

TECH STRATEGIES

Rapid Rise of Voice

Our relationship to computers is profoundly shifting. Like Jean-Luc Picard in *Star Trek*, within a few short years most of us will primarily interact with technologies — smartphones, computers, smart home devices and our cars — by speaking to them. We are leaving the era of the GUI (graphical user interface) and entering the era of the AUI (audio user interface).

As of October 2017, 20 percent of all Google searches were voice searches and by 2020 that could rise to 50 percent according to ComScore. That means that there will be 600 billion Google voice searches in 2020.

This shift is being driven by a number of converging trends: the ubiquity of smartphones, the exponential increase in computational power, improvements of voice recognition and the rise of artificial intelligence (AI). Voice recognition has reached a tipping point by achieving human-level accuracy in speech recognition.

Amazon Echo and Digital Assistants

Amazon's Echo is a "smart speaker." Along with its AI named Alexa it has hit prime time. (Alexa is named after the ancient library of Alexandria.) The market has exploded in 2017 with roughly 35 million Americans now

owning a voice-activated assistant device. Amazon Alexa allows you to stream music, get breaking news, control your smart home and order an Uber or a pizza. Google also announced that it has already integrated a range of third-party services into Google Home, including OpenTable, WhatsApp and Ticketmaster.

With 70 percent market share, Amazon is by far the dominant player in this space. Some 44 percent of the 225 million U.S. smartphones have a personal assistant application that was used at least once a month according to Verto Analytics. The amount of time spent using these apps is relatively small but growing. Increasingly, people are using voice to dictate texts and answer questions with chatbots.

Your voice-enabled digital assistant on your smartphone can book

appointments, buy products, and even create and read a daily custom news highlight for you. In the near term it will also warn you of a service light on your furnace, when your tire pressure is low, and when you need to buy more milk. It will integrate with every smart internet-enabled device that you own. What people and companies imagine that digital assistants can do for us is mirrored by the explosive growth in the number of Alexa skills.

A skill is an application. So you can enable a cooking skill to read recipes to you in the kitchen while you cook. And there are commercial skills — Domino's Pizza has one to allow you to order — you guessed it — a pizza.

Amazon has been offering Alexa-only shopping deals to get customers comfortable with shopping by voice. Why would that be? Well, when I shop on my desktop I can have multiple browsers and windows open to price compare items. But when I shop by voice there's no screen and no comparison. So Amazon wants us to get addicted to the new medium to make the market.

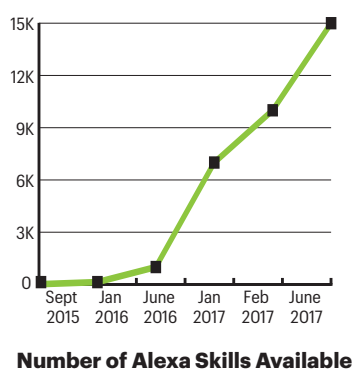
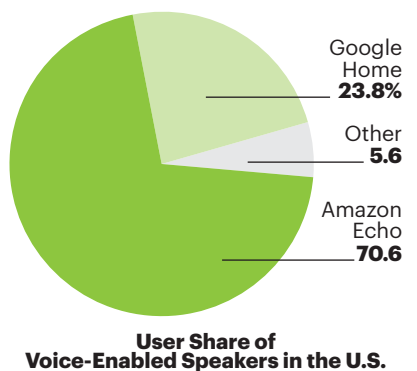
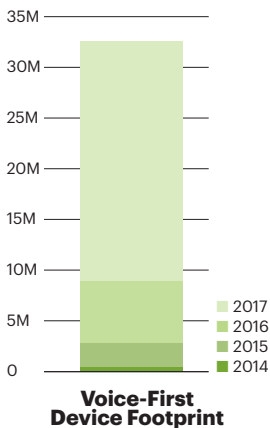
This is the natural evolution of computing and there are profound implications for companies, brands and marketers. We have entered the era of voice. ■

Jim Harris is the author of Blindsided. Follow him on Twitter @JimHarris.



Voice Recognition: By the Numbers

From footprint to market share and AI tech enhancements, the trend is clear.



SOURCES: VoiceLabs analysis combined with research from CIRQ, KPCB, and InfoScout. eMarketer. KPCB, TechCrunch, Wired.