Google’s Gemini is already winning the next-gen assistant wars

One of the most important changes in Samsung’s new phones is a simple one: when you long-press the side button on your phone, instead of activating Samsung’s own Bixby assistant by default, you’ll get Google Gemini.

This is probably a good thing. Bixby was never a very good virtual assistant — Samsung originally built it primarily as a way to more simply navigate device settings, not to get information from the internet. It has gotten better since and can now do standard assistant things like performing visual searches and setting timers, but it never managed to catch up to the likes of Alexa, Google Assistant, and now, even Siri. So, if you’re a Samsung user, this is good news! Your assistant is probably better now. (And if, for some unknown reason, you really do truly love Bixby, don’t worry: there’s still an app.)

The switch to Gemini is an even bigger deal for Google. Google was caught off guard a couple of years ago when ChatGPT launched but has caught up in a big way. According to recent reporting from *The Wall Street Journal*, CEO Sundar Pichai now believes Gemini has surpassed ChatGPT, and he wants Google to have 500 million users by the end of this year. It might just get there one Samsung phone at a time.

Gemini is now a front-and-center feature on the world’s most popular Android phones, and millions upon millions of people will likely start to use it more — or use it at all — now that it’s so accessible. For Google, which is essentially betting

that Gemini is the future of every single one of its products, that brings a hugely important new set of users and interactions. All that data makes Gemini better, which makes it more useful, which makes it more popular. Which makes it better again.

Right now, Google appears to be well ahead of its competitors in one important way: Gemini is the most capable virtual assistant on the market right now, and it's not particularly close. It's not that Gemini is specifically great; it's just that it has more access to more information and more users than anyone else. This race is still in its early stages, and *no* AI product is very good yet — but Google knows better than anyone that if you can be everywhere, you can get good really fast. That worked so well with search that it got Google into antitrust trouble. This time, at least so far, it seems like Google's going to have an even easier time taking over the market.

It's not that Gemini is specifically great; it's just that it has more access to more information and more users than anyone else

For years, there were three meaningful players in the virtual assistant space. Amazon's Alexa, Google's Assistant, and Apple's Siri all offered similar features and were similarly accessible through speakers and phones and wearables. But now? The much-hyped, AI-first "Remarkable Alexa" is, by all accounts, massively delayed and massively underpowered. The latest versions of Siri shipped with a wackier animation and seemingly no new smarts or capabilities.

There are other ascendant AI assistants, of course. ChatGPT, Claude, Grok, and Copilot all have strong underlying models, and some share the same multimodal capabilities as Gemini. There are lots of good reasons to pick them or even something like Perplexity over Gemini. But they're missing the most important thing: distribution. They're apps you have to

download, log in to, and open every time. Gemini is a button you can press — and that's a big difference. There's a reason OpenAI is reportedly working on everything from a web browser to a Jony Ive-designed ChatGPT gadget: the built-in options usually win.

The built-in options are also the ones that tend to have the best integration across the platform, which might be the whole ball game. Gemini can already change settings on your phone and, with new upgrades, can even do things across apps — grabbing information from your email and dumping it into a text message draft, just to name one example. Because of the way iOS and Android are architected, no other assistant has this kind of access — and again, there's no indication that Siri's ever going to be as good as it needs to be. If the future of assistants is this kind of agentic, using-your-apps-for-you behavior, Google's inherent advantage might be insurmountable.

Google is practically spoiled for places to put Gemini

Meanwhile, Google is practically spoiled for places to put Gemini. The company recently announced that all paying Workspace customers will get Gemini access. You can access Gemini with one click from your Gmail inbox or summon it with one keystroke in Docs. And the underlying tech is even more pervasive. You can use Gemini to find stuff on YouTube and in Drive, and practically every time you search, a Gemini-powered AI Overview appears at the top of your results. "Today, all seven of our products and platforms with more than two billion monthly users use Gemini models," Pichai said on Google's earnings call last fall. (Fun fact: the word "gemini" appears 29 times in that earnings call transcript, only three fewer than "search.")

When it comes to how people actually encounter and interact with these models, though, the phone is still the AI device of choice. And that's where Google has maybe its largest

advantage. “Gemini’s deep integration is improving Android,” Pichai said on that earnings call. “For example, Gemini Live lets you have free-flowing conversations with Gemini; people love it.” For now, smartphones are the most compelling AI devices, and Google can integrate its systems unlike any other. Apple, scrambling to play catch-up with the iPhone, had to launch an awkward handoff with ChatGPT just so Siri could answer more questions.

All of these assistants, including Gemini, still have lots of limitations. They lie; they misunderstand; they lack the necessary integrations to do even some of the basic things Alexa and Assistant have been able to do for years. The Gemini models still occasionally do ridiculous, deal-breaking things like tell people to eat rocks and generate diverse founding fathers. But if you believe the AI era is coming, or is maybe even here, then there is nothing more important right now than getting your AI platform in front of users. People are developing new habits, learning new systems, developing new relationships with their virtual assistants. The more entrenched we become, the less likely we will be to dump our AI friend for another one.

ChatGPT had the first-mover advantage and captured the world’s imagination by showing just how compelling an AI chatbot could be. But Google has the distribution. It can put its sparkly icon in front of practically the entire population of the internet every single day, across a huge range of products, and get the kind of data and feedback it needs to eventually do this well. Even as it fights in court over how powerful its default status made it in search, Google is executing the same playbook with AI. And it’s working again.

https://www.theverge.com/2025/1/22/24349416/google-gemini-virtual-assistant-samsung-siri-alexa