Google Assistant kills off support for third-party note apps



Enlarge / The lettering “Hey Google” on the Google pavilion at the CES consumer electronics show in Las Vegas in 2018. These words activate Google Assistant, Google’s virtual personal assistant.

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The deprioritized Google Assistant is losing yet another

feature. This time Google is killing off support for third-party note integration. The popular Android note-taking app AnyList announced the change, saying that “Google is shutting down the Google Assistant Notes & Lists integration for non-Google apps on June 20, 2023.” Google’s support page has since been updated confirming that, “starting June 20th, Google Assistant notes and lists will no longer work with non-Google list apps.”

One of the best Assistant commands lets you dictate notes directly into the voice system, letting you create reminders, shopping lists, or just new, plain-format notes. Exactly where these notes land has been a point of contention over the years. They used to land in Google Keep no matter what, but then Google blew up that functionality in 2017 and forced all shopping notes into “Google Express,” Google’s Amazon Prime competitor. As someone who often used the shopping list for groceries, having it tied to an online store I had no intention of ever using was pretty silly. Even if you didn’t mind the change, which essentially turned your notes into an ad for Google’s shopping site, the note-taking features got a major downgrade, going from the fully featured Google Keep app to Google Express’ barely there web app.

In 2019, presumably after forced Google Express integration didn’t juice the services numbers, Google Assistant received another note-taking revamp, this time allowing users to pick whatever note-taking app they wanted from the Assistant settings. Google Keep, Any.do, AnyList, and Bring were all available at launch, and the Assistant would seamlessly dump your notes into your preferred app and allow you to update them by voice. It was a great system, but now that’s going away, too. Google tells 9to5Google that Google Keep will keep working—it is seemingly plugged into the same system as third parties—but all those third-party apps are being cut off.

Google Assistant has been around for about seven years and seems to have fallen out of favor at Google. The last hardware

release of a Google Assistant smart screen or speaker was two years ago, and that capped off eight hardware releases in five years. In the past year, we've seen the shutdown of the Google Assistant's driving mode and the Assistant's Duplex on the Web. The Assistant was removed from new hardware entries in the Nest Wi-Fi and FitBit lines, and after losing a patent case against Sonos, Assistant speakers were stripped of group volume control. Android Auto builds of Google's Waze have shipped without Google Assistant support, and Wear OS watches from third parties seem to no longer support the voice assistant. Third-party Google Assistant speakers and smart displays were also killed off recently.

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The core problem here is that the Assistant costs a lot of money to run, the hardware gets sold at cost to compete with Amazon, and the Assistant doesn't directly bring in any revenue. If you don't have a powerful executive looking at the wider ecosystem effects of having a good voice assistant, it's easy to justify shutting the project down. We don't have a lot of direct numbers from Google, but Amazon is in exactly the same boat, and Alexa loses $10 billion a year. With the future of voice assistants at these Big Tech firms looking shaky, the hope is that the open source projects like Home Assistant will pick up the slack.

One report from CNBC says the Assistant team has been reassigned to work on Google's ChatGPT competitor, Bard. Another from The Information says Google plans to "invest less in developing its Google Assistant voice-assisted search for cars and for devices not made by Google," which would certainly line up with what we're seeing on Wear OS. If Google wants to make the Assistant a Google-hardware-only voice app, continually stripping it of features and reducing its performance isn't a strong sales pitch. The original point of the Assistant was that it was an "ambient computing" interface that was available everywhere.

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