Google Assistant everywhere: more dedicated buttons, expansion on lower-end phones

There are more than 2.5 billion Android-powered phones in use and Google is trying to make the Assistant a central part of nearly all of them. Google announced more smartphones will carry a dedicated Google Assistant button.

According to the company, which announced the news from Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Spain on Monday, over 100 million phones will have this feature in the near future. The question

is: will this become an across the board attribute of all new smartphones running Android?

Rising awareness and usage of Google Assistant. Google said in its blog post that it's "seeing more than 15 times the number of queries asking for the Assistant's help to send messages and read incoming texts out loud compared to before." However, we don't have a sense of absolute query volumes or actions happening on Google Assistant and how that's impacting more conventional search usage.

Recently Google began testing ads in Google Assistant results. That may be an effort to monetize new "inventory" or it may anticipate a time when more traditional searches are replaced by Assistant lookups.

Local search in Messages. The company is also adding suggestions in Messages on Android phones connected to movies, restaurants and weather. These will be locally relevant and contextual, presumably tied to the substance of the messaging, using "on-device AI." Users will be able to tap the suggestion to learn more. It can be shared with the other person but will remain invisible to that individual otherwise.

Users will also be able to invoke the Assistant during a chat conversion by pressing the Home button while the Messages app is open, to conduct a search.

Expanding the Assistant on lower-end phones. Google said that with the popularity of lower-end Android Go and KaiOS phones, the company has seen "a seven times increase in the number of active users for the Assistant in India, Indonesia, Mexico and Brazil." Google is now introducing speech to text to dictate text messages or conduct searches on those entry level devices.

Google Assistant Actions are coming to those same devices.

There's also expanded language support. In addition to

understanding eight Indian languages, the Google Assistant is growing the number of languages that can use its bilingual capabilities. Google will now allow mobile users to combine languages to speak interchangeably in 12 languages, including English, French, Japanese, Korean, Swedish and Dutch, among others.

Why you should care. Android is the world's dominant computer operating system, with a more than 80 percent market share according to IDC. Outside of developed countries, mobile phones are the primary internet access device for hundreds of millions of people.

The expansion of Google Assistant awareness and functionality on all these devices will drive further adoption and usage of voice search and the Assistant. This will eventually mean more queries coming through the Assistant, which means fewer organic slots to rank for. And actions will become increasingly important to developers and publishers accordingly.

About The Author

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