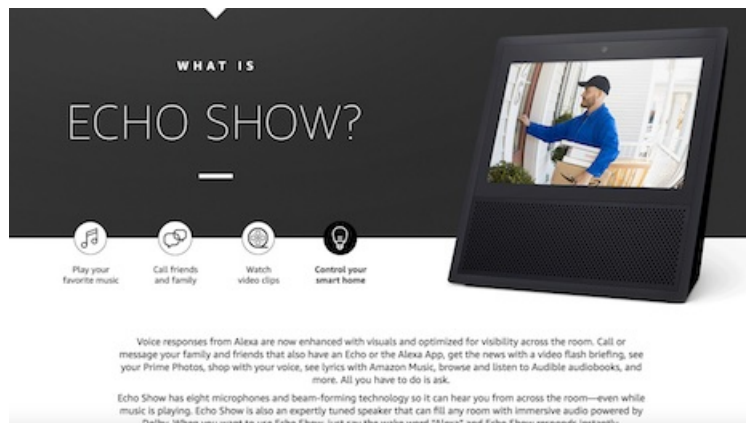


SOFTWARE AND TECHNOLOGY

Voice technology can inspire new consumer behavior

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Amazon Echo Show 2: You heard it here

By **Neil Cunningham**

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Luxury brands have recognized the opportunity in voice technology to make exclusivity more accessible to their consumers. But the real challenge lies in inspiring new customer behavior.

Voice is the new interface to the world.

From the Amazon Echo to the Apple HomePod and Google Essential Home, there is no question as to whether voice is applicable to the luxury world: it is.

We know that we will be increasingly interacting with content via voice. Not in all situations, but in quite a few.

Amazon has already reported a 10 percent growth between 2014 and 2016 across total search and **by 2023 the market is expected to grow five-fold.**

The fashion and luxury sectors have long been grappling with the dissonance between exclusivity and accessibility, with the digital revolution forcing brands to reassess their position thanks to the levelling effect of social media.

With the adoption of voice command inevitable for luxury, the focus for brands should shift from avoidance to creativity: how should we be thinking about using this new channel to encourage consumers to undertake the behavior that we, as brands, want?

Engaging in a new ecosystem

We know that voice is set to be huge.

L'Oreal expects 20 percent of total search to be done vocally in the next 18 months. Yet, when voice is part of an ecosystem where we get easier access to the things we want to know, we must not think about it in isolation.

We must be part of this ecosystem of new customer behavior, and carve out a set of behavior appropriate for luxury, just as Amazon has done by encouraging users to **use Alexa to search for music. There is an opportunity to train people as to what they can ask of luxury.**

Taking a step back, in essence, voice is about accessing information you want using your voice.

Currently, people are primarily using voice to either search or activate. It is used to find and to do very functional.

Voice is really powerful for simple actions such as "tell me the headline news story," "set a timer," or "play a song."

For the things that are part of our routine, voice is a wonderful innovation. It makes it easy to access things, and gives you back very tangible and useful advice.

Part of the change needed for luxury is to use voice in a way that provokes behavior that we want luxury brands to be associated with more discover, inspire, imagine, create, than open, find, get, locate.

We have not yet reached the point where voice can reflect what the luxury sector is really about.

Currently, if you ask Google to inspire you in the key passion areas that the luxury sector relies on, it is not good at aggregating that in real time. Therefore, in its current state, Google will not be able to reflect what luxury voice might need. This is an issue.

For the luxury sector, we can lead. Luxury is the most emotive sector. It is not just about access to information or adopting the newest fad. It is about anything to do with self-expression, and not just a traditional sense of news. That is where there is an opportunity.

We need to help people find new value around self-expression, and move away from actions such as "Siri, do this for me."

The question for marketers is, how do we use voice to allow people to express themselves and find value for brands to express all the new creative things that they are doing?

We are at the dawn of an age where we can inspire people in more fascinating and dynamic ways again.

Content became all about listicles and how-to's. We need to stop creating meaningless content and think about the actions and behavior we are trying to provoke.

Challenge in programming new behavior

The challenge now is to keep on top of customer behavior.

As we see voice emerge as a valuable behavior, we have to ask ourselves, what are people asking Alexa? Where do we see new behavior emerging? How can we add value to the experiences of these customers? What does the luxury sector train customers to do, sing, say, to add more value to those customers?

Whilst this may mean something different for every single brand, what is certain is that the technology will keep getting better, so the behavior we are going to be able to inspire is only set to get more accurate.

Put simply, it is likely that voice is going to be the next generation of search.

We are going to have to construct search strategies so that people are not only getting what they are looking for visually and aurally, but more importantly for luxury and fashion, that consumers get what they are not looking for.

You often do not know what you are searching for until you see it. Editorial has always operated in this way, and even now, its status is under threat. Consumers are crying out for creativity and inspiration instead of over-synthesised popularity pieces.

Voice of the future

In terms of the future, voice will only get bigger and simpler.

For luxury, the biggest untapped opportunity is in a command that allows you to be inspired.

There is not a voice command for "inspire" at the moment, or for things that are inspiring and interesting in real time. This is where luxury brands can play.

Current news feeds, search, and messaging do not satisfy the desire to be inspired that aspirational audiences crave.

Likewise, we do not just want another content idea for Instagram or for Twitter. We want one for how we just naturally think, how we speak, how we act, how we live.

IF WE CAN create new behavior for voice that adds to consumers' experience, then we will be onto something quite exciting.

For now, brands must focus on identifying what behavior they want their consumers to have with voice, so that when the technology develops, luxury will be poised to inspire audiences in a way that is currently unimaginable. From here, the future has never looked louder.



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