

Meta courts celebs like Awkwafina to voice AI assistants ahead of Meta Connect



Judi Dench, Keegan-Michael Key, and Awkwafina are among multiple “actors and influencers” whose voices could become part of Meta’s AI offering, *Bloomberg reported* on Friday. The company is apparently working to wrap up deals quickly so it can develop and show off the new voices at its Meta Connect conference in September.

Specifically, at least one tool will be “a digital assistant product called MetaAI,” according to multiple unnamed sources in a *New York Times* report. Meta is negotiating with all of the top talent agencies in Hollywood to secure the voices, the *Times* writes. And it may pay the actors who sign on “millions of dollars.” Meta doled out similarly fat stacks to the celebrities represented by the recently-discontinued Meta AI chatbots from last year’s Connect.

The contracts would reportedly be temporary, and actors could choose whether to re-up as the term ends. And the voices would be found across Meta's social media stable, seemingly anywhere Meta AI exists today. That includes on Facebook and Instagram, as well as on Meta Ray-Ban smart glasses, the outlet writes. Meta did not respond to a request for comment by press time.

But every single one of those implementations smacks of novelty, and for me at least, they get old very quickly. Generative AI, though, has proven undeniably better for mimicking an actual human voice, as in OpenAI's GPT-4o demo of a chatbot that sounded startlingly similar to Scarlett Johansson (which she wasn't exactly happy about). Hearing Awkwafina's distinctive rasp will feel a lot less like a cheap trick if the famous person version of Meta AI can do everything the regular one can (though we won't know if that's how it'll work if and until Meta announces the featured voices).

And I don't own a pair of Meta Ray-Bans, but I'd be tempted if it means I can have AI Dame Judy Dench tell me about, I don't know, the bridge I'm looking at. I like that she would be paid a negotiated fee for it, and plus, when it lies to me about that bridge, I can just pretend the voice is actually supposed to be M, Dench's *James Bond* spy chief, trying to throw me off the trail.

<https://www.theverge.com/2024/8/3/24212580/meta-ai-voice-assistant-celebrity-voices-judi-dench-awkwafina-keegan-michael-key>