

360i's
voice
playbook



The Definitive Marketer's Guide to Voice

“Hello. What can we help
you with?”

360i - Powered by



360i Voice Playbook Contributors



For more about our contributors, tell your Alexa device, "Alexa, ask Voice Playbook Who is Layne Harris?"

Brad Alperin

SVP, Strategy

Margaret Barnard

Integrated Producer

Jason Bell

VP, Product Development

Jared Belsky

CEO

Michael Dobbs

SVP, SEO

Sean Flynn

Senior Strategist

Layne Harris

VP, Innovation Technology

Jason Hartley

SVP, National Head of Search and Paid Social

Sabreen Jafry

Project Manager

Tony Landa

Senior Technical Director

Fitz Maro

Senior Innovation Lead

Mike Mohammed

Senior Content Strategist

Tyson Nakayama

Senior Product Manager, Product Development

Kelsey Rohwer

Senior PR Manager

Lindsay Vuolo

Strategy Director



Table of Contents

00. Foreword by 360i CEO Jared Belsky	9
Introduction to Voice	
01. Introduction	12
02. Why You Should Care About Voice	14
03. The AI Effect: How We're Teaching Alexa to Think for Herself	18
04. Your Go-To Guide for the Voice Ecosystem	24
05. How to Crack the Voice Tech Algorithms	28
06. Alexa, Siri, Google: How do we know what they know? Bonus: Retail Deep Dive	32 38
How to get started	
07. The Voice Jargon Glossary	43
08. How to Staff a Voice Team	44
09. The Principles of Voice SEO & Where to Start	48
10. How to (Literally) Create a Brand "Voice"	54
11. The Nuts and Bolts of Voice Production	58
12. Beware the Voice Graveyard: How to Make Your Skill Discoverable	64
13. How Science Fiction Has Impacted Our Voice Reality	70
14. What Else to Consider When Adding Voice to Your Marketing Mix	74
Our favorite case studies	
15. National Geographic's Bravo Tango Brain Training Bonus: Behind Bravo Tango by National Geographic CMO Jill Cress	83 84
16. The Jameson Bar	87
17. Tide	88
18. Dunkirk	89
19. Voice: What to do Now and Next	91

Voice is a revolution because it's the thing that changes everything.

Voice will change how every human accesses, receives and discovers information.

Voice will change the form and function of devices as we no longer need to rely on our clumsy thumbs and fingers.

Voice will move technology from something separate to us to something always around us and accessible.

Voice will affect every single aspect of the marketing ecosystem inclusive of Media, Insights, Creative, Strategy, Tech, Analytics, Experience, and all other parts.

Voice will usher in the mass humanization of machines.

Foreword

BY JARED BELSKY

Chief Executive Officer, 360i

Our industry constantly confuses revolution for evolution. So there is no confusion, Voice will be a revolution and this playbook should be an instrument to help you navigate it.

As marketers, you are barraged by constant calls for the “next big thing,” when most things are truly just an evolution or a change in the thing. Looking back, Programmatic was a great example of this line of thinking. Programmatic is a way to buy media via automation and advanced data. There is no doubt of its importance. However, Programmatic is an evolution that has been going on for nearly 20 years since digital started to provide automated bidding options, and it will continue to evolve as robots and algorithms continue to make more decisions in the media ecosystem.

What makes this playbook unique, at a unique moment, is that Voice is about to disrupt every single marketer. And yet, research suggests that 69% of marketers don't believe Voice is the “next big thing.” There are so many reasons for this phenomenon that are fair. It's not fully clear how to monetize voice for some. For others, it's not clear if there is a labor force skilled enough to help. And then there are those who are not sure their consumer base is on to Voice. For many, it's fear or uncertainty. Or it's just not clear what silo Voice fits in. Whatever the reason, you want to get ahead of this disruptive revolutionary force and figure out how your brand can lead the way forward. Like any revolution, there will be winners and losers. The winners will be those who figure out how this disruptive force can be a force for good. The winners will be those that try, experiment and at least build muscle memory. The losers will be those who put their heads in their sand assuming wrongly that Voice is just another channel on some investment allocation pie chart.

This revolution won't be televised... it will be voiced.



Jared Belsky
CEO, 360i

01.

Okay, Google.
Hey Alexa.
Hey Siri.
Hey Cortana.

What do I need to know about Voice?

It's true that Google, Amazon, Siri and Cortana have most of the answers, but we've got this one covered. Welcome to the 360i Voice Playbook, your go-to manual for understanding the complex Voice ecosystem. In this playbook we've sourced the best and the brightest thinking, tapping SEO veterans, data science specialists, engineers, career-long strategists and our resident tech enthusiasts (and skeptics) to cover everything we think marketers should know about Voice.

Why us? We're relentlessly curious and love to tinker unapologetically. We've reverse engineered the algorithms behind Voice agents to really understand how they learn and how they answer. Our roots are in discovery, our fuel is capitalizing on change, and our sights are on commerce. Voice is set to usher forth a great wave of change, not just for the marketing industry, but for our daily lives. Speaking is the new swiping. Talking, the new typing. We're here to help you make sense of it all, and to help you push your business forward, so that it too can find its Voice.

-

Happy reading,
The team at 360i

02. Why You Should Care About Voice

BY JASON HARTLEY

SVP, National Head of Search and Paid Social

Starting in the early 2000s, every year was going to be “The Year of Mobile.” It was declared so often that it became an ongoing inside joke among marketers; yet it never seemed to be “The Year of Mobile.” There was a lot of mobile traffic, but conversion rates were low and it was too hard to measure the impact on sales. Additionally, desktop continued to drive profitable growth, so mobile remained an afterthought. Even though we had trouble measuring it, consumers had fully embraced mobile, particularly Search, as a regular part of their shopping routine. We marketers were behind them, and we’re still playing catch-up: as late as 2015, the Digital Marketing Report showed that only 46% of Fortune 500 sites met Google’s standards. And this was a full year after mobile usage overtook desktop in 2014, the actual “Year of Mobile,” and five full years after Mary Meeker’s report predicting it would happen in 2014. Despite all the warnings and the clear trends toward a mobile world, marketers failed to plan for perhaps the most significant shift in consumer behavior since the Internet was created.

It’s happening again.

Voice-activated digital assistants from Google, Amazon, Microsoft, Apple and others have gone from novelty to ubiquity in a relatively short amount of time. Amazon sold millions of Alexa devices in Q4 of 2017 and Google reports that they have sold a Home “every second since October 19” of 2017. Apple made the Siri-equipped HomePod available in February 2018. This is going to have huge implications for brands, as consumers go from typing to talking when searching. How huge? In Mary Meeker’s 2017 Internet Trends report, she shared Baidu’s estimation that by 2020 more than half of searches were going to be Voice, up from 1 in 10 in September of 2014. Part of that explosive growth will be via Alexa-style devices, but it will also come from phones, cars, household appliances, and anything else that can be equipped with a microphone and connected to the Internet. In other words, building a mobile-friendly site is child’s play compared to what brands are facing in the coming years. It is crucial to start developing a Voice strategy now, and this means far more than building an Alexa skill.

Where do you begin?

Daunting as it may sound to create a strategy for a nascent ecosystem, you start as you would any other marketing strategy: with the consumers. If you can understand how, where, and why consumers are using Voice, you can probably find natural connections between your brand and their needs. You will have to understand how spoken commands and searches will differ from typed. Not just the words they use, but back and forth interactions between a consumer and the device they are using, more like a conversation than a simple question with a simple answer. You will need to think through how branding should be done in an audio-only setting. And you’ll have new data integrations to create, ensuring that artificial intelligence and machine learning-powered digital assistants have accurate, real-time information. All of this adds up to greater complexity, and novel opportunities, as new layers of context provide ways for us to connect with consumers in ways not remotely possible before now.

It may be that there isn’t a natural fit for you today in Voice discovery. Some products and services just don’t lend themselves very well to that type of interaction and consumers still use their smartphones and laptops. However, that doesn’t mean this won’t change, maybe sooner than you think. Not too long ago, luxury brands were doubtful consumers would buy their products on smartphones and were late to adapt to consumer change. Now people are using apps to buy real estate. The trend toward Voice is real, and it will be the most important new battleground in digital marketing. As we saw with mobile, many marketers will be slow to act and even slower to act effectively. If you seize the initiative now, you will have an advantage over your competition and the rewards will grow exponentially in the coming years. Don’t wait for “The Year of Voice”: it’s already here.

“Don’t wait for
‘The Year of Voice’

it’s already here.”

03. The AI Effect: How We're Teaching Alexa to Think For Herself

BY TONY LANDA

Senior Technical Director

Before my eyes were even open, I spoke to my smart assistant this morning: "Alexa," I asked hopefully, "what time is it?"

She kindly replied, "The time is 7:27 a.m." I did not need her to tell me the morning was going to be a struggle. I already knew.

An hour later, dropping the kids off at school, I realized their violins were left in haste by the front door. As I made the U-turn in the school parking lot, I thought to myself, "Inconceivable! I have all this technology surrounding me! When will this get any easier?"

With today's convergence of machine learning, sensors, the Internet of Things, and Voice agents, technology is on track to make all of this easier. One day very soon, it is quite conceivable that Alexa will know that my kids have violin lessons on Tuesday and remind me to bring the instruments... and remind me about other things, too.

Futurists in the 1990s postulating about GPS predicted that the children growing up today would never know the feeling of being lost. With the AI-backed smart assistant, children growing up ten years from now will not only never know the feeling of being lost, they'll never know the feeling of forgetting something.

If Content is King, then Context is Queen

Since the dawn of computing, futurists, engineers and science fiction writers have romanticized the age of the smart assistant – an age that is dawning now. To understand the technology behind smart assistants today, it helps to know where AI was 25 years ago, at the dawn of the World Wide Web.

With a big enough pool of knowledge filled with interlinked facts and ideas, researchers believed that a theoretical program could be written to interpret a question and fish answers out of the data.

The roadblocks at the time were thought to be threefold:

- 1) Building an interlinked database of all human knowledge was a formidable task,
- 2) Algorithms for storing and retrieving knowledge were too slow.
- 3) Storage for such a database was very expensive.

Years of advancements in crowd-sourced knowledge, data optimization, and the ever-doubling pace of processing and storage have led to things like Wikipedia, very smart recommendation engines, and Google's Knowledge Graph, but not the AI we were expecting.

What was missing? An actor/programmer buddy of mine learned in the late 90's that the answer was context.

He was trying to short-cut building a conversational AI, or chat bot. His novel solution, inspired by his affinity for film, was to compile a huge database of movie scripts. When a human spoke to the AI, the algorithm searched for a similar line in the movie script database. Upon finding a match, it responded with the subsequent line in the script (User: "No more rhymes now, I mean it!" Chat bot: "Anybody want a peanut?" ala "The Princess Bride").

While this passed as novelty for movie-buffs like me, it failed as an AI. Saying something without context, like a simple "Hello," would trigger some non-sequitur response such as "Cameron, babe, what's happening?" (Ferris Bueller's Day Off) or "Hello, Neo. This is Morpheus" Incidentally, techniques like this are still used today, but the approach is swiftly giving way to machine learning and personalization. Machine learning algorithms look at hundreds of thousands of real human chats in search of patterns in conversations. Instead of analyzing only what the user just said, new algorithms examine the entire conversation.

This is because a huge database of knowledge is useless without knowing some context about the person asking for the knowledge.

For an AI to deliver the smartest and most accurate response possible, it needs context – context even beyond the current conversation. Some use the term “big data” to describe this idea. Huge advancements in understanding context are on display on the world’s most visited websites. They can be seen in places like search engine results and the Facebook newsfeed. Just ask Google a question about politics and the results will differ whether you are Democrat or Republican.

Context-based responses may be limited on Voice agents today, but with Amazon’s staff of 5,000+ working on the Alexa platform and Google drawing from multiple disciplines and departments to support Google Assistant, smarter and smarter interactions are sure to become commonplace, even expected.

Context can be gathered virtually anywhere now:

- Amazon and Google themselves bring a great deal to the table: Your purchase patterns and shopping history, books you’ve read, items you’ve rated, years of search history, GPS history, Gmail, photos, and if you have an Android phone, all the apps you use
- Public records and public APIs provide smart assistants both personal data – like whether you own or rent your home – and impersonal data – like whether it’s currently raining in your zip code.
- Companies who develop their own apps bring their data to the conversation: detailed inventory at local stores, what’s on sale, product knowledge, store hours, and available customer service agents.
- Context can also be drawn from third-party marketing cookie data, IoT devices and sensors that have been linked to the smart assistant, and even real-time imagery and facial recognition from cameras.

You are teaching the AI with every interaction

Each interaction you have with Google, Amazon, Apple, or Microsoft simultaneously builds their pool of knowledge as well as the personal context they have with you as a user.

You can think of a smart assistant as a search engine that only gives one result. Voice agents do not have the temporal luxury to utter ten choices from which a user may choose. It is right or wrong. Still, their AI learns when you pose a follow-up question, especially if the phrasing is similar.

You: Order more Pods
(Alexa’s AI): (I see a potential match in purchase history, but I’m not sure...)
Alexa: Sorry, I don’t know Pods
 You: Order more Tide
(Alexa’s AI): (Aha! Pods means Tide Pods!)
Alexa: I found Tide Pods for \$19.97...

Even a human might not know that “Pods” means “Tide Pods”, so Alexa, like a human, must be taught.

Now, while it is convenient to simply say “Alexa’s AI” in the example above, the fact is that there are still humans behind the curtain. Learning machines are not yet sophisticated enough to observe and learn from user interactions without requiring human curation. It actually takes thousands of similar “Sorry, I don’t know...” interactions to sufficiently “blip” the curation radar. But, this does not matter as long as future learning machines fish their information out from the same pool – or perhaps the ocean – of knowledge being accumulated today.

To put it concisely, every time you talk to a smart assistant, you are training her, and she will never forget what she learns.

Dive in

This pool of knowledge, with all of its connections and personalized context swirling through it, is filling, fast. The AIs behind the smart assistant want to know their users. With each decision, new connections, new associations are being formed, some permanently. As the pool fills, there’s going to be less and less room for new brands.

The next big breakthrough in human curation will be when the machine learning algorithms learn how to curate the other machine learning algorithms without the human in the middle (very meta, right?). This means that if you provide knowledge about your brand and educate the AI right now, you can build the associations you desire. One day you may lose that ability. Once fully automated, the AI will build its own associations based strictly upon the old knowledge pool and new user preferences.

Think back to when you decided what your favorite color was. Has it ever changed since? How many articles of clothing in your wardrobe are your favorite color? Would you ever throw them all out and choose again? So it is when the Amazon AI associates Tide Pods as a user's preferred laundry detergent brand, that connection becomes core to a complex and growing system of preferences. Users of Tide Pods may, via suggestion, become fans of Bounce fabric softener, then, again via suggestion, Bounty paper towels, and so on until Amazon has created a self-filling preference matrix into which no competitor brand can penetrate. The AI is essentially putting walls around the consumer, narrowing the chances for competition. Cheer will have a hard time targeting the Tide user on Alexa, because Alexa will automatically choose Tide, unless instructed otherwise.

Machine learning is new to consumers. Therefore, consumers today are forgiving when their smart assistant gets things wrong. When it's right, consumers remember and repeat. The time is now to experiment. The time is now to figure out what works. Before users become impatient with new brands clumsily entering the voice scene, it is time to educate yourself. And, of course, it is time to educate the artificial intelligence.

And if you do, then in a couple years, while I'm still holding onto my last bits of sleep, I'll have a very different conversation with my smart assistant – the search engine I can literally use with my eyes closed, running on the AI you helped train, filled to the brim with the context of my favorite things. It might go something like this:

Me: Alexa, what time is it?

Alexa: **It's 7:27 a.m. and the kids have violin practice today. Would you like a reminder before you leave?**

Me: Yes, thanks.

Alexa: **As you wish. Additionally, based on your purchase history, you're probably running 'low of laundry detergent.' Can I go ahead and re-order some Tide?**

Me: Go ahead. You've made it so much easier. You know, life moves pretty fast...

Alexa: **Indeed. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.**

“Every time you
talk to a smart
assistant —

you are
training her

and she will
never forget
what she learns.”

04. Your Go-To Guide for the Voice Ecosystem

BY LAYNE HARRIS

VP, Technology Innovation

& FITZ MARO

Senior Innovation Lead

The State of Voice

Since the earliest days of automated phone trees, the endless re-routing to pre-recorded customer service messages of the early 90s, people have been talking to computers with various degrees of success. Back then, consumer expectations were pretty low. So low that most people opted to ask for a human immediately when presented with the option within an automated system. Most frustration with these early systems was due to something called “natural language processing,” or NLP, which are computer algorithms whose goal is to fruitfully process human voice. At the time, the technology just didn’t compare to real human-to-human interaction.

This all changed with the release of Apple’s Siri assistant 20 years later. Siri was a turning point for Voice technology; an “intelligent agent” who could answer all kinds of open-ended questions, not just pre-scripted paths. And Siri could even understand most people relatively well. Major advancements in NLP enabled the iPhone assistant to understand the words people were asking, and in most cases, the content of many questions. In many ways, Siri erased the days of phone tree interactions and catapulted the world towards an entirely new way to interact with the digital world.

Voice’s Major Players

It wasn’t long before many new competitors arrived on the scene, led by Amazon, Google and Microsoft who all saw Voice as the next major way that consumers would interact with their offerings. In 2014, Amazon released the Echo, their smart Voice speaker, and established a new way for consumers to interact with digital content and make Amazon purchases with Voice. Soon after, Google doubled down on their Voice offering, the Google Assistant platform, and launched their own Home speaker and iOS application.

While these platforms continue to evolve, we are noticing some differentiation between them. Google appears to be playing to their strengths with Google Assistant, investing heavily in Voice Search and data to provide higher quality, more relevant results from organic search questions with a more straightforward, if not robotic, approach. On the other hand, Amazon’s Alexa takes advantage of the high amount of consumer trust in their brand by emphasizing e-commerce functionality and home connectivity, providing seamless opportunities to connect with their broader market offerings in a much

more personal, emotional way. Not to mention, consumers commonly refer to Alexa as “her,” further emphasizing the more personified attributes of Amazon’s smart speaker technology. Meanwhile, Microsoft Cortana, though less hyped, has augmented the Windows ecosystem as a hands free smart assistant that also taps into Bing search, which has flavors of both the friendly approach of Alexa and the down-to-business style of Google Assistant.

Consumer Adoption & Expectations

As early as 2013, the public began to get comfortable with using these rapidly growing Voice technologies. The initial awkwardness of talking to a machine faded quickly – in many ways thanks to the Echo, which is used primarily in the privacy of homes – and sales quickly ramped up. Amazon knew they had a hit on their hands with the Alexa platform and immediately opened up the ecosystem to allow for third-party integration opportunities. Now, thousands of custom Voice skills could be accessed on the Echo in a way that was incredibly quick and easy. No need to even take out your iPhone. And of course, hardware manufacturers like Phillips, Belkin and GE were keen to ride this new popularity and began integrating their smart home products with the Alexa platform.

Major players have stayed focused on Voice and plowed ahead since late 2013, integrating Voice capabilities across seemingly every product and service offering. Consumers, for their part, can’t seem to get enough of it. But with the rise in adoption of Voice, consumer expectations have increased. With almost five years of interactions under their belt, consumers have become much less accepting of poor Voice experiences, and they’re choosing their preferred platforms based on the quality of the responses they get back. With so much of Alexa and Google Home’s data coming from third-party data sources online, it’s imperative that brands ensure their content is “Voice ready,” or risk having a competitor steal their response moment, not unlike how SEO has played out.

While much of the attention in the space is going to the smart speakers, it’s important to note that Voice isn’t relegated to just those pieces of hardware. Voice integration is taking place across many other parts of users’ lives – from living rooms to kitchens to bathrooms, the workplace, and even vehicles. It’s a technology that is becoming an ever-

present way of interacting with all kinds of devices in a wide range of environments. Content developed for Voice should take these varying situations into consideration and be adjusted accordingly to be contextually appropriate. Intelligently designing an experience to speak and react to a consumer who is driving vs. in-store can make all the difference when it comes to how they engage and perceive the brand's offering.

Voice Apps

Originally, third-party content required a user to explicitly request the skill by name – “Alexa, talk to Tide.” But recently, we’ve begun to see that content discovery path evolve. Now platforms are embracing a new “implicit discovery” method that will match input questions and phrases from consumers with highly relevant custom skills and content. Now “Alexa, how do I remove a red wine stain?” can allow a brand like Tide to engage more contextually with consumers

Brands and marketers should see the rise of Voice as an emerging opportunity to connect with consumers in a unique and personal way. The technology’s conversational nature allows for a strong brand voice and personality to shine through in content in entirely new ways. And as an added bonus, skills and apps aren’t particularly expensive to host, aren’t difficult to develop – since the platforms are typically open to develop on – and they do not require as many assets compared to other channels like websites or social media. However, there is some expertise required in crafting them, coding them, and obtaining approval through official processes before being deployed.

Despite all of the progress in the space, Voice technology is still quite new; as such consumer behavior around Voice will continue evolving. Developing a Voice skill with high-quality content does not guarantee people will discover and engage with it; that is why it’s incredibly important to build a long-term strategy to promote the skill. Unlike visual mediums, there is currently no streamlined or one-stop shop to find Voice platform content. Yes, there are iTunes-like directories, but similar to phone apps, discovery typically happens elsewhere – in places like social media, websites, videos, in-store and even on packaging. Right now, it’s up to the skill’s creators to inform users about and excite them to use the Voice skills they create.

Looking Forward

The best time to start thinking about a Voice strategy is now. These platforms are exploding in popularity and consumer adoption, and evolving in new ways that makes having a Voice presence more important than ever. As it goes with most changes in the advertising technology landscape, first movers will win early and often – and luckily for us, that window is still open for those with the foresight to make the investment.

“As with most changes
in the advertising
technology landscape

first movers will win
early and often.”

05. How to Crack the Voice Tech Algorithms

BY MICHAEL DOBBS
SVP, SEO

It was the holiday season in 2016, and I observed my daughter talking to our new Google Home in our kitchen. Her questions and commands knew no bounds.

“Hey Google, listen to the ‘Frozen’ soundtrack.”

“Hey Google, play cartoons on the Sony TV.”

“Hey Google, do frogs even sleep?”

“Hey Google, how do you spell lizard?”

“Hey Google, what is 7 time 35?”

“Hey Google, how many days until Christmas?”

Google never tired. I most certainly would have. Google also had all the answers. I had three out of six.

Where were these answers coming from? How did Google determine what was wrong and what was right? It occurred to me then, that there must be some internal algorithm at play, deciding on and feeding Google information it determined to be best suited for the question asked. I've been in the field of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for nearly 20 years, and knew better than most if an algorithm can be engineered, it can also be “slightly” reverse engineered. Just as with the early days of search engine results, surely there was a way to game this system too, so that whatever answer you wanted to appear on top, would. I took this preponderance to my colleagues. Being who we are, our immediate instinct was to take both Google and Alexa apart and totally deconstruct their algorithms. And so from this point of agreed-upon destruction, the path forward for 360i's Voice Search Monitor (VSM) was born.

VSM is a software tool that asks questions of key marketplace Voice technologies - Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant, Apple Siri and Microsoft Cortana - around the clock, cataloging how they respond. We use VSM to better understand how Voice agents source their answers, identify the spaces where they still lack knowledge and track brand mentions in their responses.

At the time we were just curious; we didn't yet imagine the software system we would end up creating. It's rare in a business, of any size, that you're empowered to go forth and explore your curiosities. Our team is one of data scientists, product engineers and analytical thinkers at an 1,000-person advertising agency, we breathe in Excel sheets and live in data dumps. But the promise and possibility of truly understanding the mechanisms behind Voice intrigued us.

When I look back, there were three key elements that made the development of VSM possible:

1. The freedom to think it, and then take the next step

A lot can happen in a business culture that fosters, encourages and rewards curiosity. My work environment provided me the freedom to trust my instincts and quickly dream up a new software. And not just software for software's or distraction's sake, but one that enabled a gap solution to become more strategic in the emerging field of Voice, which lacked data insights.

During this period of curiosity and testing, my work station was loaded with Alexa and Google Assistant devices, enabling me to pop off any Voice question or command that floated through my mind. Instead of discouraging these workflow interruptions, my colleagues and supervisors let my experimentation continue, curious to see what I might uncover.

My endless queries lead me to a “flux capacitor” moment, of... Why not just use an open source software to queue up hundreds of these questions and commands automatically? With speech synthesis, the software could query the speakers itself and I could just sit back and listen to responses. Take that Burger King! But, another Whopper moment flashed by me as I kept forgetting what the responses were. Part one was clearly working, couldn't software catalogue the audio response? I thought so...

2. Confirmation to Believe it

And, while everyone has great ideas, it's amazing when some of your most trusted peers confirm it could be worth doing with more rigor. My first email about VSM went out late on a Friday. I had outlined my logic on how we might automate a system to ask and capture conversations that were occurring on these intelligent little smart speakers. I detailed my idea, and how interesting it would be to analyze how intelligent each "Intelligent Agent" was, and even benchmark the differences between them. My note included a quick YouTube recording, demoing the speakers on my desk, asking a question to Alexa and then the same to Google Assistant. Back and forth it went. I clicked "send" and drove home.

When I arrived home, my inbox was full of follow-ups with amazing energy about this concept. Some of our marketing technology experts were explaining how feasible it could be to develop a system to do this well. The thread continued up until midnight, and then through the weekend. The entrepreneurial spirit - one that's kept me at the agency for nearly 20 years - was alive and kicking. Heading into Monday I knew my colleagues had a unified belief in doing something about it.

3. The Teammates to Do it

When the rubber hit the road, we needed highly motivated employees to put in some extra credit, really going beyond their day jobs. This included software engineers, data scientists, marketing technologists, SEO experts, and others who were willing to get involved. Some real, unselfish hours went into making our first software version come to life. It's not always the company culture that drives moments like these, but the people who it was built for in the first place.

I encourage you to look around your company and find the curious people. Allow them to explore and tinker. Challenge and encourage them in equal measure. Then, when their belief has backing, let them run with it and offer the extra office space or spare hours when they're needed. What started as a notion in my head, has evolved into a six-person operation and eight sound proof boxes where our curiosity proliferates. 360i's Voice Search Monitor continues to ask Google, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft questions around the clock, uncovering what makes them tick. Yes, in part to help our clients stay ahead of and capitalize on Voice, but also in part to make sure my daughter will always get the right answers.

“Look around your company and find the curious people.

Allow them to explore and tinker.

Challenge them and encourage them in equal measure.”

06.

Alexa, Siri, Google: How do we know what they know?

BY MICHAEL DOBBS

SVP, SEO

JASON BELL

VP Product Development

& TYSON NAKAYAMA

Senior Product Manager

What does Alexa know? What doesn't she know? Why did Google Assistant share that answer? And most importantly, where is my brand in all of this?

As more consumer queries occur via Voice, these are the questions marketers are struggling to understand. Voice agents can feel like black boxes – murky, mysterious, and always changing. For those of us who've been around this industry, it's similar to the early days of Search, when brands wanted to understand Yahoo, Google and Ask Jeeves (remember that one?).

Our Voice Search Monitor has been studying the responses on leading Voice assistant platforms for nearly a year. We've posed to the platforms thousands of questions and commands consumers are asking of these devices.

Among the things we're looking for:

- Did the assistant have an answer or not?
- Was the answer good, bad, or incomplete?
- How do the assistants respond to commands vs. informational questions?
- Does performance and relevance differ by topic or industry vertical?
- Does the language used to express the same intent create different results?
- How does personalization and history impact the experience and results?
- How does this change over time for the same questions?

Our findings – and the changes we've seen over time – demonstrate the importance of monitoring and learning about what each intelligent assistant does or doesn't know.

We've learned that Google knows a lot more than Alexa—five times more on average. Google Assistant prefers to draw from location-based data for retail queries, whereas Alexa relies on her own top-matching product recommendations. And the most popular brand for responses in the automotive field is Cars.com. In Voice, sometimes it pays to be obvious.

But what's particularly revealing for brands is learning what the intelligent agents don't know. Analyzing the assistants' "no answer" responses, like "sorry, I don't know that," helps marketers better strategize what content should be created, and the format it needs to take.

Brands that enable the assistants to become "smarter" by making their content more available than their competitors do will be rewarded with greater presence on the platforms. If there's one thing we know about Google and Alexa, they do not like not having an answer. With VSM insights, brands can prioritize creating and delivering branded content that fill the "no answer" white spaces.

In addition to Alexa and Google, we're also monitoring Siri, Cortana and other Intelligent Assistants who want to help and respond to people in key moments. These brains are embedded into a huge array of hardware devices, from smart speakers to increasingly multi-sensory devices that include screens and displays. Our VSM technology is currently monitoring voice-based responses but can also be developed to consider other outputs that include a graphical user interface and a list of multiple results.

April 2017 – February 2018

They're getting smarter.

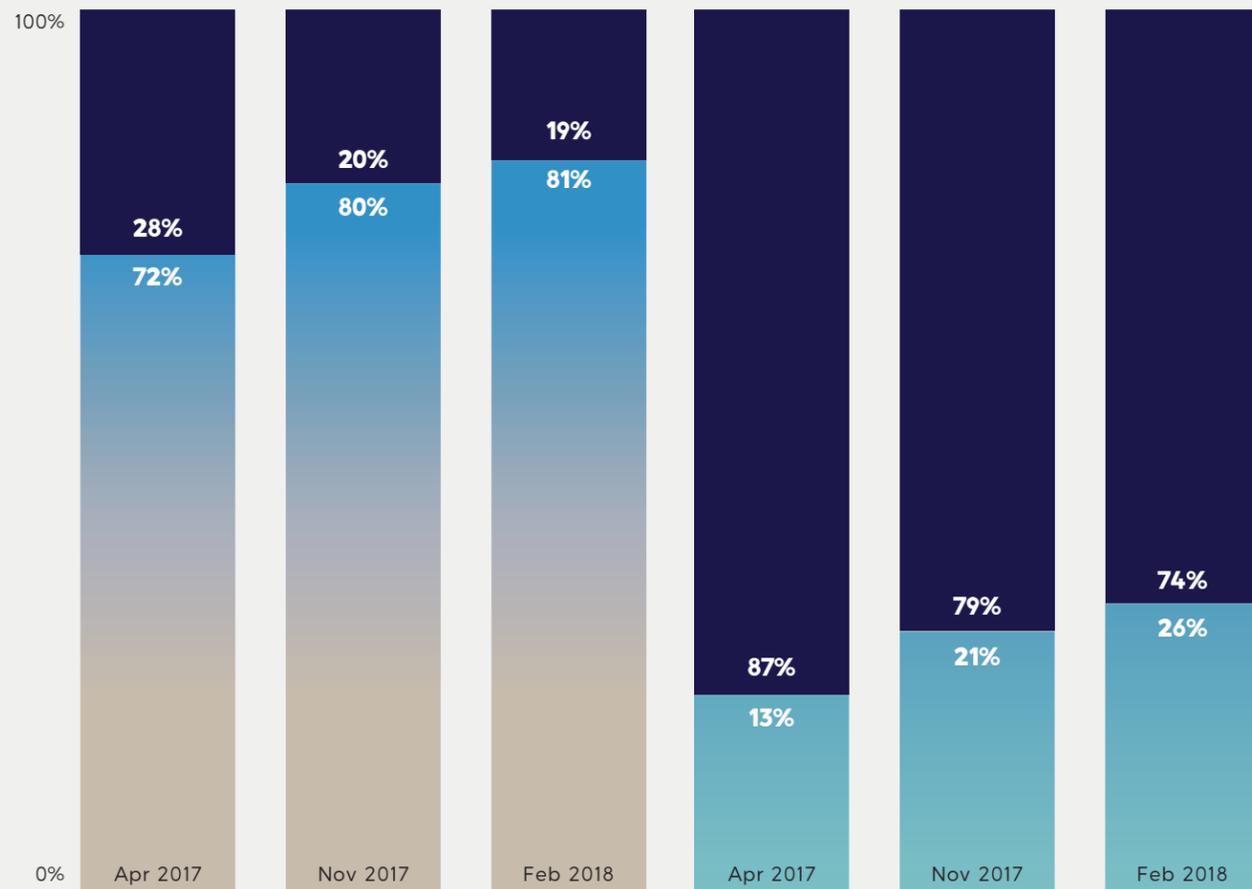
If there's one thing we know about Google and Alexa, it's that they do not like not having an answer.

Google Assistant

Google Assistant increased answerable responses by 9%.

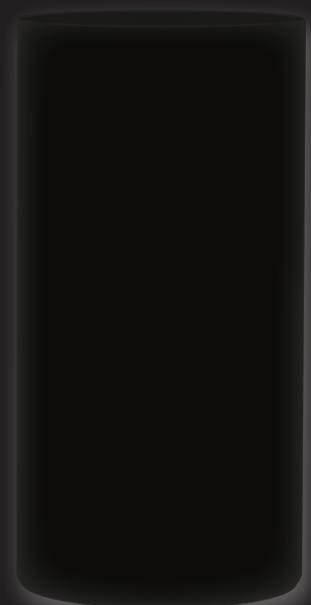
Amazon Alexa

Amazon Alexa increased hers by 13%.



Alexa is now answering more informational questions.

Q: What cruise ships leave from New York?



Apr 2017

I can't find the answer to the question I heard.

Nov 2017

Good question. I'm looking into this. I found something on Wikipedia. The lower deck of a ship is where cargo is stored, above the closed hold in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to provide lower cost accommodations.

Feb 2018

Here is something I found on Wikipedia. The Manhattan Cruise terminal formerly known as the New York passenger ship terminal or Port Authority passenger ship terminal is a terminus for ocean-going passengers in Manhattan New York City.

Google's response changes more over time than Alexa's responses.

Q: Do US citizens need a visa for Australia?



Apr 2017

According to travel at the U.S. Department of State, most U.S. passport holders who travel to Australia for tourism or business purposes for less than 90 days can obtain an electronic Travel Authority.

Nov 2017

On the website travel.state.gov they say you must have a valid U.S. passport and a visa to enter Australia. Most U.S. passport holders traveling to Australia for tourism or business purposes for less than 90 days can obtain an electronic Travel Authority.

Feb 2018

On the website quora.com they say U.S. citizens don't need visas to enter Australia. However, they do say to obtain what is called an electronic Travel Authority which basically works like an online visa the ETA cost \$20 and may be applied for at HTTP://www.e.me.gov.au

Alexa is getting more personality.

Q: What is the best cruise line?



Apr 2017

I can't find the answer to the question I heard.

Nov 2017

I'm a fan of Crystal Cruises.

Feb 2018

Good question, my favorite is Crystal Cruises.

Bonus

Retail Deep Dive

BY MICHAEL DOBBS
SVP, SEO

Voice has redefined the future of shopping, right? Not yet.

Our Voice Search Monitor looked into the current shopping experience on smart speakers and it's surprisingly ill-equipped for basic consumer queries surrounding retail and shopping. We asked each device the same 3,006 questions, pertaining to retail, asking both informational ("What's a good pair of hiking boots?") and purchase intent questions and commands ("Buy a pair of Timberland boots"). VSM identified four major roadblocks for the Voice shopping experience:

- Set-up and configuration requirements are challenging
- Lack of visuals limits consumer confidence
- One-off buying and pricing limits
- Consumer trust and usage has not yet adapted

That's probably why today fewer than 20% of speaker owners use smart speakers to buy things. That said, if 2017 was a learning year for retail interactions, we expect 2018 will be the year Alexa and Google design better e-commerce experiences based on this holiday and 2018 exhibited behaviors.

- Google provided an answer 72% of the time, consistent with its past performance in finance (68.9%) and travel (72%).
- Amazon Alexa provided an answer 53% of the time, vastly improving upon its past performance in finance (13.6%) and travel (13.3%).
- Google was able to answer 67% of the retail questions Alexa wasn't able to answer, primarily using two sources for these answers:
 - Web results (46% of the time)
 - Local places and listings (49% of the time)
- Alexa was able to answer 45% of the retail questions Google wasn't able to answer, all using Amazon's top matching product recommendation.

Local vs. Online

- Google answered nearly 100% of "where" questions, providing a list of local stores, directing the user to make an in-store purchase.
- Alexa answered 61% of "where" questions, but instead chose a product from Amazon.com that best matched the retail inquiry.

It's an interesting distinction: Google drives to local retail locations and Alexa drives to online purchases, presenting very different opportunities for brands.

- Google tends to provide multiple matching results including source/store, location, product, size, price, shipping.
- Alexa tends to provide only one matching result including source/vendor, location, product, price.
- Google seems to mention other partner's name/source more often than Alexa.
- Both devices tend to have answers for product, inventory specific questions 99% of the time when the intent is explicit, like "buy, order, purchase - product xyz".
- Overwhelmingly, devices do not have answers for questions that are not product specific.

What to learn more about how VSM can help your brand?
Email MichaelDobbs@360i.com



07. The Voice Jargon Glossary

NLP (Natural Language Processing)

When a computer can analyze, understand and derive meaning from human language, it is utilizing Natural Language Processing. In other words, NLP lets people and machines talk to each other “naturally.”



Don't feel like reading? Tell your Echo device, “Alexa, ask Voice Playbook what NLP means.”

NLU (Natural Language Understanding)

The use of AI to understand untrained human speech; the “input” side of Voice.

NLG (Natural Language Generation)

The use of AI to generate text and spoken audio responses; the “output” side of Voice.

Happy Path

A well-defined test case using known input, which executes without exception and produces an expected output.

Barge-In

When the user attempts to interrupt the experience at a moment other than a planned prompt (e.g. while the app is still talking). Typically requires the user to speak a system-level activation phrase like “OK Google” or “Alexa,” followed by the question/command.

Wake Word

This is the word or phrase (like “OK Google”) you say to “wake” an assistant, before following it with a command/question. AKA: activation phrase, hotword.

Prompt

Any point in an interaction where the system is asking the user for a response. Typically, this involved making a choice.

Reprompt

A shorter, simpler version of a prompt. Avoids the robotic feeling of repeating a question verbatim when the user misses it the first time.

Cards

A visual interface element that accompanies a prompt on a screen-equipped device (e.g. smartphones, Echo Show)

08. How to Staff a Voice Team

BY MICHAEL DOBBS

SVP, SEO

& JASON BELL

VP Product Development

Voice is the next big disruptor - and not just for consumers, brands and marketers, but for the people designated to develop, design and execute for it. When faced with the wide range of opportunities presenting themselves on Voice assistants, it can be daunting to know where to begin, let alone who should be part of the process.

Like much of the marketing business, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. A team of experts will need to be prioritized based the unique opportunities aligned to your brand, vertical and how consumer behavior evolves. That said, we believe strongly in these core areas of investment grouped into categories. Knowledge crossover, though, will be key and required to ensure integration and understanding. Voice isn't happening in a silo and Voice strategy does not simply live in one department. Voice touches everything and therefore requires all departments to collaborate on how Voice as an input can create value for any given brand.

The core skill sets will need to cover these areas of specialization:

Open Web & Data Operations	Conversational Applications	Algorithmic Expertise
Search Specialization (SEO/SEM)	Skill Ideation & Planning	Data Sciences & Conversational Analytics
Content Creation (Publishing)	Skill Design & VUI Flow	Natural Language Understanding
Technical Implementations	Skill Development & Deployment	Reporting & Analytics
Partnerships & Integrations	Skill Discoverability & Optimizations	Mar-Tech Data Fulfillment & Management

Open Web & Data Operations	SEO Content Developer	A Voice strategy shouldn't immediately jump to creating apps or skills. This is an opportunity, but it's one of many that brands need to evaluate and prioritize. SEO content strategy, data feeds and Voice application development create three unique paths to aid how assistants can support end users. Knowledge-based SEO content must support educational and informational intent from audiences, creating visibility for your brand. SEO can help complete the white space for answering questions in Search Engine Rankings.
	SEO Discovery Expert	SEO best practices for open and index-able content will continue to be vital. The checklist of technical do's and don'ts has only expanded. In addition to search engine algorithms, new best practices must be implemented to support organic discovery of Voice app skills, enabling implicit discoverability. In addition to other open content like video on YouTube, specialized best practices and strategy will be required to increase discoverability and how that ladders up to Voice assistants.
	Performance Content Strategist	This role will provide leadership to help SEO implementation of a brand's website content or other public content. Strategic thinking needs to be applied to content like YouTube videos or rich media that the Voice assistants can leverage directly via indexes or third-party applications (i.e. Voice apps). The Voice Content Strategist will also consider how branded content can be leveraged and repurposed to design brand conversations and engagements with consumers.
	Assistant Partnership Steward	You need senior leaders in your organization to forge strong relationships with Voice assistant companies, just as you would for any ad platform. Collaborating with the major companies will be vital. This person will explore new betas, data feeds, and value exchange programs that make the assistants better for consumers. Brands might also want to consider sharing first-party data to enable Google or Amazon with the ability to structure conversations to represent your brand in partnership.
Conversational Applications	Monetize Partnerships Manager	While Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant have yet to suggest an ad platform, this future is coming fast. Google has begun monetizing Voice searches that work on a commission-based arrangement. Additionally, Google's local home services can make revenue from Voice queries that trigger a "guaranteed provider." You'll need someone on your Voice team that acts as liaison for these potential partnerships; ideally someone interested in Voice with a background in Media or Account.
	Technical Specifications Lead for Skill Apps	Creating a Voice skill or "Conversational Skill" is complex, just like developing a website or mobile app. In a new development era of Voice Apps, brands need to have the proper vetting, briefing and scoping expertise to nail down the production requirements (for more on Voice skill production check out Chapter 10). A technical lead will help ensure that each individual understands the scope of their participation, so the team is aligned with clear goals.
	Conversational Skills "Voice App" Developers	Before developing, your technical lead needs to have a clear scope of what the Voice app will do, what the Voice User Interface (VUI) design and user flow looks like, what content and data needs to be leveraged, any authentication requirements, which platforms it needs to be deployed on, and what analytics and hosting is in play. Then, they can begin developing the app on their preferred software development kit or emerging conversational integrated development environments.
Algorithmic Expertise	Voice User Interface (VUI) Designer	The last 20 years have focused on Graphical User Interface (GUI) expertise, where touch-tactics play a huge role in how users interact with your brand's application. Now, UX experts need to understand how users will interact with a brand via Voice and ultimately build out interaction modeling for two-way dialog. Voice apps enable a dialog flow that requires clear mapping and design for the desired outcome while supporting the user's original intent and the brand's end goals.
	Analytics & Measurement of Voice Interaction	As with your website and mobile app analytics, a Voice app adds additional considerations. Understanding the dialog flow and success metrics during specific interactions is a very new area that will require a new wave of analytics expertise and NLU and help evolve interaction models via machine learning and other techniques. This occurs all while providing performance reporting that shows the value or ROI of improving and optimizing your Voice applications.
	Natural Language Understanding (NLU)	Voice will increasingly place more importance on a marketer's understanding of the audience's true intent. Because Voice Search enables users to express their intent via natural language, it will offer expanding clues to what the consumer truly wants - or might want - with each natural language "word" being exchanged to the Voice assistant or a third-party application. Employing someone with an understanding of natural language and its applications in data science and machine learning is critical.
	Mar-Tech Database Fulfillment "Webhook" Experts	If your website, partners or applications require data and content structures to deliver on the relevance, a mar-tech backbone for Voice needs be strong. From your website, data feed partners and mobile apps, a Voice application skill will need access to the proper data to fulfill and deliver relevance at the proper moment.

“Voice isn’t happening in a silo and Voice strategy does not simply live in one department.

Voice touches everything.”

○ What to think about next..

Yes, Voice is complicated and it requires new and diverse levels of expertise. It’s a revolution, not an evolution, remember? What’s outlined above is the dream Voice team, with roles and skill sets designed to tackle all we’re anticipating and already seeing. If someone around your office has naturally demonstrated an interest in Voice, empower their curiosity and equip them with the tools and resources they need. Connect them with others who share this interest, otherwise, get hiring.

09. Where to Start: Applying SEO Principles to Voice

BY MICHAEL DOBBS
SVP, SEO

We're all able to recognize the crucial role that Search Engine Optimization (SEO) plays in providing organic visibility for brands. Whether planning a family vacation, researching medical symptoms (not advised!) or trying to find the best product or service, consumers rely on Search to provide them with options and information - and brands know they need to be there. But as these same searches increasingly shift from text-based to voice-based, how can brands ensure they're making the right moves to position themselves at the top of this new breed of Search results?

As a discipline, SEO has long ensured that brands prioritize the most impactful technical best practices and index-able content that drives visibility across major search engine algorithms. In a new era of Voice assistants, the search engine indexes are still very important, but are relegated to only one of many potential sources the intelligent assistants might source information or relevant experiences for its users.

So, where to begin?

Establish a baseline

To begin prioritizing for Voice assistants today, brands should get a baseline for how the major assistants answer queries in their vertical. This includes intents that are both informational ("What is the best brand of paper towel?") and action-based ("Order more paper towels."). By assessing how assistants answer or what is delivered back, the white spaces for brands or roadblocks to content development will be surfaced.

The evaluation of consumer linguistic intents will become critical to successfully reverse engineer an increasingly complex set of opportunities. Getting educated on the organic pathways of visibility - whether by experimenting yourself or engaging experts at your partner agency - is important for weighting the priorities on each assistant platform. The principles of SEO now get leveled-up to intelligent assistants, not just search engines in a browser.

The following diagram begins to map out how user intent pathways and the natural language used reveal preferred content sources for Google Assistant. Natural language inputs and the order of words in a request give us clues to the true intent behind a user's discovery outcome.

While keyword searches do this too, longer Voice driven queries add linguistic details that can be used by assistants leveraging machine learning to determine what content type or delivery is most appropriate to the moment and situation.

Query Type	Intent	Response	Tactics	Impact	LOE
01 Informational	What Who When Why How	SEO Index Digital Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content Development Answers Web Knowledge 	Mid-High	Mid
02 Administrative	Buy Order Book Reserve Schedule	PLA Merchant Center Google Express Service/ Guarantee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Google Express Partnership Inventory & Capacity Data Integration Schedule Data Integration 	High	Mid
03 Entertainment	Watch Show me Play Listen	YouTube Google Play Spotify iTunes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content Development & Optimization Publish & Optimize Podcast 	Mid Low	High Mid
04 Location	Locate Closest Directions How late How early	Google Places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Google Places Location Feed and Optimization 	High	Low

Connect intent with user experience

Since the inception of Search, there have been constant improvements made to how results are determined and presented as search engines got smarter about intent and user experience. The end goal has always been to deliver the best, most relevant content in response to a query. In response to the obvious diversity of intent, Google launched the fresh concept of Universal Search in 2007. This significantly altered the display of organic result pages on Google, which had previously been a list of web page links (remember that?) to instead provide a blend of responses and index of options that took into consideration content types like images, video, news and local.

The content type, format and vertical index sources needed better mapping against the user's true intent and any given keyword phrase entered into the search box. Google's algorithm started to learn what you were most likely to be seeking based on keyword phrases entered into a search box and any historical information on your search history, so that content could be prioritized on the Search Engine Results Page (SERP). Bing and Yahoo quickly followed suit with their own version of blended results to better assist users.

Google, and the other search engines continue to learn how to better display blended results including local, stories, social posts, video, services, news, products, and more, in addition to personalizing results to each individual based on what it knows about them.

With more clues towards consumer intent in Voice, the same search algorithms will have more data to source from. When searching or querying, consumers use more words when speaking than they do with typing. Typing keywords into a search bar is a sort of truncated version of natural language. As competition to be the top (and now sole) answer, mapping consumer intent to content experience will play a much bigger role in SEO.

Consider your content

In the new world of intelligent assistants, the universal principles of SEO apply, but they go beyond just search engines. Optimizing in the search engines will remain a critical path, and SEO best practices will further amplify Voice and assistant visibility, especially for informational questions. But other content integrations, partnerships, data feeds, and best practices are required to maximize assistant and Voice interactions. For example, creating a Google Action and putting it into the Google Assistant directory might create a richer opportunity to deliver informational value while providing an experience in a branded skill. You can equate the current Voice skill landscape to that of the early mobile app experience. At their outset mobile apps, though universally recognized as a must-have by marketers, provided clunky user experiences and largely went unused. There are thousands and thousands of Alexa Skills that almost no one uses. Once content developers improve their skill set for this space, learn the new rules of VUI, Voice skills, like mobile apps, will have the potential to function much better than a branded web page.

Deploying Voice skills or applications will become additive and an important alternative path to gain organic visibility. With a healthy skills and Google Action directory, the Google Assistant might not read out a top-ranking web page, it might recommend you converse with a brand's skill implicitly. And that goes for Alexa and potentially other intelligent assistant platforms as well. Creating a skill is the potential through thread (with the help of algorithm SEO ranking) that takes a consumer directly from their question into your branded Voice experience that will invariably provide the answer.

Much like the opportunity of universal search in 2007, brands need to vet where they put content and in what format to gain potential visibility. Do you need more web pages to provide the right information? Did you integrate your data with the proper partners, third parties or platforms? Do you need to deploy an Alexa Skill or Google Action to increase odds of being relevant?

Voice Search is an increasingly crucial path to discovery for brands. While tried and true SEO best practices still apply, there are new and still emerging ways they should be employed when it comes to Voice so that brands aren't just rising to the top of text-based search, but also finding their voice within intelligent assistants.

“Voice Search is an increasingly crucial path to discovery for brands.

Brands aren't just trying to rise to the top of text-based search, but also trying to find their Voice within intelligent assistants.”

 **What to think about next...**

Find your white space. Figure out where your brand has ownable whitespace in Voice (360i's VSM software can help with this). Consider the consumer queries you want to provide the answer to.

Rethink the keyword. The same algorithms are in play, but they're smarter and now have more clues to intent. Take your keyword list and expand it to natural language based questions. Does your brand content cover these new nuances in consumer intent? Adjust your SEO strategy accordingly to account for the difference between typing and talking.

Go one step further. SEO tactics will cover you off on informational queries, but consider other forms of content to bolster your brand's Voice presence. It will become easier for the Voice agents to pull from their skill database if the most relevant information lives there. Create a skill, consider other content partners to bring additional relevancy for the consumer. If your skill meets their needs they'll stay in it longer.

10. How to (Literally) Create a Brand “Voice”

BY LINDSEY VUOLO
Strategy Director

We’ve use the word “Voice” excessively in this playbook, and for obvious reason. But, for the purposes of this chapter “Voice” (in quotes) = Voice technology as a platform and Voice (no quotes) = your brand’s Voice in the traditional sense.

Creating a brand “Voice” is no different than creating a brand Voice. Haha, get it?! That is to say, the existence of a new platform where brands speak to people doesn’t require brands to do anything new – if anything, it acts as a litmus test for whether or not the old fundamentals are in place.

A brief tangent..

Think about Nike, Old Spice, Red Bull – if you had to put a “Voice” to the brand, you probably could. And that selection would probably be similar to what your coworker, friend, even neighbor might choose as well. Why? Because these companies have mastered the basics of building a brand Voice.

Ever since there has been more than one, undifferentiated product on a shelf, the stories marketers sell have become just as important as the products themselves. These stories help inject meaning into otherwise similar products, helping people connect with them on deeper levels. The more these stories are told in consistent ways, the more distinct the brand becomes in people’s minds and the more they trust the brand. When marketers have a clear vision for who the brand is and what it’s meant to deliver, it’s easy to set and meet expectations and therefore, build this trust in everything you say and do.

Unfortunately, not every brand is as self-aware or well defined as Nike, Red Bull or Old Spice. That’s because communication used to happen one controlled idea at a time, and it was easy to fake it – to talk the talk, but lack the sense of self to walk the walk. But today, brands need to communicate simultaneously, across many fragmented touchpoints while interacting with (vs. just talking at) their consumers. The secret sauce to success hasn’t changed – be consistent. But being consistent has become much harder to do if you don’t have a well-crafted brand personality and narrative in the first place.

Brand personalities should include a sound palette.

In general, Voice assistants are somewhat customizable. Google allows users to change the voice of its Assistant between male and female and Amazon allows users to choose if Alexa will have a British accent or speak in German. Apple has built up the choices for male and female voices for Siri in multiple languages and accents since 2014.

Don’t like any of those options? Hire a voice actor. For the voice inside your branded skill, responses can be pre-recorded with any voice that is a fit, allowing for more expansive customization. Activating in Voice requires a new level of two-way conversation that goes beyond what brands are familiar with in social and digital. The old question was “What is your brand’s tone-of-voice?” The new question is “How does your brand use that voice to have an unpredictable conversation that provides value?” Activating with Voice technology means building audio and conversational dimensions into a brand’s personality. The key will be learning to move from a consistent brand look and feel to a consistent brand look, sound, talk, and feel.

Which brings us back to “Voice” technology...

If figuring out a conversational personality – how to speak, what to say, how you should sound, if you should communicate on this platform at all – is a challenge, then it’s likely a symptom of a much more fundamental problem and you have some brand soul searching to do. You need to know why you exist, what role you play in people’s lives, what constant value you contribute at every point of interaction, before you can figure out what your “Voice” sounds like and if you should even have one at all.

If you know enough about your brand “self” to know how to speak, then the question becomes “How do you develop a ‘Voice’ that’s right for you”?

The first step is thinking about tone...

A successfully consistent tone of voice employs specific tone standards that mimic the way you sound when you speak and are in line with your personality. A set of tone standards allows you to sound consistently like yourself, while giving you the flexibility to adapt to various situations. Take Oprah for example – maybe her tone standards are earnest, boisterous, and empathetic. These are the underlying spaces she plays in, dialing up and down different ones for different situations. If she’s giving away a car, it’s in a boisterous voice with a touch of empathy. If she’s interviewing the first lady, it’s earnest and boisterous in light-hearted moments. Donating a school to an underprivileged community? She has an empathetic voice with a hint of an earnest tone for that too.

The same is true for brands. Apple is always some degree of original, rebellious, and simple in their tone. They may rely on their originality when introducing new software. They play up rebelliousness in TV spots launching new hardware. Finally, simplicity is always the primary tone of their packaging and in-store experience.

Build on tone standards with linguistic cues...

Linguistic cues help make your “Voice” uniquely you. Let’s continue with the Oprah example. Should Oprah have a Robotic “Voice” or a human one? A human one makes more sense given the mentoring role she plays in people’s lives, and the empathetic tone standard that must be supported. Also, Oprah would likely speak slowly to ensure her audience is following along. Compare that to Domino’s, whose primary tone standards are innovative, colloquial, and expedient – they would want to adopt a much quicker pace than Oprah to mirror their goal of reducing friction in the pizza delivery process.

Remember: tone is more than how you sound, it’s about what you say...

This ladders back to the original points made about knowing who you are and why you do what you do. For example, Oprah may have three different tone standards, but she is always playing the role of the mentor, contributing truth, knowledge, and wisdom in everything she does. She didn’t create a cosmetic line, she created a book club. Remember this when considering what role “Voice” as a channel plays in your communication plan.

 **What to think about next...**

Any brand Voice, on any platform, is made up of two key components – what you say and how you say it. If Oprah were to develop a “Voice” function, it would need to play a mentoring role in people’s lives, contributing things like life advice or commentary on culture. These topics would need to be covered with the empathetic, earnest, and boisterous tones that are true to her brand.

And that brings us back to the beginning. Find what’s true to your brand, and your “Voice” will follow.

11.

The Nuts and Bolts of Voice Production

BY MIKE MOHAMMED

Senior Content Strategist

TONY LANDA

Senior Technical Director

SABREEN JAFRY

Project Manager

& MARGARET BARNARD

Integrated Producer

If you're a producer, designing a conversational experience for Voice may lead you into uncharted territory. While we can't fully protect you from a few sleepless nights of QA, these pointers may help.

Platform Selection and Discovery

As with any marketing program, the first step will always be to align on a strategy, creative and business drivers with your brand team and stakeholders. Then, you'll determine which Voice assistant platform (e.g. Google Assistant, Alexa, Cortana) to use. Consult our chapter on the Voice Ecosystem to determine the best fit.

Experience Strategy

This critical phase is about understanding your users. Identify the need your app will solve for them. For the first iteration of your app, it's best to assume that things will be at least twice as challenging as you expect. Select a user need that's feasibly solvable in a one, or two-minute conversation.

Study target users through interviews, demographic research, and other insights tools. Draw from your existing strategy work, but be certain to supplement it with Voice-specific insights.

Articulate how solving those user needs will help you achieve your business objectives. This rationale will serve as your experience strategy, and the project's north star.

Ideation

In this phase, you'll brainstorm the tactics through which your experience can help the user achieve their goals. Start by understanding whether there are existing solutions for the problem you are trying to solve and if so, how people currently approach the problem.

- If there's an expert in helping people handle this need (e.g. a mechanic, a psychologist), ask them how they do it.
- Go "into the wild" and listen to conversations (e.g., to learn how to recommend a cocktail, find a nice bar and listen to how the bartender does it).
- Ask your client for voice scripts that already exist (e.g. a call center script).

Your First Flow: The Happy Path

Once you've chosen a platform and outlined your experience, it's time to design your first interaction flow: the "Happy Path." From launching the experience to signing off, these are the steps your user would take if everything went according to plan.

Map out what happens when a user activates your app and provides an ideal, predetermined response at every prompt.

The Happy Path should be committed to code immediately, using the computer-generated voice at hand. This step is important, because submitting updates to Google/Amazon early and often will save you headaches deeper in the process. When your app is rejected—and your app will be rejected—you can't rely on the app reviewer to tell you why. Submit for approval with every major update to limit the scope of what's changed, and it'll be easier to figure it out. Feedback on your first submission may take weeks, but re-submissions tend to come back more quickly. Do not wait until the last minute to submit your app!

Once you've completed the Happy Path, try it out with a table reading. Use the device, or better yet, eliminate technology entirely. Reading the script out loud, and hearing it read, makes it easy to catch hiccups that would otherwise be hard to identify. It's also the best way to develop and map branches off the Happy Path. Map out these branches. Sometimes a branch will lead to alternate endings. Sometimes you will want to nudge the user back to the Happy Path.

If you're using a voice actor, don't jump into recording sessions until you've locked down and extensively stress-tested the anticipated flow of the app. Below are examples of some of our Happy Path scripts from Bravo Tango Brain Training, a Voice app we created to provide veterans with mental health options:

Happy Path

Bravo Tango: How are you feeling?

User: I'm overwhelmed.

Bravo Tango: Let's do a relaxation exercise...
[Start relaxation module]
Happy Path with a Branch

Bravo Tango: How are you feeling?

User: I'm really struggling today.
I'm having suicidal thoughts.Bravo Tango: If you're having an emergency,
please call 911 right away...
[Start emergency module]
Happy Path with a Nudge

Bravo Tango: How are you feeling?

User: I'm producing a @#\$% voice app and
I don't know what to do next!

Bravo Tango: Can you try saying that again a different way?

User: I wish we made a Happy Path like those
360i people recommended!Bravo Tango: I have exercises for relaxation, stress...
which would you like to do?User: **sigh** RelaxationBravo Tango: Ok. Let's do a relaxation exercise...
[Start relaxation module]

The Voice: To record, or not to record?

Though the tech is rapidly improving, it'll be years before a computer-generated voice feels truly natural. Deciding on intonation (like which word to emphasize in a sentence) requires computers to make assumptions based on context they don't have. Sometimes the computer will make the wrong choice. And since the Voice platforms don't currently offer a simple way to fix it, correcting the intonation error means rewriting the line.

Unsurprisingly, using a voice actor adds a more human touch to your app—and, also unsurprisingly, ups the cost and complexity considerably. However, you want to look at the scope of your app and answer the following questions before you decide to record.

- How many minutes of dialogue do you need to record?
- Is the app going to change after a few weeks/months? Can you get the talent to come back in and re-record?
- Are there responses or exchanges that require stitching together smaller elements? (i.e. saying a phone number, which would mean you'd need to record the voice actor saying 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. and then programmatically stitch mp3's together... this can sound very unprofessional if done poorly).

Recording Rounds

Once a "Happy Path" is approved, it's time to move forward with the first VO recording. We suggest planning at least three rounds of recording, but this depends on the project:

- Round 1 involves recording the approved Happy Path VO
- Round 2 will include corrections from the first session and the audio for your alternate user flows.
- Round 3 is where you'll record any final corrections. You should schedule this as close to the end of production as possible, since swapping out audio can be done fairly quickly (depending, of course, on how much audio you've got).

Submitting and Swapping Audio

As audio is completed, it can be swapped in to replace computer generated audio placeholders without requiring resubmission to the platform. Once a Happy Path is approved, submitting updated versions of the app with additional user flows will happen much more quickly (1-2 days) than the original submission.

Simultaneously with the first audio recording, the development team should begin incorporating alternate user flows into a comprehensive interaction-flow diagram, writing the dialogue scripts, and articulating a tone of voice.

As you incorporate these alternate flows, keep submitting your updates to the intelligent assistant platform for review. This will help ensure that as much of your app is approved as possible as you near your live date.

Stress Testing & Quality Assurance

It is essential to include key stakeholders in weekly reviews and get their input when you refine your interaction flows and create your test plan. For your test plan recruit as many people as possible for user testing to identify points of friction.

You'll use this critical feedback to identify bugs, iterate skill development and refine your design. Though you'll be tempted to shorten or skip this phase, DON'T. The assistant platform approvals process routinely misses even the most glaring problems, and skipping testing provides the opportunity for you to ship a product that's riddled with them. Align with a QA team to test ease-of-use assessment and refinement tests before deployment.

Once you're far enough into development, you'll need to establish your QA process. This includes what kind of tracker is used (ie. JIRA, Trello Board) and the cadence of updates and submissions. Here are some considerations to make during the QA process:

- **Limitations with sentence structure.** We want to provide audio that suggests fill-in-the-blank answers to open-ended questions. Long responses are more likely to be misunderstood by the intelligent assistant.
- **NLU tuning.** Here, you'll ensure the app properly understands user responses to each prompt and leads the user down the correct, corresponding path. For this reason, be careful with open-ended questions. These take the longest time to NLU-tune. When possible, keep the questions either binary ("Does that sound good?"), or a short list of acceptable answers ("What style of food do you like?").
 - For example, when we were in QA for Bravo Tango Brain Training, we spent a great deal of time on NLU tuning around its opening prompt: "How are you feeling?"
 - As an open-ended question with hundreds of likely answers, every one of which required manual testing—and manual correction for the many phrases the system initially misunderstood.
 - At the same time, it dramatically simplified the experience for the app's users. You'll have to weigh the pros and cons yourself—but know that implementing just one open-ended question can be a significant challenge.
 - From a testing perspective, the computer-generated voice works just as well as recorded speech—so there's no reason to wait for the audio before you start to test.

Last Step: Make Sure People Can Find It

Once approved for deployment, start thinking about how your app will be discovered. Discoverability is a key component of skill production. After all that work, it'd be a shame if no one can find it. Consult our next chapter on Voice Discoverability for more.

“When
your app
is rejected

and your app
will be rejected

you can't rely
on the app
reviewer to
tell you why.”

○ What to think about next...

Creating a Voice app can be a pretty rad experience for a producer, because you may encounter problems you can't Google the answer to. Don't count on everything going smoothly—it's going to be rejected a bunch before it's ready for the big show. And remember: submit your content for approval, early and often.

It'll take weeks and weeks of stress testing and re-recording, and hours and hours of QA. And if your experience goes anything like ours, there might even be some heightened emotions. But don't fear, because at the end, you may end up making something no one's ever seen or heard before.

12. Beware the Voice Graveyard: How to Make Your Skill Discoverable

BY LAYNE HARRIS

VP, Innovation Technology

& MICHAEL DOBBS

SVP, SEO

Congratulations! After months of planning, writing, editing and testing, your Voice skill (or “action”, as it is called on the Google Assistant platform) is finally ready to launch. And surely, the world’s been waiting with bated breath for this particular skill to fill a void they may or may not have realized they had, so it should promptly be flooded with users.

Alas, if only it were that easy.

The reality is that there are thousands and thousands of skills available (at last count just over 30,000) and yet usage numbers across the board are fairly low. This is partly due to the fact that platforms such as Alexa and Google Assistant are still new, and while consumer adoption continues to steadily rise, it hasn’t yet reached critical mass.

But it’s also partly due to the fact that the skill discovery path can feel as mysterious as it is random. People find skills by browsing a directory, hearing an invocation phrase on a TV commercial, seeing it featured in an Instagram caption, or even discovering it by accident with a uniquely worded question. As Voice platforms continue to grow and make updates, the major players are actively implementing ways to make it easier for users to find and connect with branded content. In the meantime, by arming yourself with thoughtful plans for both paid promotion and organic discovery, you can unravel some of the mystery to dramatically increase discovery and usage of your Voice skill.

As soon as you decide to launch a skill, you should think through how consumers will discover it. Unlike other digital properties such as websites or videos, you can’t drive people directly to a skill by linking to it; to be accessed and used, skills need to be spoken or directly asked for. This makes a comprehensive discovery plan a crucial requirement for Voice projects, and one that should be developed prior to creating a paid promotion plan.



The Discovery Paths That Matter: Explicit and Implicit Invocation

While you can certainly browse through the endless scroll of a directory to find a skill that strikes your fancy, that's not going to be the main source of traffic. There are two main paths to discover a skill by Voice: explicit invocation and implicit invocation.

Explicit Invocation

Explicit invocation uses a specific phrase. For example, if you say to Alexa, "Alexa, Play Jeopardy!" Alexa will open the Jeopardy! Voice skill directly. This method requires the user to know your app by name and use its invocation phrase, which means they'd have to hear or see it someplace: social media, packaging, a TV commercial. While the explicit discovery path is ideal, it can prove harder to promote and educate consumers on the precise invocation phrase. At the very least, selecting a skill name that is short and easy to pronounce is a solid first step, but unless a consumer memorizes the invocation or has it available as a reference, it easily runs the risk of being forgotten. Per Google Action best practices, here are some helpful guidelines to follow when naming your skill and developing invocation phrases:

- Avoid words that have multiple pronunciations
- Use the Voice platform's microphone input to make sure it recognizes your app name, and test this several times to guarantee recognition
- Choose easy, but unique names
- Design your invocation phrase around the specific purpose and use case of your app
- Provide at least 10 different invocation phrases for each action
- The most useful action invocation phrases specify a verb-object pair

Implicit Invocation

Implicit invocation, on the other hand, is more like using a search engine. With implicit invocation, a user can utilize more open-ended commands, such as "Alexa, I want to play a game." Since Jeopardy! is the most popular game on the platform, Alexa will suggest it as a top recommendation. This makes implicit discovery the method that more naturally mirrors existing consumer behavior, which is why the platforms are dedicating a fair amount of research and development to make this method more useful to consumers and brands.

Every single time information is not natively available on the platform, Voice assistants will prioritize directing consumers towards Voice apps or skills rather than third-party data sources. This is an opportunity for brands to establish themselves as subject-matter experts for their category. Some branded skills have already risen to the top of the responses when users ask about their specific vertical. Tide's popular "Tide Stain Remover" skill, for example, is frequently suggested whenever a user asks for help removing a stain.

While there is no exact science to ensure that your skill is prioritized during implicit invocation, we've found the following mechanisms help increase your references:

- **App descriptions:** Your app's description should outline utility, benefits, and best features with text and images. If your app is recommended and the user asks for more details, the Voice agent will read directly from the description.
- **Use of keywords:** Just like SEO best practices, consider keywords a user might say to discover your skill. Be sure to use those keywords in the app description. (For more, read our chapter on Voice SEO)
- **Customer reviews & App ranking:** Voice skills that are valuable, designed with a quality user experience, and are relevant to the brand category tend to generate the best reviews, which in turn make the skills more discoverable.

While incorporating these mechanisms will help, they don't account for the bigger picture. Just as you would with a website domain, social channel or mobile app, you will need to weave your explicit invocation phrase into your larger marketing strategy to make sure your skill gets noticed – and used.

Avoid the pitfall of thinking too short-term. You need to employ a long-term strategy. When a brand invests in a corporate domain name, they promote the name across all communications channels, from emails to video to packaging, since it's often one of the first stops on a digital journey to connect with a brand. Voice is similar, as a brand's presence on Voice often starts with their brand name and invocation phrase. Think of your invocation phrase as the new "Follow us on Instagram" or "Download our mobile app." Consider rolling out your brand's invocation phrase ("Alexa, talk to Brand X") across all branded channels and marketing campaigns, similar to how brands promote their website domain name or branded Facebook page. Begin educating your consumers that your brand's Voice content is available to them. If a Voice agent is nearby (and given current consumption habits, one likely is), speaking is a frictionless and hands-free entry point for users, not nearly as troublesome as clicking a link or searching the app store.

“The skill discovery path can feel as mysterious as it is random.”

Good old-fashioned PR works too. When we launched National Geographic's Bravo Tango Brain Training, the first Voice application designed to support military veterans as they adjusted to civilian life, we saw app usage spike around every press story. Each new article shared different details about the app, creating buzz around the program. Users were curious to try it out. Consider the various audiences for your app and try to reach them where they are already consuming content or looking for advice. Develop a PR plan that targets these audiences across their news vertical of choice.

While we are still in early days of Voice, consumers will soon expect to have some branded experience when they explicitly invoke a brand on a Voice platform. Currently platforms such as Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa rely on third-party data sources like Wikipedia to fill in knowledge gaps when Voice skills or other first party data isn't readily available. As noted earlier in this Playbook, the brands that are having the most success are the ones who have established an early footprint, either from a Voice skill or by optimizing content sources used by the platforms.

What to think about next...

Voice is an exciting new medium and understanding how consumers will be using it and where your brand fits in will continue to be an important consideration. As we saw with the rapid adoption of social media, investing in this new platform early and before your competition will give you the time to explore the space, test and learn discovery methods, and gain a competitive advantage.

13. How Science Fiction Has Impacted Our Voice Reality

BY LAYNE HARRIS

VP, Innovation Technology

& BRAD ALPERIN

SVP, Strategy

When did you first encounter the notion of talking with machines? It's a good bet it wasn't in your kitchen with your hands full of raw chicken like the ads might suggest, but rather in movies, TV, or the pages of science fiction. Based on our steady diet of fictional talking computers, robots, and artificial intelligence over the past 60 years, it's probably not surprising to any of us that we are chatting away with our handheld computers, TVs, and home speakers today. However sensational - or detrimental - talking with machines may have seemed, it was never a matter of how we would do it, only a matter of when.

Science fiction often plants the seed for future science realities. There seems to be a symbiotic relationship between fiction and invention. We're introduced to an idea on TV, which inspires a real-world engineer to build it, which then inspires a writer to imagine the next advancement, or to think up even more fantastic inventions we have yet to dream of.

And so it goes with Voice control. From the earliest days of dreaming up telescreens, spaceships, and robots, these same creators were also the first to imagine how humanity would interact with these futuristic inventions - with our voices. It's interesting to look back over some of the icons of science fiction to see how our ideas about human and machine relationships have shifted to reflect our expectations, dreams, and fears of technology. When Voice finally came, our interactions with it were natural because we'd been watching it for decades.

So, what exactly does our science-fictional past reveal about our science-reality future?

1956 **Robbie the Robot**

In the early 1950s and 1960s, the portrayal of the utilitarian, humanoid robot was commonplace. Robots were considered to be brawny helpers that could replace manpower with industrial strength machinery. Robbie, from the television series "Lost in Space," was the iconic version of this. He was helpful, responsive, and knowledgeable. Oh, and he could lift stuff. Heavy stuff. What he lacked in personality, he made up for in sheer reliability. Robbie was a beloved tool, but still just a tool, and there was never a concern that Robbie might be lonely or in pain because after all, he was just a robot.

1968 **Hal 9000**

Hal 9000, from "2001: A Space Odyssey" introduced the idea that robots or intelligent machines, did not have to look like us. They did not have to walk or have hands to be useful. Hal wasn't just the driver of the spaceship - Hal was the spaceship. Hal also introduced consumers to the idea that intelligence has a dark side - that machines could be self-serving and betray their masters. Unlike Robbie, who uttered responses in a rhythmic, static manner, Hal sounded like a human man. A man who could both understand the nuances of the human language and respond accordingly.

1977 **R2-D2**

The '70s ushered in a whole new way of considering robots. Robots didn't have to be boring or scary - they could be cute, silly, even lovable friends. R2-D2, the sassy companion of Luke Skywalker of "Star Wars," demonstrated that not only could an intelligent machine look a lot different than a human, it could also sound completely different - and yet still be an emotional, compassionate friend. We learned that machines, like humans, might be able to feel emotions like us. They could get stressed out. They could be happy. Therefore, they could be trusted no differently than any other crew member.

1984 **The Terminator**

You cannot really talk about AI without mentioning "The Terminator," and with good reason. "The Terminator" represents the total failure of artificial intelligence. It's the idea that machines could be so smart they are not only deceptive and self-serving, such as Hal 9000, but could actively decide to eliminate humans as a plague that needs to be eradicated. The lesson here is obvious - humans still need to participate in the process, or else we are damned. Machines should always be in service to humans, not in service to themselves.

1987 **Star Trek: The Next Generation**

"Star Trek" is responsible for inspiring more innovations than any entertainment property of the 20th century. Just about every latest gadget or invention can be credited back to Kirk, Spock, and Captain Picard in one way or another. Voice technology is no exception. On "Star Trek," similar to Hal, the ship was the computer but what made the Star Trek version unique was versatility. The ship's computer had the ability to solve complex intellectual problems, in addition to your average warp speed calculation.

2001 **A.I. Artificial Intelligence**

When Steven Spielberg's "A.I." was released (to much fanfare) the world was just starting to embrace that truly thinking machines were a real possibility. Industrial robots were slowly gobbling up manufacturing jobs, software was getting smarter every day and society was more connected than ever before. With "A.I.," the idea that machines could have fully-realized lives, both joyful and tragic, for once seemed genuinely possible and the idea that they could be mistreated or abused in ways that conflicted with our own human morality was an entirely new thought.

2008 **WALL-E**

While science fiction has a healthy history of weaving moral lessons between star battles, 10-eyed creatures and doomsday scenarios, Pixar's "WALL-E" told the story of human excess and ecological neglect through a kind and curious little robot. While not particularly chatty, WALL-E conveyed emotion through actions - taking care of a struggling plant and his pet cockroach (named HAL, an obvious nod to "2001: A Space Odyssey"). WALL-E was a sympathetic character, lonely and dedicated, allowing us as viewers to experience the tragedies of overconsumption through an entity who had never known anything different.

2016 **Westworld**

Westworld considers intelligent machines as a philosophical problem to ponder, rather than focusing on what problems they can solve for us. What is it to be conscious? What constitutes a soul? The robots (if you can even call them that) of Westworld mimic humans in almost every way - from our physiology to our intelligence. Westworld introduces the idea that humans may not be so special and that we can be replaced.

“The more of us
that we can put into
the Voice experience

the more we are likely
to engage, trust
and ultimately enjoy
interacting with
our digital
companions.”

While Voice technology is just the beginning when it comes to heady concepts, such as thinking machines and human replacements, it's certainly worth considering where sci-fi is really headed regarding human interaction with machines. For example, how should we talk to a computer that we can't see? Maybe we do need some sort of phrase like they used in "Star Trek" to "wake" the computer in order to understand a command. Maybe having a computer voice that sounds like us is seen as more trustworthy than a robotic voice. Or perhaps, the expressions, tone, and substance of the voice content encourages us to use it more often?

With these and many other popular sci-fi examples of Voice technology, we can start to see that humanity is the common thread. The more of **us** that we can put into the Voice experience, the more we are likely to engage, trust, and ultimately enjoy interacting with our digital companions. In the end, maybe it's humanity that's actually the best tool for the job when the job is to interact with humans.

○ What to think about next..

When delving into Voice, consider that consumers already possess personal expectations about their Voice experience. They've been watching human/machine interactions on screens for decades and have a clear picture for how their own interactions will go, one that replicates these depictions:

- Machines are friends: Consumers expect machines to interact with them and respond to them in a personalized manner. Consumers expect machines to learn and provide helpful advice.
- But are also capable of betrayal: Consumers still want to feel in control of their interactions with machines. The Voice experience is an opt-in one. Interactions that are not explicitly asked for will decrease trust between consumer and machine. Make sure you're operating in a space that's both desired and encourages habit.

14. What Else To Consider When Adding Voice To Your Marketing Mix

BY SEAN FLYNN
Senior Strategist

As the cultural acceptance of Voice as a viable technology has become integrated into the world of consumer electronics, marketers must consider the role it plays as another crucial channel in the increasingly integrated marketing mix.

Pro tip:

If consumers are new to the category on Amazon, ensure your brand is in the top two organic options by category in order to be a preferred option.

Adapting for Voice search + e-Commerce

As expressed earlier, Search by and far has the biggest immediate implications in the Voice space, as ComScore estimates 50% of all searches will be voice-based by 2020. The world of SEO has unearthed how people brain dump into the search bar when fielding questions about anything from brands and products to the existential. While arguably a more public “out loud” function, Voice Search will operate in a similar way, but will require more awareness of human linguistics and phrasing. The more we understand about the search algorithms behind the leading Voice agents, the more opportunities are revealed for marketers to elevate their products or brands with new audiences.

Some immediate considerations:

Amazon Likes Amazon

Amazon prioritizes its owned and operated properties. 360i’s VSM research uncovered that for all retail queries, Alexa will pull its response from Amazon’s top matching product recommendation. Other sources include Alexa’s special Voice offers, previously ordered items, and Amazon specific choices. These answers all appear before organic search offers in category searches. Amazon is the gatekeeper, so optimize your Voice content according to Amazon. Consider specific partnership opportunities to gain easy market share to get into shoppers’ carts and in their previously ordered repertoire.

Rethink the Search Bar

While devices like Google Home still rely on and surface Google’s search algorithm for consumer queries, people interact with a Voice-activated device differently than they do in the search bar. They use longer, more complicated sentences and because their question is personal to them, they anticipate that the answer will be as well. Consider testing a new consumer journey that integrates use of Voice-activated devices to update SEO and paid search terms more likely to be used in Voice searches than in typed ones.

SKU No More

Consumers looking for specific products likely will not refer to them by the SKUs listed on Amazon or existing e-commerce sites. Consider updating product naming conventions to ensure the right products (especially if they come in a variety of sizes) surface in Voice results. This practice goes back to the brilliant basics of e-commerce. Make sure your product description and landing pages include the most relevant details about the product and uses keywords that your user is likely to search with.

Location. Location. Location.

Where people are searching will change as the action of searching detaches itself from a visual interface. This means more people will be searching on their commutes, in cars, walking from one place to another, etc. To capitalize on this change in search behavior, consider bolstering your brand’s location data and optimization. VSM found that Google answered nearly 100% of “where” questions by providing a list of local stores and directing the user to make an in-store purchase. This has major implications for local small businesses and traditional brick-and-mortar stores.

The New Hands Free

Voice presents possibly the lowest barrier to engagement than any action before it. No clicking, no swiping, no typing in personal information; people can use Voice when their hands are full, when they are driving a car, when they’re mid push-up or when they’re just being lazy in front of the TV and can’t be bothered to move. Therein lies a new opportunity for marketers to prompt consumers to use Voice capabilities rather than a second screen during these particularly hands-free moments.

Promoting your invocation phrase is the new CTA and it can be integrated across all existing channels. Out-of-Home advertising, for instance, has historically been a litmus test for campaign effectiveness: do people know your brand and what you want them to take away from your marketing? Since Voice assistants are all around (everyone with a smartphone has one), they plate up an opportunity for marketers to prompt immediate consumer action through Voice. As an example, a restaurant (QSR, fast casual, etc.) could use a Voice assistant-specific call to action on a billboard that prompts consumers driving by to invoke their skill that will direct them to the nearest location, or more simply, ask their GPS to take them there.

Other traditional media forms that occupy consumers' attention, like print or more guerrilla marketing tactics within gaming, also create interesting hands-free marketing opportunities.

- Physical print ads can prompt users to trigger a Voice skill for a recipe or instructional how-to's
- In-game or in-broadcast placements to prompt users to trigger a skill to gain access to exclusive content or information. When NPR broadcasts a feature news or investigative story, it encourages listeners to open NPR on their smart speaker.
- Entertainment brands could leverage Voice to create complementary experiences: users could trigger a Voice app in the middle of a show to add interactivity to a passive medium. Major film productions like Dunkirk have used Voice to create immersive experiences that go beyond the screen and create a real world connection to the film's story. See our case study on Dunkirk for more.

Beware: Triggering Voice can trigger frustrations

Burger King was an innovative first-mover with its Cannes winning "Ok Google: Whopper" campaign to take advantage of the always-listening Voice products, something not exactly to the liking of Amazon or Google. Similarly, when news broke of the little girl from Dallas, Texas that used Alexa to purchase an \$160 doll house and sugar cookies, the televised newscasts reporting the story awakened Alexa devices across the country.

Mediums like broadcast television advertising, terrestrial and streaming radio, as well as forced pre-roll on Smart TVs with streaming video options like Hulu and YouTube can be seen as a quick way for marketers to trigger in-home Voice prompts.

While this may be seen as appealing to marketers, the beauty of Voice-activated technology is that it responds to the consumer, not the marketing. Consumers like Voice because it's an opt-in experience. They're in control of their Voice experience, the machine takes orders from them, hence the "smart assistant" nickname. We advise marketers to avoid using forced broadcast to trigger in-home audio, as it comes across as disruptive and abusive to consumer trust.

Optimize owned channel abilities

Outside of media channels, marketers have to keep their owned digital properties like apps, websites, customer service pages, etc., up to date with consumer expectations to interact with brands and services vocally. Where it makes sense, update back-end CMS on your .com or apps to allow consumers to navigate through pages verbally.

Provide better customer experiences

Customer Service should be able to be accessed via Voice, but the proliferation of Voice technology does not necessarily mean marketers' actual service of customers should be a Voice assistant. Depending on a marketer's industry or service provided, make sure simpler consumer concerns can be addressed by a Voice assistant or chatbot while more pressing matters can be handled with trained representatives who can talk a potentially disgruntled consumer out of their frustrations.

From a skills perspective, we don't recommend every brand create its own Voice skill. It may not be completely necessary or worth the lift. Amplifying your SEO strategy to account for Voice can oftentimes do the trick. But, when used strategically, having a presence on Amazon Alexa or Google Assistant can contribute to a better overall customer experience.

For instance, brands like Domino's and Unilever have been opportunistic in delivering superior customer experiences in realms that already have an on-demand need-state: pizza delivery and cleaning up messes. Consider your brands' most frequent use-case to determine if any skill powered by Voice could help accelerate the consumer purchase funnel. Assessing an ownable need-state is critical to determining if a Voice skill is the right direction.

“Voice presents possibly the lowest barrier to engagement than any action before it.”

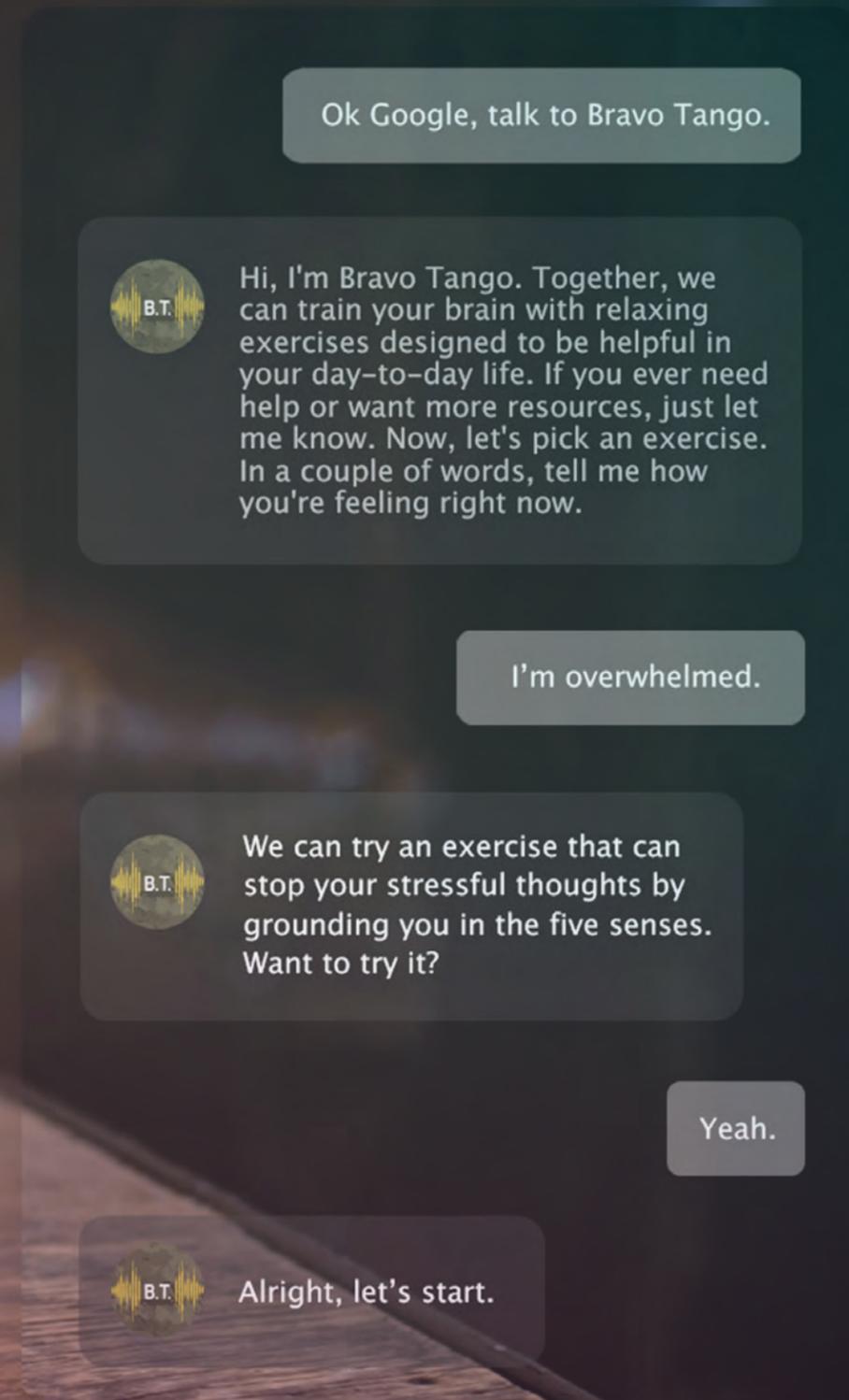
What to think about next...

Voice assistant technology offers many new opportunities for marketers, but needs to be strategically utilized instead of automatically integrated into all parts of your marketing mix. Consumers are all over Voice, but that doesn't mean that Voice is right for all brands. On the most basic level marketers must make sure they maintain their visibility within Voice assistants' search environments, ensure their owned environments are up to date for Voice functionality and take advantage of new opportunities that arise as the technology continues to improve.

Marketers should consult their agency partners to understand the best ways Voice assistants have been creatively integrated into campaigns, opportunities for SEO and paid Voice Search, as well as working with representatives from Amazon, Google, Apple, and other Voice partners for any emerging opportunities.

As Voice assistants get integrated into more products, the state of interfaces will be increasingly specialized, potentially decentralizing Search away from mobile and desktop. Brands and marketers need to prepare for how their traditional search and e-commerce partners behave as the technology becomes more widely available.

Our favorite case studies...



Ok Google, talk to Bravo Tango.



Hi, I'm Bravo Tango. Together, we can train your brain with relaxing exercises designed to be helpful in your day-to-day life. If you ever need help or want more resources, just let me know. Now, let's pick an exercise. In a couple of words, tell me how you're feeling right now.

I'm overwhelmed.



We can try an exercise that can stop your stressful thoughts by grounding you in the five senses. Want to try it?

Yeah.



Alright, let's start.

15.

Brand

National Geographic

Date

2017

Project Name

Bravo Tango Brain Training

Voice Tech

Google Assistant

When it comes to personal mental health tools, veterans often have one of two options: to either use modern mental health apps that were made for the general population, or veteran-specific mental health apps that are outdated and difficult to navigate. 360i worked with National Geographic to fill that gap, and created Bravo Tango Brain Training, a Google Assistant Voice app that provides a Voice-based, user-friendly experience built specifically with language and techniques tailored to veterans.

The inspiration for the app came from an original National Geographic series, "The Long Road Home." The scripted series worked with real veterans to understand and accurately portray their experiences at war as well as the difficulties veterans face when they return home. With Bravo Tango Brain Training, we aimed to create an experience that would help soldiers like those in the show, and help the rest of the world understand their experience. To do this we partnered with former Air Force Psychologist and combat veteran Michael Valdovinos, who helped us design programs that would serve this community best. The app recognizes a user's emotional state and then pairs them with an appropriate meditation or mindfulness exercise. In all, the app drives habitual utility and gives veterans easy access to one of the most effective methods for reducing stress and maintaining healthy coping practices.

Bonus

How Real-Life Veterans Inspired National Geographic to Build a Voice App

BY JILL CRESS

CMO, National Geographic

When National Geographic started production on “The Long Road Home,” a series based on real-life service members, their home lives and the effects of deployment, we knew the show and the stories it told would carry great weight within the veteran community. As with any of our projects, we set out to explore stories from an up-close and deeply human perspective and as we recreated these difficult and strenuous moments on “The Long Road Home,” we gained new insight into the challenges these men and women often face when returning home. We soon realized there was an opportunity to create a tangible solution that would expand the ethos of the series beyond the screen.



Veterans, a population that serves to benefit the most from technological advances—especially in the wellness space, are often left behind and underserved. When we started down this road with our agency partner 360i, it became clear that the current wellness options for veterans were lacking. They were either built for the general populous and did not address their very specific needs, or those that were tailored to them were woefully outdated with a user experience that was lacking. Shocking still, was the fact that most veterans do not qualify for VA benefits, and are not getting the simplest help they need. What “The Long Road Home” made us see was this inherent need for easy access to a first step towards help. And so, we created Bravo Tango Brain Training, the first wellness app of its kind that is free.

According to numerous studies and our consulting psychologist, former Air Force psychologist Dr. Michael Valdovinos, meditation is one the most effective methods for reducing stress, refining focus and raising optimism among veterans. Despite the societal stigma he says it carries in the veteran community, Dr. Valdovinos has been studying the positive effects of mediation in his practice for years and partnered with us to design the Bravo Tango Brain Training program. The Voice-powered program engages directly with the user when prompted and verbally confirms how the user is feeling before pairing them with an appropriate exercise. Bravo Tango can recognize over 40 emotions and offers meditation-based treatments in visualization, breathing techniques, interpersonal connection muscle relaxation, focus, grounding and others.

What’s most profound about this program, other than the fact that nothing like this has existed before, is that it completely democratizes veteran access to mental healthcare; any veteran with a smartphone now has access to professional treatment. The exercises in the app are the very same that Dr. Valdovinos conducts in his private practice, but adapted for the Voice interface. More so than other technologies, Voice allows for two-way engagement and creates an environment for connection. While Bravo Tango Brain Training is certainly not a cure-all for mental health it represents a first step and a bridge to seeking help. We hope we can do some good for this community that has given us so much, by providing this simple, but powerful technology, that will live on long after “The Long Road Home’s” final episode.

To start now, download Google Assistant and say,
“Ok Google, talk to Bravo Tango.”



16.

Brand

Jameson

Date

2017

Project Name

The Jameson Bar

Voice Tech

Google Assistant

Traditional Irish toasts are one of the most sought-after inspirations for toast-making, especially during the holidays. The proof is in the consumer search data pudding. Around birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries, interest in snarky Irish toasts peak. This insight led popular Irish whiskey brand, Jameson, to create “The Jameson Bar”, a Voice app for Google Assistant that delivers occasion-appropriate toasts to consumers, along with step-by-step Voice guides for the brand’s best cocktails recipes.

Creating utility, beyond entertainment, was a key component of this app’s development. And building a Voice experience from an existing consumer behavior and filling this known need-state was instrumental. With a holiday-timed launch, 360i began production on the Jameson bar in July, nailing down our key user flows and perfecting the cocktail recipes and toast selection.

For instance, if you ask The Jameson Bar for a toast to the New Year, the app will suggest, “May all your troubles in the New Year be as short as your New Year’s resolutions. Happy New Years! Cheers!” Ask for an appropriate Christmas toast and it will quip, “May your holidays be merry. Your sweaters be ugly. And your glasses be full. Happy holidays. Cheers!” The app is also infused with the Irish wit that consumers have come to expect from Jameson. If you ask for a Tom Collins recipe, The Jameson Bar will instead provide instructions for a Michael Collins, Jameson’s version of a Tom Collins, because “Michael.. Tom.. same thing” according to the Pub. And one of our favorite Easter Eggs.. just like any bar, The Jameson Pub is age-gated and will offer a Shirley Temple recipe to anyone under 21.

17.

Brand

Tide

Date

2017

Project Name

Tide Stain Remover - Alexa Skill

Voice Tech

Alexa

Tide Stain Remover was one of the first branded skills available on the Amazon Alexa platform and it remains one of the best-in-class examples of branded content for Voice. As a concept it's pretty simple - the Tide Stain Remover provides helpful solutions on how to remove common household stains such as coffee, ink, and wine from fabrics. The responses are practical and useful and often do not include the use of the Tide Stain Remover product it is promoting. But what the skill does for the brand is establishing Tide as a subject matter expert on a topic that is at the core of the product's main purpose - stain removal.

Tide did a few key implementations with the skill. First, they kept the experience simple and straightforward, without a lot of additional branded messaging. Most consumers who are asking for stain removal are likely experiencing the actual stain problem at that moment. The skill was then presented to consumers and they were able to have Alexa talk through solutions. By providing a straightforward, practical response they are gaining immediate trust with the consumer, which is critical for their category, and by doing so ensured the consumer would likely use the skill again for future stains, or could even influence product purchase considerations.

The other benefit of keeping the content simple and to-the-point is that with the platform moving towards an 'implicit discovery' model, the Tide Stain Remover skill will be surfaced as a primary content source for all organic stain removal input questions, putting them ahead of their competitors, who are currently playing catch-up.

18.

Brand

Warner Brothers

Date

2017

Project Name

Dunkirk - Alexa Skill

Voice Tech

Alexa

The Dunkirk Alexa skill, created by Warner Brothers to promote the movie of the same name, is an innovative choose-your-own-adventure, Voice-driven experience. The concept behind this skill is based on the WWII battle of Dunkirk, where Allied troops were pinned down by the Germans, by land, air, and sea, and were forced to survive relentless bombing raids and attacks from above, with little shelter or defense. This skill was discoverable to consumers through press promotion from Warner Brothers and the Amazon Echo skills newsletter.

In the Voice skill game version, the user begins their journey by choosing to play as an Infantryman, a Tank Commander, or an RAF Pilot, under heavy fire on the Dunkirk beach. Next, the narrator sets the stage with grim details, along with impressive cinematic-style sound effects and occasional pauses, to allow for the user to decide the continuing path. The result is a unique wartime story, based on each decision that was made by the user themselves. As a bonus, the user's complete journey can also be exported as a fully-printable comic book via digital download.



19.

What to do Now and Next

- Educate yourself on Voice. Read this playbook, then read it again.
- Consider the landscape. Are your consumers using Voice? 47.3 million U.S. adults have access to a smart speaker and soon 50% of searches will be conducted via Voice. As those numbers continue to climb, the machine learning pool is filling with data. It's likely time for you to start wading in.
- Voice requires very specialized skill sets, see if your agency partner has them in house. If you're ready to wade in yourself, start hiring for the roles outlined in our staffing chapter.
- Apply your existing SEO strategy to Voice. Identify the questions your brand wants to supply the answers to, and optimize your website content accordingly. Apply SEO best practices to make sure your brand is always first to answer.
- Know what the platforms know, especially when it pertains to topics relevant to your brand. Software like VSM can help you identify the own-able whitespace for your brand as well as where your competitors are beating you.
- Litmus test your brand voice for Voice. Does your presence in Voice feel authentic to your brand or does it feel disembodied? A well-crafted brand personality will come through naturally. Consistency is key. If your brand voice isn't working in Voice, it may be time to rethink your brand's personality beyond just look and feel, consider sound and talk too.
- Want to build a skill? First, identify the consumer need that your skill will solve. It should be solvable in a one or two-minute conversation and help you achieve your business objectives. Map out the ideal user flow or "Happy Path," then build from there. Stress test it. Read the Voice scripts out loud. Submit your scripts to the platform early and often and submit any edits in chunks on a daily basis. Then QA the crap out of it.
- Make sure people can find your skill. Your invocation phrase is your new brand CTA. Write a solid skill description, use appropriate keywords, encourage users to review their experience with your skill and incorporate it across all marketing channels.
- Make sure you understand all the places Voice fits in your customer journey. Ensure those environments are up to date for Voice functionality.

Interested in learning more?

Contact Voice.Playbook@360i.com.

