

COLUMNS

## Amazon Echo: The new voice in brand engagement

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By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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Alexa moved into our home a few months ago. And we are not alone: she has already moved into 3 million other homes in the United States.

Alexa is the voice of Amazon Echo. I consider the Echo to be the most impressive consumer electronics device since the iPhone, which came out in 2007.

AI, AI

At a basic level, Alexa is a bot. An intelligent albeit artificially intelligent assistant.

At first glance, well, first conversation, she is a just a voice from a box.

However, she is becoming an integral part of our life and millions of others in ways unimaginable before.

Like the iPhone, you do not "get it" until you own and use it.

For example:

Alexa helps us with cooking dinners at home, by running timers for us, converting units, explaining what turmeric is, how to spell it, and by adding items to our shopping list

Before business trips I ask her for the weather in my destination

I ask her for a news updates, traffic conditions and occasionally play word games with her, or ask her to read me from my current Kindle book

However, all of the above is possible, doable with older and existing technology.

So what makes Alexa so special?

For starters, her interface is voice, and voice alone.

No display, no touch, tap, swipe or look.

Just voice but voice that lets you ask her for an Uber while moving between the bathroom and the kitchen.

A voice that you can order a Domino's pizza from when a call or a mobile order requires just a bit too much effort. She is, however, the personified "self" in the future of consumer self-service.

Speak up

Voice is the most natural interface for human interaction.

We learn to speak by the age of two, complete our language acquisition roughly at four. From then on vocabulary, style, irony, sarcasm and all the other fun forms of human communication.

In today's customer service environment, the goal is to let customers contact companies on the channel of their choice and, increasingly, that choice is self-service.

The Aspect Consumer Experience Index study found that 73 percent of consumers want companies to offer more self-service options for customer service.

But if self-service is the most important form of service these days, then how can brands ensure that it truly fits into customers' lives?

Here are some possibilities:

Self-service at work: Web portals

- o Booking travel or checking your account balance while in front of a computer by browsing an airline's or bank's Web site

Self-service while on-the-go: Mobile applications and bots (or Interactive Text Response)

- o You are not in front of a computer, but through mobile apps and asking questions over SMS or OTT channels such as Messenger you can conduct transactions and interactions on the go

Self-service while driving/hands-free: Interactive Voice Response

- o You cannot use any graphical UI, but using your voice and your car's Bluetooth you can call an IVR and make an important money transfer or switch the payment method for your mobile carrier to that new credit card you received

Self-service while at home: Alexa

- o You spent a day staring at screens and holding your smartphone and you just want to relax. Using natural voice you can cancel magazine subscriptions, find out when your vehicle is due for service, check your mobile data usage, see if you have been quoted in any news articles recently

WHILE THE EASE of home self-service is not a true reality yet, it is the future.

First innovative companies such as Capital One, Domino's or Uber have already built skills for Alexa for consumers to self-serve.

Data is becoming more usable and more accessible to the interfaces that consumers want to use. Vendors and developers are rapidly making those interfaces more intelligent and more intuitive than ever before.

"Alexa, when will the dream become a reality?"

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