No, you don’t need a voice-controlled printer in your life

Voice assistants are all the rage right now — Amazon’s Alexa and Google’s Assistant are popping up in every connected gadget you can think of, from thermostats to refrigerators to headphones. This week, HP announced that it plans to bring voice assistant compatibility to its line of printers. They will work with Alexa, Google Assistant, and Microsoft’s Cortana (cute that HP is throwing Microsoft a bone here).

The company says that you can use a voice assistant to ask the printer to spit things out like a to-do list, calendar, graph paper, Sudoku puzzle, or a coloring page with a cartoon character’s outline on it. HP’s global head of home printing, Anneliese Olson, says “Our tests with customers show that they want to print whenever, wherever.”

That certainly sounds like something an executive at a company that makes printers and ink for those printers would say, because I can’t think of a single reason why I’d want to ask Alexa to print something out, and I use Alexa in my home all the time. Printing out a to-do list that’s already on my phone is a complete waste of paper, and any parent knows that a full coloring book costs less than a buck and printing out a page at a time from an inkjet printer would cost a fortune and take forever. None of this sounds like it’d be easier to do with my voice instead of just using my phone or computer to print something out either.

All of the things HP wants you to print by voice are either unnecessary or easier to do from a phone or computer
HP says that in the future, printers will have voice assistants baked into them, so you won’t need a separate

speaker like an Echo or Google Home to control it by voice. You could then use your voice to add the printer to your network (have fun dictating a 16-character alphanumeric Wi-Fi password to your printer) or ask it how much ink is left in it, which it almost surely will tell you on the display that's already there. HP also imagines a world where your voice assistant knows so much about your life that it will proactively print boarding passes for your flight just before it's time to leave for the airport. Too bad those same boarding passes have been on our phones for years already and require no ink or paper.

All of this just smacks of HP trying to make its printers relevant to the hot tech of the moment, when, in fact, they are still just inkjet printers that most of us use maybe once a year. The one place where printers do still get used a lot is in the office, but wisely, HP has not tried to make the case that its voice-controlled printers belong there, because that would surely be a nightmare for everyone involved.

Printers aren't the only products that don't need voice control, but will get it anyway because it's the fad of the moment. Alexa has shown up in bathroom mirrors, smoke alarms, and even the Big Mouth Billy Bass, none of which make a compelling argument for why it needs to be there. We'll likely see Alexa and the other voice assistants get forced into more unnecessary gadgets as we figure out exactly how we want to use these services in our lives.

But I can tell you this much: I don't want to talk to my printer.

https://www.theverge.com/circuitbreaker/2018/2/2/16965632/hp-voice-assistant-printer-alexa-cortana-google