

What Will It Take to Get Consumers to Transact Via Voice?

Buying via voice assistants may not be mainstream, but users engage on their path to purchase

ARTICLE |

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Voice commerce holds promise. But at the moment, more consumers are turning to their Amazon Echo and Google Home devices to research products than add them to their cart.

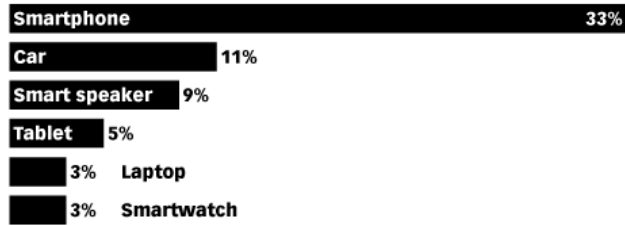
Why is that?

Despite the proliferation of Alexa-enabled Amazon devices and growing competition from Google Home and smaller players, there are twice as many monthly smartphone voice assistant users compared with monthly smart speaker users (90.1 million vs. 45.7 million), according to a new study by [Voicebot](#), [Pullstring](#) and [RAIN](#). While 88.5% of US internet users own a smartphone, only 22.9% own a smart speaker.

The dominance of smartphones for voice assistants was also demonstrated in a September 2018 survey by [CivicScience](#). One-third of US internet users access voice assistants through phones compared with 9% on smart speakers. This data also shows the rising usage of voice assistants in cars (11%).

On Which Devices Do US Internet Users Use a Voice Assistant?

% of respondents, Sep 2018



Note: n=1,828 ages 18+

Source: CivicScience as cited in company blog, Sep 9, 2018

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According to the Voicebot study, smartphone voice assistants are most commonly used while driving (62%) — which makes sense since hands are not free— followed by relaxing at home (38%), a very different use case.

Even as voice is integrated into more channels like cars, TVs and appliances and moving beyond the obvious use cases, voice commerce isn't catching on as quickly.

Voice via smartphone is primarily used as an informational tool. The highest number of users asked general questions (83.6%) as well as monthly usage (52.7%). Asking about traffic or directions (47.4%) and finding a place to eat (28.8%) were the next most common monthly use cases.

Interestingly, using voice to research a product before purchase had higher usage than entertainment-related tasks like streaming music, games, radio or podcasts. A substantial figure (41.8%) have at least once tried researching a product, 24.8% did this monthly and 5.3% reported daily usage.

The majority of US internet users are fairly indifferent to buying via a voice-activated speaker, though. According to an October 2018 survey conducted by **Bizrate Insights** for eMarketer, 54% haven't tried it and have no interest and 31% haven't used it but had some interest. Only 5% have used it while 1% used it regularly.

However, 37% had performed a shopping activity via voice. The highest number of respondents (18%) asked for product

recommendations, followed by browsing products (15%) and re-ordering previously purchased products (11%).

Voice commerce has the potential to go beyond re-ordering paper towels. "Renewables and consumables are the gateway drug to voice shopping," said Greg Hedges, vice president of emerging experiences at voice strategy agency RAIN. He spoke with eMarketer about the factors that will drive transactions among today's voice users.

eMarketer: Consumers perform shopping activities through voice, but there doesn't seem to be a huge demand for buying via voice. Is that going to change?

Hedges: If I'm ready to transact, I'm going to go through whatever channel is easiest. That's where retailers can make sure they are there to answer questions and push down the path to conversion.

eMarketer: What else could help?

Hedges: Shopping is such a visual thing, which is one of the drawbacks of voice commerce. One thing we're seeing change the game a little bit is the introduction of screen-based devices like the Echo Show or Facebook Portal.

eMarketer: What do retailers and brands need to know about voice commerce?

Hedges: You need to make sure your consumers are asking for you. They're going to have to transition to the fact that more than ever, brands are an asset existing in the consumers' mind—and more importantly—the tips of the tongue. Easily commodified brands get lost in the clutter very quickly, so we're seeing a lot of brands forging their relationships in different ways now.

eMarketer: Amazon devices currently dominate in the US, but do you think that's eventually going to play out differently? Is it even going to be about Amazon vs. Google or will it just be about voice?

Hedges: It's interesting to think who's on the fringe, and we're not able to factor in yet. Who's the Uber or Instagram of voice? The competition means it's the consumers who are winning. Amazon and Google are

pushing each other into evolving very quickly, and the proliferation of voice is creating infrastructure and benefiting us all.