Amazon must solve hallucination problem before launching AI-enabled Alexa

“[T]he most challenging thing about AI agents is making sure they’re safe, reliable, and predictable,” Anthropic’s chief executive, Dario Amodei, told the FT last year.

Agent-like AI software needs to get to the point “where… people can actually have trust in the system,” he added. “Once we get to that point, then we’ll release these systems.”

One current employee said more steps were still needed, such as overlaying child safety filters and testing custom integrations with Alexa such as smart lights and the Ring doorbell.

“The reliability is the issue—getting it to be working close to 100 percent of the time,” the employee added. “That’s why you see us… or Apple or Google shipping slowly and incrementally.”

Numerous third parties developing “skills” or features for Alexa said they were unsure when the new generative AI-enabled device would be rolled out and how to create new functions for it.

“We’re waiting for the details and understanding,” said Thomas Lindgren, co-founder of Swedish content developer Wanderword. “When we started working with them they were a lot more open… then with time, they’ve changed.”

Another partner said that after an initial period of

“pressure” that was put on developers by Amazon to start getting ready for the next generation of Alexa, things had gone quiet.

An enduring challenge for Amazon’s Alexa team—which was hit by major lay-offs in 2023—is how to make money. Figuring out how to make the assistants “cheap enough to run at scale” will be a major task, said Jared Roesch, co-founder of generative AI group OctoAI.

Options being discussed include creating a new Alexa subscription service, or to take a cut of sales of goods and services, said a former Alexa employee.

Prasad said Amazon’s goal was to create a variety of AI models that could act as the “building blocks” for a variety of applications beyond Alexa.

“What we are always grounded on is customers and practical AI, we are not doing science for the sake of science,” Prasad said. “We are doing this… to deliver customer value and impact, which in this era of generative AI is becoming more important than ever because customers want to see a return on investment.”

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