

# OK, marketers: Here's what people are saying about their voice-activated speakers

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## Topics

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While getting to know their voice-activated devices, people are forging a new relationship with technology and new expectations when it comes to brand experiences, writes Google's Sara Kleinberg.

If you've spent any time online or watching TV in the last couple of months, you've undoubtedly seen ads for voice-activated speakers. Spots for the Google Home Mini and Amazon Echo Dot were in particularly heavy rotation as holiday marketing heated up. And if the holiday season is any indication, more people than ever will be using voice-activated speakers in 2018.

We were interested to know why and how consumers are using their new devices, so we surveyed over 1,500 people who own Google Home or Amazon Echo voice-activated speakers. [The data is telling](#). It indicates that people's relationship with [technology is shifting—fast](#).

To get a deeper understanding, we conducted in-home ethnographies with voice-activated speaker owners.<sup>1</sup> What we found is that people are not only learning how to use the devices, they're weaving them into their lives and daily routines. And in some instances, they're forging a new kind of bond with technology, one that's often much more personal than in the past.

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## A more natural relationship

As more and more people invite assistive technology into their lives and integrate it into their homes, many expect a more seamless and efficient experience. And these speakers are making that possible.

“Voice is a more natural way of interacting than typing and using your thumbs,” one person told us.

In fact, being able to talk to the device is also leading to a more personal relationship with technology.

We were surprised to find that despite the newness of the technology, many people are already quite comfortable with it. Fifty-three percent of people who own a voice-activated speaker said it feels natural speaking to it, with many saying it feels like talking to a friend.<sup>2</sup> Several respondents told us they’re saying “please” and “thank you” to their devices—something we’ve also seen in Google Home queries.

But it goes beyond “please” and “thank you.” “My kids have a dialogue with our [voice-activated speaker] and even say ‘sorry’ to her,” one person said.

“I’d call it an ‘e-lative,’ like an electronic relative,” said another.

## In the moment

People have also noticed that being able to talk to their voice-activated speaker doesn’t pull them out of the moment.

“It’s a good option for moving away from screen time. A different way to get information and not be glued to a screen,” one person told us.

That’s one reason the majority of owners place their devices in common areas like living rooms and the family den.

“It becomes more interactive and it’s less of you pulling out your phone. You don’t have to pull away from your conversation. It’s not me looking it up, ignoring everything else being said. It’s like we’re all kind of here,” another person told us.

## The daily routine

From alarms to calendar reminders, people have been using mobile devices as part of their day-to-day lives for some time now. But even here we're seeing people drawn to voice-activated speakers because the devices allow them to get many of those things done in a shorter amount of time.

In fact, one of the top reasons people use the device is because it allows them to more easily multitask.

"I can get my news while I'm doing something in the morning," one person told us. "You can get sports updates while you're doing something else. It gives me more time or saves me time."

Another person told us that the "first thing" he does when he wakes up is say "turn on morning," which "opens the blinds, turns on NPR, and turns on the lights."

"It becomes a device that isn't a device anymore," said yet another. "It's an entity in your life that's always behind the scenes for things you need. It hasn't let me down."

## A personal shopper

Getting the things you need, of course, requires shopping. And as people go about their daily routines, they are testing the waters with buying things through their devices.

In fact, one respondent said the ability to purchase things made it feel more like an actual assistant. "I went from asking it questions to now it's sending me actual products. Way more involved, way more real," he said.

Some of them even have suggestions for brands and weren't shy about their expectations.

“It should be able to predict what I’d want and help me execute it. Like, ‘Hey! It’s taco Tuesday, your basket is ready with all the ingredients,’” said one.

“If I’m asking the device for concert tickets, that’s an opportunity for it to say ‘Ticketmaster has tickets,’” said another.

In other words, consumers are open to brand messaging on their devices as long as it feels native to the experience. Brands, of course, will have to proceed with the usual caution.

“There’s a line between evasiveness and pervasiveness,” said one respondent. How not to cross the line? It “has to be useful.”

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## Sources

- 1 Google/Peerless Insights, “Voice-Activated Speakers: People’s Lives Are Changing,” U.S., A18+, in-home ethnographies, July 2017.
- 2 Google/Peerless Insights, “Voice-Activated Speakers: People’s Lives Are Changing,” n=1,642, U.S. monthly active voice-activated speaker owners (Amazon Echo/Dot and Google Home), A18+, Aug. 2017.