Alexa will soon be able to launch Android and iOS apps using voice commands

Amazon is working on a new feature for its Alexa voice assistant that will let the software launch Android and iOS apps using voice commands, a first for Amazon's assistant and a bold expansion of its strategy to position Alexa as a platform-agnostic alternative to Apple's Siri and Google Assistant. Called Alexa for Apps, the new feature is launching today in preview form, meaning Amazon is working with select developers on how they'd like to make use of it.

For instance, Amazon imagines users on either an iPhone or an Android device asking Alexa to open Twitter and search for a hashtag, and the app would then let the companion Alexa skill do the work of launching the app and inputting the search term. The results would then show up on the phone instead of being read aloud. Another example Amazon gives is using a voice request to launch TikTok and start a hands-free video recording (in the event you're filming yourself).

It's a new type of interaction Amazon is hoping could catch on and help better position Alexa as a viable competitor to digital assistants from Apple and Google, both of which are deeply baked into their respective operating systems and have richer access to apps and system-level features as a result. Amazon tried and failed to launch its own phone back in 2014 using a forked version of Android. And while its tablets, Echo family of devices, and Fire TV line of streaming devices continue to use more advanced versions of that forked OS, Amazon still struggles with the fact that it cannot directly

reach consumers on mobile devices without going through Apple and Google first.

Amazon is trying to make up for the fact that it does not have its own mobile operating system

Hampering the adoption of such a feature is the fact that, while Alexa may be more widespread in the smart home, developers already have to manage two competing digital assistants that are much more widely used on phones. You can already use Siri to order an Uber or ask Google Assistant to play an episode of *BoJack Horseman* on Netflix. App makers now have to tailor these integrations to work with Alexa to support the feature – or at the very least, take Alexa skills (if they exist) and reorient them to work for the new app launching format. But that's why Amazon is launching in preview form before making it more widely available as a beta and then as fully baked feature ready for consumers.

Amazon has a bunch of other Alexa news announcements today coinciding with its Alexa Live presentation. Those include a beta for a more powerful conversational AI model for Alexa that will allow users to talk more naturally to the assistant and updates to the technology used to build Alexa experiences (called APL) that will enable improved audio apps better browser-based Alexa games.

Amazon is also launching a skill resumption feature so you can pause for a bit to continue performing a task and check in with Alexa on the progress of a previous request. Lastly, Amazon is flaunting a quick links feature in beta that will let developers launch Alexa skills from mobile apps, websites, and even ads as well as the ability to make purchases on Echo devices with screens or from Amazon.com.

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