



**ATOMIC 212°**

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THE FUTURE OF  
**VOICE TECHNOLOGY.**

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## 1

## CHAPTER ONE:

## AN INDUSTRY IN FLUX.

**INTRODUCTION: WHERE TO FROM HERE?**

AI-driven voice technology is set to fundamentally change the way brands communicate with their audiences and transform customer expectations.

Add the fact that voice is one of the most significant modes of human communication and interaction with the world around them. We learn to speak long before we learn to type, and even a newborn has a pretty good grasp of the power of their voice. In short, brands that ignore this technology do so at their peril.

Of course, it's nigh on impossible to predict precisely how voice will shift consumer expectations.

As Roy Amara famously put it, in what has become known as Amara's Law, "We tend to overestimate the effect of a technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run."

However, one prediction can be made with certainty: Voice search and AI are set to alter the very fabric of marketing and communications. Players like Google, Apple, Microsoft and Amazon have already flooded the market with voice products, and this trend is set to intensify in the years to come.

- Comscore estimate that by 2020, 50% of online searches will be by voice;<sup>1</sup>
- Ovum made the prediction that by 2021, there will be more digital assistants than humans on the planet.<sup>2</sup>

AI is not new – as early as 1950 Alan Turing proposed his famous Turing Test regarding the ability of machines to display human intelligence – but by bringing this terminology into perspective, particularly voice-based machine learning, we can begin to understand what implications it will have for the brands of the future.

It doesn't matter if you're working in Silicon Valley, you're a student or if you're a taxi driver – these technologies will change the way every business and consumer operates on a day-to-day basis.

And innovations within this sphere are already signaling what future customer expectations could hold.

**SUCCESS IS STEEPED IN SIMPLICITY**

Consumer relationships with technology have developed significantly over the past 50 years and it has become clear that the key to success is simplification.

Computers used to be the size of an entire room, cost a fortune to own and run, and were therefore only used by a select few. Now, computers live in our pockets, and can be operated by everyone from toddlers to their great grandparents.

Advancements in speech recognition have increased our ability to communicate with technology, while typing has been surpassed by a mode of communication that is both emotional and far simpler in its application.

## TURNING SCIENCE-FICTION INTO THE EVERYDAY AVERAGE

As with so many of the advances we've seen over the past 20 or so years, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft and Google are at the forefront of the voice revolution.

Google has led the way in changing task-based behaviours online, making the seemingly impossible not only possible, but downright mundane!

In the past few years, it has become commonplace to ask Siri where the closest shopping centres are, which restaurants have the best reviews and what is the quickest way to drive to your friend's house.

Of course, it hasn't all been smooth sailing. For example, Google Duplex's voice platform was hailed as a revolutionary development which could place calls for consumers in a human-sounding voice and book appointments. While it was initially a flop, Google's promise is that the technology will be rolled out across devices in select regions of North America toward the end of 2018, and further afield in 2019.

However, AI-driven voice technology is progressing in leaps and bounds, and the likes of Siri, Cortana, Alexa and Google Assistant are making their way into the homes and pockets of most consumers. Less than a decade ago, this was the stuff of a Philip K. Dick fever dream.

As AI-driven voice technology progresses, it will revolutionise the consumer experience and consumer expectations in two ways:

1. Assistants will have an increased ability to perform task-specific behaviour that will outperform humans and change expectations.
2. Assistants will have the ability to adapt to human emotions, based on previous learnings, which will only improve over time.

These two avenues should be seen as the roadmap for agencies and brands.

## "BUT I DON'T EVEN USE SEARCH!"

For the voice sceptics, you're not some strange outlier.

Voice is trumpeted as being phenomenally successful at the moment, with computer-based comprehension accuracy rates in the 90% range.

But, as then-chief scientist at Baidu, Andrew Ng, put it in 2015, this is still a frustrating level of error. To provide a level of context, Baidu is a Chinese multinational technology company specialising in AI.

"Speech recognition, depending on the circumstances, is say 95% accurate. So maybe it gets one word in 20 wrong. That's really annoying if it gets one in 20 wrong and you probably don't want to use it very often. That's probably where speech recognition is today," Ng said at an event in Sydney.

"I think that as speech recognition accuracy goes from say 95% to 98%, 99% to 99.9%, all of us in the room will go from barely using it today or infrequently to using it all the time.

"Most people underestimate the difference between 95% and 99% accuracy – 99% is a game changer."<sup>3</sup>

In short, Rome wasn't built in a day – so don't mistake your general frustration with Siri as meaning you don't need to prepare for a voice-heavy future.



**WHERE ARE WE, HERE AND NOW?**

Currently, voice technology is individual and needs-based, rather than used on a mass scale.

In the future, the use of voice technology will be skewed towards private spaces, particularly the home, where routine-based tasks can be performed.

Because of this, the two current leaders are both domesticated products - Amazon Echo and Google Home, with Apple doing a decent job of catching up.

As this trio fight it out to establish the preferred consumer machine learning platform, their respective assistants - Alexa for Amazon, Google Assistant and Siri for Apple - will change the way brands connect with their customers.

They will become the go-to channel for information, goods and services, and as a result, the battle of brands to win over attention will come in the form of voice.

**WE'LL GET THERE!**

In their paper 'Speak Easy', J. Walter Thompson Innovation Group London and Mindshare Futures investigated the brain's response to voice interactions as opposed to text. They found that "voice, as the oldest form of human communication, is inherently more intuitive and comfortable".<sup>4</sup>

"Using voice to buy products is currently in its infancy: only 18% of regular voice users have bought a product purely using voice 'without looking on a website first'. Slightly more (24%) have bought a product by voice 'having browsed for it elsewhere'."<sup>5</sup>

There is a huge difference between what we presently have, and what is theoretically possible. While initial experiences for some users have been underwhelming, the AI platform and machine learning will gain momentum as technology advances.

**41%** OF PEOPLE USE VOICE TECHNOLOGY WHEN THEY ARE "FEELING LAZY".<sup>6</sup>

# 2

CHAPTER TWO:

## THE GATEKEEPERS OF VOICE AND AI.

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Who is leading the charge? Amazon and Google are the present market leaders, with Apple making inroads, while a little company by the name of Microsoft can never be discounted.



PLAYER ONE

## AMAZON & ALEXA.

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Amazon was one of the early players in the smart speaker market, with recent reports suggesting the company has sold over 50 million of its Echo units since it came to market in late 2014.<sup>7</sup>

Amazon was forecast to generate \$3.8 billion in worldwide ad revenue in 2018, but the company's first quarter earnings report suggested that its ad business already exceeded \$2 billion in that segment.<sup>8</sup>

Amazon and Alexa are a brilliant fit. When it comes to low value items like groceries – where the user is happy for Amazon to choose the product – Alexa simply purchases Amazon generic brands.

For example if you ask Amazon to buy batteries without any further specifications, Alexa will choose the "Amazon Basics" brand.

Of course, as audiences become more accustomed to purchasing via voice and as they build preferences for specific platforms (namely those platforms with the largest one-stop shop), so too will their trust build in Alexa to know specific preferences.

Alexa also offers a range of 'Skills', which allow brands to integrate their offerings into consumers' everyday lives.



#### A PARTNERSHIP MADE IN HEAVEN - MARRIOTT AND AMAZON

Marriott and Amazon launched Alexa for Hospitality in the US in June 2018.

It enables hospitality partners to customise their system to include specifics based on their business, such as personalised checkout times and functions that allow their guests to request room service.

In-room functions such as air conditioning can also be controlled, while consumers can contact third-party apps.

#### TIDE STAIN REMOVAL SKILL AS CONTENT MARKETING

The Tide Stain Removal skill provides users with detailed voice instructions on stain removal, thus establishing goodwill for the company.

At the time of writing, the skill had a 3.3-star rating from 26 consumers – largely positive. As for the not-so-great responses, the bulk of them say the skill plays commercials, which make potential customers lose interest.

This raises an obvious question: Are ads a roadblock to voice/brand penetration?

Seamless integration  
with your services



## PLAYER TWO

## GOOGLE &amp; GOOGLE ASSISTANT.

Launched in May 2016, Google's smart speaker offering, Google Home, is gaining on Echo, having outsold the Amazon offering in the first quarter of 2018.<sup>9</sup>

In May 2018, Google introduced Google Duplex, which the company describes as "a new technology for conducting natural conversations to carry out 'real world' tasks over the phone".

As Google explained on the company blog, "Duplex's conversations sound natural thanks to advances in understanding, interacting, timing, and speaking."<sup>10</sup>

In concert with Google Assistant, Duplex will increase access over the phone, with the aim of allowing technologies to seamlessly interact with humans in typical communication styles. Google believes this will contribute to "meaningful improvement in people's experience in day-to-day interactions with computers".<sup>11</sup>

Above and beyond Google's direct artificial assistance via Home and Pixel Mobile – which will soon include Duplex – is its almighty search engines, Google Search and YouTube, both of which have had degrees of voice search included since 2009.



#### JOINING FORCES - SUN LIFE AND GOOGLE HOME

Sun Life Assurance Company announced its new digital assistant "Ella" in partnership with Google Home in September 2017.

Ella currently responds to basic commands but is expected to develop over time, to allow for increased personalisation and one-to-one customer experiences.

"Ella is just a baby now, but she's going to be our digital coach for platforms like mobile, web, Alexa, and Google Home," said Alice Thomas, Sun Life's chief digital technology officer.

"These interfaces need a human personality. Apple's got Siri as its human interface, and we've got Ella."<sup>12</sup>

#### "WHAT IS A WHOPPER BURGER?"

Creepy? Or effective marketing? In 2017, a Burger King TV ad hijacked Google when the TVC voiceover said: "You're watching a 15" Burger King ad, which is unfortunately not enough time to explain all the fresh ingredients in the Whopper Sandwich. But I got an idea, 'Okay Google, what is a Whopper Burger?'" These words activated the Google Home, which proceeded to list the ingredients in a Whopper.

What can I help you with?

PLAYER THREE

## APPLE & SIRI.

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After Siri's debut in 2011, the demand for virtual digital assistants exploded. With a better reputation for quality and sound, experts have hailed Apple as one of the true pioneers in voice technology.

While they are best known for their phones, watches, computers and tablets – all of which have Siri integration – their more recent addition, HomePod, was a response to Echo and Google Home.

Significantly, Apple has scored a major win using voice technology in the public sphere: AirPods. The voice-responsive headphones allow voice interactions to be semi-private by concealing responses.

Apple is also focusing on language options, data and privacy as their priorities.



PLAYER FOUR

## MICROSOFT & CORTANA.

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Microsoft's virtual assistant is Cortana – named after the artificially intelligent character from the company's wildly successful gaming franchise, Halo.

Cortana, which was released in April 2014, works across Windows platforms, but currently lacks a strong mobile platform. Users can also communicate with Cortana via typing as well, through the company's search engine, Bing.



### WHAT WILL THE FUTURE BRING FOR THE BEHEMOTHS OF VOICE?

As AI develops further, consumers will become increasingly reliant on their digital assistant, particularly as they become more integrated into homes, cars and mobile devices. As they gather and deliver tailored products and services, assistants are expected to become a “digital butler”.<sup>13</sup>

As such, beyond the obvious efficiencies of speaking over typing, there are expectations for voice technology to develop into an advisor that consumers not only rely upon, but trust.

In order to get there, the companies at the helm of voice need to keep their eye on the ball, not just each other.

As to which of these companies is ‘winning’ voice technology, really all we can say is that the fight is on!

### BATTLE LINES DRAWN: WHO WILL EMERGE VICTORIOUS?

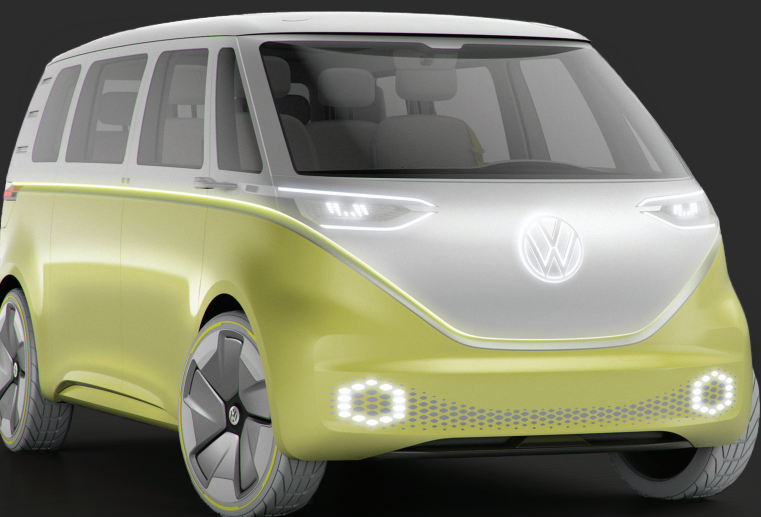
Central to ‘winning’ the voice market will be developing a system that operates across multiple devices, and has cross-platform compatibility.

Multiple elements – like visual, scent and perhaps even learned emotion – will also need to be incorporated.

It’s probably fair to say Amazon are in the lead at the moment, but with Google claiming to be fused with over 400 million devices around the world via partnerships with Sony, Kia, Jaybird and others, it is likely that the battle for supremacy is just beginning.

Really though, no AI assistant has nailed every aspect – picking and choosing a little bit from each would make for a wonderful digital butler – and that makes it nigh-on impossible to predict who will win.

Choice and collaboration are going to be at the core of success, and with Cortana and Amazon working together to create synergies, they are certainly worth keeping an eye on.



### VOICE HITS THE ROAD

The car is set to be a key platform for voice technology, with the likes of Hyundai and Volkswagen investing significantly in machine learning – particularly in Alexa.

## 3

## CHAPTER THREE:

**BUILDING TRUST, RESPECTING  
PRIVACY & THE USER EXPERIENCE.**

As voice search becomes the norm, three interrelated issues will become increasingly important: privacy, trust and the user experience.

**THE PROBLEM OF PRIVACY**

Personalisation and performance are critical, but in today's digital age, privacy is paramount. As if the likes of Edward Snowden and Julian Assange hadn't highlighted this issue enough, the Cambridge Analytica scandal in early 2018 rammed home the critical importance of data privacy.

In J. Walter Thompson and Mindshare's studies, 44% of those who use "listening" devices regularly agreed to the statement, "I am worried about companies listening to the conversations I have with my voice assistant."<sup>14</sup>

With this in mind, privacy settings, offline mode and ultimately the power to decide what you are willing to share are just some of the potential extensions.

However, a perception of an unmuzzled AI being some kind of malicious, pseudo-SkyNet that is ignoring our privacy, is wide off the mark.

**FACEBOOK'S FAIRNESS FLOW**

Increasingly, people expect tech platforms to act ethically, in a manner that is above reproach. For instance, in May 2018, at Facebook's F8 developer conference, the company announced it was training up an AI system called Fairness Flow, which is aimed at detecting bias in its algorithms.

Bias against gender, race and age are the key identifiers, with the initial focus being on the company's employment algorithm.

"We wanted to ensure job recommendations weren't biased against some groups over others," research scientist Isabel Kloumann said at the event.<sup>15</sup>

**YOU SHALL NOT PASS!**

While we all like to wheel out an impersonation or two from time to time – queue everyone's Ian McKellen as Gandalf impersonation – the reality is that an individual's voiceprint is as unique as their fingerprints.

So, much like your phone's ability to recognise your thumb or face, our levels of digital access are already in some cases determined by our vocal chords. As this becomes more commonplace, you won't have to remember a password, just be able to talk, and your device will analyse the frequency, modulation, timbre and a multitude of other aspects to identify your voice as distinctly yours.

Of course, the fact the BBC demonstrated that it could beat the HSBC's voice recognition security system in May of 2017 shows that voice-based security systems still require some fine tuning.

### BALANCING PROFITS AND PEOPLE

While consumers are always after a more convenient experience, they also don't want to cop the hard sell from the digital device that lives on their kitchen benchtop.

If your digital assistant buys Amazon-branded goods every time, it won't take long for consumers to realise they haven't bought a digital butler, they've just paid for the privilege of having Jeff Bezos' stooge take up counter space.

So establishing a happy equilibrium between providing consumers with a happy outcome while also managing brand placement needs to be at the forefront of considerations.

That said, provided companies are transparent, consumers will generally make allowances. If they are aware that the device in their home is designed to sell them products, but they also get a discount on those products, that becomes a choice they can make.

J. Walter Thompson and Mindshare found that 63% of voice users agreed to the line, "I don't mind if Google or Amazon take a commission from a purchase made by voice as long as the deal is good for me."<sup>16</sup>

### ACCURACY BUILDS TRUST

The best AI assistants of the future, and certainly the most trusted, will be those that are almost unnoticeable.

If you ask your device to buy you a bottle of shampoo and the wrong brand turns up, you'll be disappointed. But if it's exactly what you expected, you're probably not going to have an opinion either way – the thing you expected to happen is what occurred.

That is why developing trust in your AI will be so important.

In that vein, having to sit through an ad just to find out what the weather's going to be like today isn't going to sit well.

However, as a voice-enabled device learns more about consumers and their preferences, it should be able to deliver the kind of offers and deals that are relevant to the consumer's life.

It's not that ads are going to ruin the voice experience. Instead, they simply need to be the right ads. And, particularly when it's an ad served to someone making a voice query, it will need to be written in a conversational tone – one that *feels* organic and doesn't *feel* like an advertisement.

### BUILDING TRUST IN A POST-SEO WORLD

Search engine optimisation does pretty much what it says on the tin, and brands obviously want their online presence to be optimised to answer the questions most relevant to what they do.

Once upon a time, this meant trying to appease Google, rather than the user. But Google has become far more intelligent in its assessment of websites and deliverance of results based on relevance and quality, opposed to 'which brand's geek can trick the algorithm better'.

As a result, the previous chasm between optimising for the engine and optimising for the user has grown narrower, almost to the point of intersection - that means the concept of SEO is likely to be retired, as we instead focus on search user optimisation (SUO).

## A WORLD WITH ANSWERS, BUT NO QUESTIONS?

Search engines are ubiquitous, to the point that 'Google' has been a verb in the Oxford English Dictionary since 2006.

Yet the advances we are seeing could lead to search engines becoming obsolete.

We are getting to a point where the prospect of a bionic device within your body that allows screen-based results to appear organically at the moment of thought isn't a ridiculous concept.

And if (when?) we get there, the need to speak – let alone type – to get what you are looking for will be null and void.

This is when SUO will be at its most pure, rendering the agent that once provided the service of 'search' result irrelevant.

### WHEN ZERO IS MORE THAN ONE

In the world of voice search, Position 0 is number one.

Position 0 – the Google search engine's featured snippet – pops up when a question is asked that can be answered by pulling a succinct answer or extract from a website on the first page of results.

It means the user gets the info they're after without having to go to an external website and look for it there.

And that is the best way to get an answer to a voice search query.

Importantly, while the snippet that forms Position 0 will be pulled from a website that appears on Page 1, it doesn't need to be at Position 1 for the particular query. So, with 0 set to be worth more than 1 in our voice-heavy future, snippet-friendly answers are going to increasingly be the most valuable real estate in the SERPs. It will all come back to understanding how your target audience speaks – how do they search vocally in comparison to text. Once again, understanding the user is key.

## 4

## CHAPTER FOUR:

# THE VOICE-ENABLED AGENCY OF THE FUTURE.

Voice is already shifting the way brands do business. This will only become more evident as our cars and TVs grow ever more intelligent. And these are considerations of which agencies need to be cognisant.

However, voice is also a harbinger of the massive changes that AI is going to force upon agencies.

When you consider the billions of calculations a computer is capable of making in the course of a single hour, it is inevitable that AI will have a huge role to play in agencies – our point of reference, creativity and media strategy are set to undergo fundamental shifts.

That's not to say the agency of the future is just a database, though.

Rather, where repetitive tasks and those that are prone to human error are likely to be taken up by AI, direction and vision for execution will be the focus for those of us with a heartbeat.

These are issues where voice is going to require a human guiding hand, which is where the full-service agency holds a distinct advantage.

A company can offer a voice option, but how are they going to ensure that the voice is representative of their brand? Discovering audience-specific insights, producing creative that appeals to it via voice, and then delivering it on a platform that reaches the right people is a gig that's beyond the world's best computers.

But it's exactly what a smart, forward-thinking full-service agency delivers.

**A PERSPECTIVE: ANGUS BOWER,  
SEO DIRECTOR AT ATOMIC212°**

"We foresee a specialist agency that transforms a brand's online presence through technology that enables users to digitally interact via their own voice.

"The value of voice search is only in the strength of the search engines providing results, whether that is Google with Home, Bing with Siri or Amazon with Echo.

"However, this is not where a user journey ends – it is where it begins. If companies want to take full advantage of voice search, they need to assist users into a new level of interaction with their brand, not just by haphazardly navigating via clicks.

"Just as customer service utilises voice interaction to get users to the right information, companies must start implementing voice abilities that allow users to research their websites and complete actions in the most organic fashion."

### HOW CAN AGENCIES GET AHEAD OF THE PACK?

Despite evolutions in technologies and methods, agencies have always helped their clients with three core tasks: winning new customers, providing customers with a product or service, and keeping those customers happy.

In a voice-driven future, agencies will still be performing the same tasks. But they need to be effectively tapping into new technologies to do so.

## 1.

### FINDING THE RIGHT CUSTOMER WITH VOICE TECHNOLOGY

With each AI platform to pack its own algorithm, we are facing a series of increasingly complicated paths to finding the right customers.

As such, a new consideration for agencies when developing media budgets will be the cost of gaining top search positions, as well as the commission required to reimburse the platform that gets brands the sale.

Media buyers who are trading via AI platforms will need to show actual customer results, with transactions and proof of purchase becoming incrementally linked.

“PLATFORMS WILL ANALYSE THAT DATA, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT PRODUCTS’ PRICING, CHARACTERISTICS, PAST PERFORMANCE, AND REVIEWS (WEIGHTED BY AUTHENTICITY AND RELEVANCE) AND THE CONSUMERS’ PREFERENCES AND PAST BEHAVIOUR. CUSTOMER ACQUISITION WILL BECOME EVEN MORE OF A SCIENCE AND WILL FOCUS ON A SINGLE CHANNEL—THE PLATFORM—RATHER THAN ON MULTIPLE CHANNELS.”

- Niraj Dawar, professor of marketing at the Ivey Business School<sup>17</sup>

## 2.

### DELIVERING THE RIGHT PRODUCT OR SERVICES VIA VOICE

The Shangri-la for AI and voice is to deliver recommendations better than we decide for ourselves – or, for that matter, beyond what we ever could have imagined.

And while that sounds like our device reading our minds, the reality is that by assessing our transactional data – think preferences across price, brands and interests – AI could predict what we want and organise for it to be delivered on the day we first realise it's what we'd like to have.

“HOW MUCH MORE WILL THEY PAY FOR A MORE HEALTHFUL PRODUCT? HOW MUCH ROOM IN A CAR WILL THEY SACRIFICE TO GET BETTER FUEL EFFICIENCY? AI PLATFORMS WILL EVEN KNOW WHETHER CONSUMERS ARE LIKELY TO ADAPT THEIR REQUIREMENTS IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS—FOR EXAMPLE, IF A PERSON ON A DIET WILL MAKE AN EXCEPTION FOR DESSERT WHEN CELEBRATING.”

- Niraj Dawar, professor of marketing at the Ivey Business School <sup>18</sup>

## 3.

### CREATING RETENTION AND LOYALTY WITH VOICE

How often have you bought the same everyday product – probably at the supermarket – simply because you couldn't be bothered to look at an alternative?

Obviously brand loyalty and preference play a part, but so does basic laziness. You've always bought Yoplait yoghurt, it does the job, why bother trying something different?

But voice search, with the grunt of AI behind it, will force the 'go to' brands to prove their position.

Take, for example, the prospect of wanting to shed a few kilos, and therefore looking to put the least amount of sugar possible on your morning cereal. You could spend time at the supermarket, assessing every brand of yoghurt to see which has the least sugar.

Or you could ask your digital butler to simply “Buy the yoghurt with the lowest sugar content.”

And it will be a two-way street – you don't always want to tell your 'butler' what to do, you want them to make the best decision for you, based on what they've ascertained from your previous requests.

Again, establishing trust will be paramount.

“THE SECRET TO COMPETITIVE DIFFERENTIATION—AND, HENCE, RETENTION—WILL BE CONSTANTLY DESIGNING OFFERS THAT MEET A CUSTOMER'S EVOLVING CRITERIA. FOR BRANDS, THIS WILL BECOME AS MUCH A FOCUS OF INNOVATION AS DEVELOPING A BETTER PRODUCTS IS.”

- Niraj Dawar, professor of marketing at the Ivey Business School<sup>19</sup>

## 5

## CHAPTER FIVE:

# THE VOICE-DRIVEN BRANDS OF TOMORROW.

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Voice is not just going to be a device-led change – the entire way we conduct our day-to-day transactions is set for a refresher.

Brands will adapt their products and services to be voice-enabled, via either an AI platform or through their own voice technology.

Take, for example, the prospect of in-store voice assistants: J. Walter Thompson and Mindshare Futures found that 38% of smartphone users want “a voice assistant that could communicate with the store (e.g. to help you navigate while there and help you find products more easily)”.<sup>20</sup>

Or consider the prospect of smart packaging, allowing consumers to interact with the product they’re interested in to find out key information. It will shift the very foundations of the way a company creates its products, being mindful of how they are viewed and consumed long before the point of purchase.

## SAME-SAME, BUT DIFFERENT

Ultimately, a machine is going to provide the voice for all tomorrow’s brands, which means finding a way to personalise content and give your brand a distinct voice will be of the utmost importance.

Take Microsoft’s Cortana. Aware that their core product was likely to be utilised by people who have an affinity with the brand, they made a point of hiring voice actress Jen Taylor – who voices the character of Cortana in the Halo franchise – to be the US voice of their assistant.

It was a clever piece of marketing that showed Microsoft understands its American audience and wants its voice offering to clearly ‘speak’ to these people.

Optics are always important, but we’re entering the age of the acoustics being of similar value.

“WHEN BRANDING FACELESS TECHNOLOGIES LIKE VOICE ASSISTANTS, MARKETERS RANKED TONE OF VOICE AS THE MOST IMPORTANT FEATURE TO CONSIDER...”

- Jennifer Harvey, VP of Branding and Communications at Bynder<sup>21</sup>

#### APPEASING THE VOICE OVERLORDS

While brands will always need to speak to their consumers, we are set to enter an age where brands also need to be aware of the way they communicate with AI assistants, who will largely be entrusted with the purse strings.

This is likely to see a shift towards brands optimising for AI, meaning three critical factors must be kept in mind:

1. Asking the right questions;
2. Setting the right goals; and
3. Maintaining your position.

“

A STUDY RELEASED IN EARLY 2018 BY PWC ADVISED BRANDS TO DEVELOP A THOROUGH UNDERSTANDING OF VOICE SEARCH IF THEY WANT TO SURVIVE IN THE COMPETITIVE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE: “CONSUMER AWARENESS OF VOICE DEVICES AND ASSISTANTS, IN TERMS OF ALL THE TECHNOLOGY THAT EXISTS AND THE CAPABILITIES THAT ARE ALREADY IN PLACE, IS NASCENT. YET, THERE’S NO DENYING THAT VOICE IS THE FUTURE. THE TECHNOLOGY WILL CONTINUE TO DRIVE AND SHIFT CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR, AND COMPANIES NEED TO PREPARE AND ADJUST ACCORDINGLY. SEARCH, ADVERTISING, CONTENT, AND COMMERCE ARE BEING IMPACTED INDUSTRY-WIDE AS CONSUMERS TRANSFORM THE WAY THEY INTERACT WITH BRANDS AS THE RESULT OF VOICE TECHNOLOGY. CONSUMERS ARE TALKING, AND IT’S A GOOD IDEA TO LISTEN.”

- Niraj Dawar, professor of marketing at the Ivey Business School<sup>22</sup>

**MAKING ARTIFICIAL FEEL ORGANIC**

While marketing spend on AI platforms is set to increase, one can't forget old lessons can still apply to new technology.

Simply having your product get the voice treatment won't mean a thing if your advertising is forced and annoying.

Say, for example, a consumer asks their assistant what the weather will be like today, and is then forced to hear about an offer on Colgate toothpaste before hearing the answer. That's not going to build goodwill – let alone sell tubes of toothpaste.

The creative needs to feel organic to the content, so an answer along the lines of, "It will be 30 degrees and sunny today – just as well Coles have a sale on Banana Boat sunscreen this week", would be a lot more palatable, as it's information that offers value.

**SO WHAT'S TO BE DONE?**

Brands need to have both a short and long-term outlook when it comes to our voice-activated world.

In the short term, immerse yourself in conversation!

If you want to understand how it can benefit your brand, then get stuck into it. Use your AI assistant to understand its limitations, build a chatbot to see how it can improve interactions with your customers, or start experimenting with audio ads that develop your brand's voice.

In a nutshell, discover for yourself what you think does and doesn't work. Experiment. Test. Learn. Apply. Optimise.

Over the longer period, the focus needs to be broader.

1. Review your search strategy – does it stack up in a voice-led world?
2. With privacy increasingly a make-or-break proposition, does your brand have the required trust for people to want to talk to it?
3. Start investigating brands who could become partners in your voice-integration model.
4. Invest in analytics software to truly understand how consumers are talking about your brand and how you can talk to them in turn.



## CONCLUSION

# IGNORE VOICE AT YOUR OWN PERIL.

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Voice still has some obvious limitations, but as its accuracy rates head from the mid to the very high 90% benchmark, having a conversation with your device will become easier and far more organic than typing.

Voice has already changed the face of marketing and communications, and these changes will only intensify in the years to come.

Brands need to begin positioning themselves not only as desirable to consumers but to their AI assistants, which will flow from building trust, ensuring ads are organic rather than forced, and having a genuine, relatable and defined voice of their own.

Again, we need to keep Amara's Law at the back of our minds when we consider all these prospects – a new company or shift in tech could dramatically change expected outcomes – but given how basic voice is in human interaction, and the rate at which AI is pressing forward, they are both set to play a vital role in tomorrow's marketing landscape.

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