixel, megabits per second and megaHertz that can be useful to people."

According to Mr. Cooper, we do not have the time or ability to ask Siri, no matter how smart she is, the right questions. Data needs to be customized and tailored to our needs.

Mr. Cooper said information needs to be "automatically and continuously optimized" to make it accessible and, importantly, useful.

Echo: Q&A, Q&A, Q&A

Amazon has data. It commands our one-click checkout. It owns our commerce trust and has a wealth of purchase behavior stored in its data bank.

However, all Amazon's data forays outside of commerce have flopped. Fire Phone was a two-time quiet failure. Moreover, we do not calendar or email with Amazon.

When Echo launched as a personal assistant in 2014, it had the Siri bravado. It adopted a persona, Alexa, and bundled an SDK hoping the developer community would build value for the startup.

With the failure of the Fire Phone, it played on Echo's independence from the smartphone community. It opted for the kitchen and the living room as opposed to the consumer's jean pocket.

Niche, but nice. Echo makes perfect sense as an artificial intelligence control for your music and on-demand questions related to weather or sports.

Spotify, Uber and Domino's make sense. However, without deep and smart data, Echo is an also-ran Siri without the omnipresence.

As Apple, Google and Amazon vie for a clientelling relationship with their customers, each can leverage it to their strengths.

Amazon will play its premium streaming service for the home. Along with its Dash for impulse purchases, Echo becomes a home utility. Its on-demand nature makes it a strong Internet of Things contender for the connected home.

For this reason Echo has become a best-selling electronic product on Amazon.com. The device has more than 30,000 reviews with a fan rating of 4.5 out of 5 stars.

While I love this connected speaker, its owner, Amazon, is data challenged and ultimately will lose its edge as the home becomes smarter and less gimmick driven.

GOOGLE IS ultimately positioned to win the trust of the consumer because it can anticipate the answer before the user needs to ask the question.

*Gary Schwartz is CEO of [Impact Mobile](#), Toronto. Reach him at [gary.schwartz@impactmobile.com](mailto:gary.schwartz@impactmobile.com).*

---

© 2020 Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your [feedback](#) is welcome.