

!! Kaja Grzybowska & Gosia Rusin

Voice

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IN THIS ARTICLE YOU'LL FIND OUT:

- Is voice commerce another breakthrough
- What the research tells us
- How PWA can support voice search

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Despite the constant growth of the market of smart speakers, voice commerce hasn't sparked a revolution in retail. However, jumping to conclusions that the whole trend is overrated seems a bit hasty. Many brands simply don't know how to properly incorporate voice into their customers' journeys.

When Echo Dot became one of Amazon's Christmas bestsellers, we were all eager to proclaim that voice recognition technology would reshape the way we use the internet (or at least the way mobile did). The data seemed to support this thinking.

eMarket analytics estimate that, by 2021, the number of US voice assistant users will reach 122.7 million, representing 42.2% of US internet users and 36.6% of the population. The global smart speaker market is also expanding by leaps and bounds (Tab 1).

Amazon has significantly pulled ahead of the pack, and so it is clear that smart speakers will find the way into the retail sooner or later. This aim is barely a secret since Prime members can get Echo Dot (bundled with one month of its Amazon Music Unlimited service) at the price of a cup of coffee. Besides, Amazon has never hidden the fact that making money on electronic devices is not its primary focus. Echo, aligned with Alexa, was always more of a way to smooth access to all kinds of Amazon and Amazon-related services. Amazon's deal with UK food delivery company Deliveroo — a deal was later subject to a CMA investigation — only proves that point.

Amazon is not the only one trying to build a new bridge to users' hearts (and wallets). Both Amazon and Google are selling their devices for 50 USD, which is basically

giving them away for free. Mind you, the previous 20 years have already taught us that Silicon Valley companies give nothing away for free, even though we didn't always know that we were paying.

Voice assistants, as well as smart speakers, are taking the market by storm, and — according to Voicebot study conducted in August 2018 — they are really used by customers for a variety of purposes. People ask them to answer questions, play music, check the weather, set a timer, turn on/off the radio, and many other things. However, making purchases is very low down on the list, with only 1.5% of users declaring that they use this feature at least once a month. Voicebot experts claim that this number actually proves that voice commerce is making progress, but even they must see why there is more general skepticism when it comes to using smart speakers for purchasing.

And skepticism certainly abounds...

IS VOICE COMMERCE OVERHYPED?

Wired asking, "Hey Alexa, Why Is Voice Shopping So Lousy?" suggests that forecasting a revolution in retail based on just the raw numbers is a little bit rash, especially when the customer experience delivered by the biggest player on the market remains so weak.

Tab. 1 Worldwide smart speaker shipments and annual growth Canaylst smart speaker market pulse: Q3 2019

Vendor	Q3 2019 shipments (million)	Q3 2019 market share	Q3 2018 shipments (million)	Q3 2018 market share	Annual growth
Amazon	10.4	36.6%	6.3	31.9%	65.9%
Alibaba	3.9	13.6%	2.2	11.1%	77.6%
Baidu	3.7	13.1	1.0	4.9%	290.1%
Google	3.5	12.3%	5.9	29.8%	-40.1%
Xiaomi	3.4	12.0%	1.9	9.7%	77.7%
Others	3.6	12.5%	2.5	12.5%	44.0%
Total	28.6	100.0%	19.7	100.0%	44.9%

Note: percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding, source: Canaylst Smart Speaker (sell-in shipments), November 2019

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