

Tech's 4 Weirdest Flexes for 2022

Article

Elon Musk takes over Twitter

The news: Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk finally closed the **\$44 billion deal** to take **Twitter** private but not before trying to back out of the deal and being sued by Twitter.

- The case was headed to the **Delaware Court of Chancery**, which has built a reputation for **enforcing** deal certainty in mergers.
- After a few embarrassing **texts** between Musk and his cronies were revealed as part of legal discovery, the world's wealthiest person quickly resolved to close the deal at \$54.20 per

share.

- With a sink in hand, Musk took over Twitter in late October, dissolving the board and delisting the social media company from the New York Stock Exchange.

How it started: Musk's desire to make Twitter profitable starts with its superusers.

- Verified Twitter accounts have to [pay \\$8-\\$20 per month](#) to maintain their blue check marks.
- Employees were told that they need to develop the verification subscription solution by November 7 or risk being fired.

How it's going: Twitter soon sliced its headcount by half, [firing 3,500 employees](#) and then scrambling to [rehire](#) some that were critical to day-to-day operations.

- This was followed by a rush of newly verified accounts spoofing companies and celebrities and [spreading misinformation](#).
- Advertisers paused their ads while longtime Twitter users looked to **Mastodon**, **Tumblr**, and [other social apps](#) to benefit from Twitter's continued fallout.

The key takeaway: The world's richest person now owns one of the largest platforms for real-time news and information.

Without the guardrails of a board or several key executives, **Musk's whims and ad-hoc changes to Twitter will have lasting effects as its users wrestle with possible replacements while value spirals.**

2. Google backs out of gaming, axes Stadia

The news: Google pulled the plug on its Stadia gaming initiative in October, ostensibly as part of its "simplicity sprint."

The miss: Stadia, which relied on **Google Cloud** to serve and stream games to devices like smartphones, Chromecasts, and PCs, could have been a revolutionary service, especially since it only required a controller because the heavy processing was being done in the cloud.

Video games were long thought to be recession-proof. The year started with [a flurry of gaming acquisitions](#) and consolidation that reinforced the notion that gaming could see unprecedented growth, particularly in cloud gaming and streaming and subscription services.

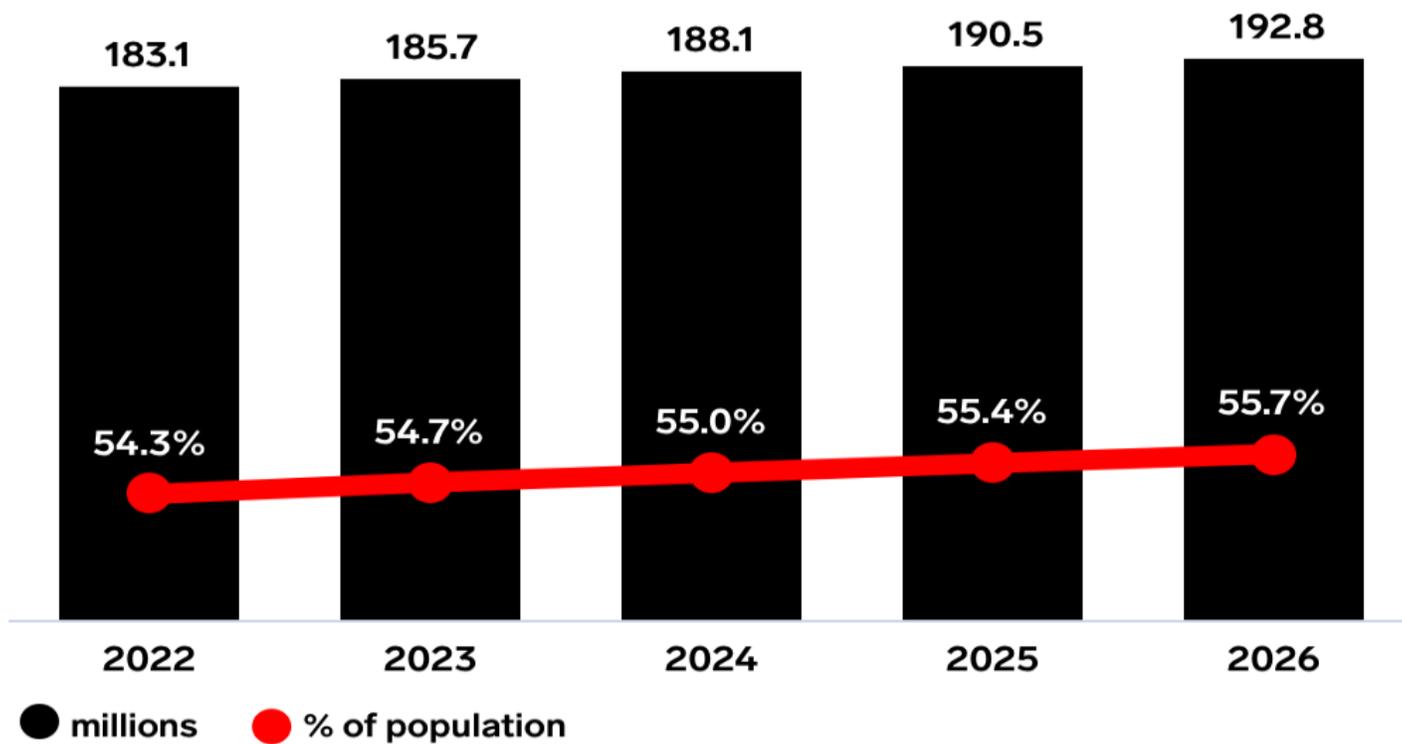
- Google could have leveraged its strength in the cloud as well as adapted various Android and PC games, but it was not to be.
- “We will be refunding all Stadia hardware purchases made through the Google Store, and all game and add-on content purchases made through the Stadia store. Players will continue to have access to their games library and play through January 18, 2023.”
- Google, which has gained infamy for the kilometric list of [products and services it has killed](#), seems to have prematurely burned the cloud gaming bridge.

The key takeaway: With competitors like **Microsoft**, **Amazon**, and **Meta** expanding their own gaming services and platforms, it is only a matter of time before Google seeks to become a player in gaming.

Its ignominious Stadia retreat could hinder future collaborations and partnerships as well as alienate gamers who feel burned by the sting of Stadia’s demise.

Digital Gamers

US, 2022-2026



Note: internet users of any age who play games through the internet or games that update via the internet at least once per month via any device; includes desktop/mobile app and browser gaming, online console gaming and gaming on social networks

Source: eMarketer, September 2022

eMarketer | InsiderIntelligence.com

3. Amazon Alexa brings back the (voices of the) dead.

The news: Amazon announced an experimental feature for its **Alexa** virtual assistant that can use [the voice of deceased relatives](#). Requiring just a one-minute clip of the voice, potentially left on voicemail, the AI can, for example, read an entire story to a child.

- “Human attributes” within AI systems are important “in these times of the ongoing pandemic, when so many of us have lost someone we love,” said **Rohit Prasad**, Amazon’s head scientist

for Alexa AI.

- In 2021, the technology was used, with much backlash, to [clone the voice of Anthony Bourdain](#), who died in 2018, to read quotes in a documentary on his life.

Point: The technology could be used to help people with catastrophic injuries regain their voice or help those dealing with grief.

- **Sonantic**, which **Spotify** is acquiring, recently used AI in “Top Gun: Maverick” to give [Val Kilmer a voice](#). The actor lost his ability to speak during treatment for throat cancer in 2014.
- A company like [ElliQ](#) could use the voice of a deceased spouse in its companion bots to ease the impact of death.

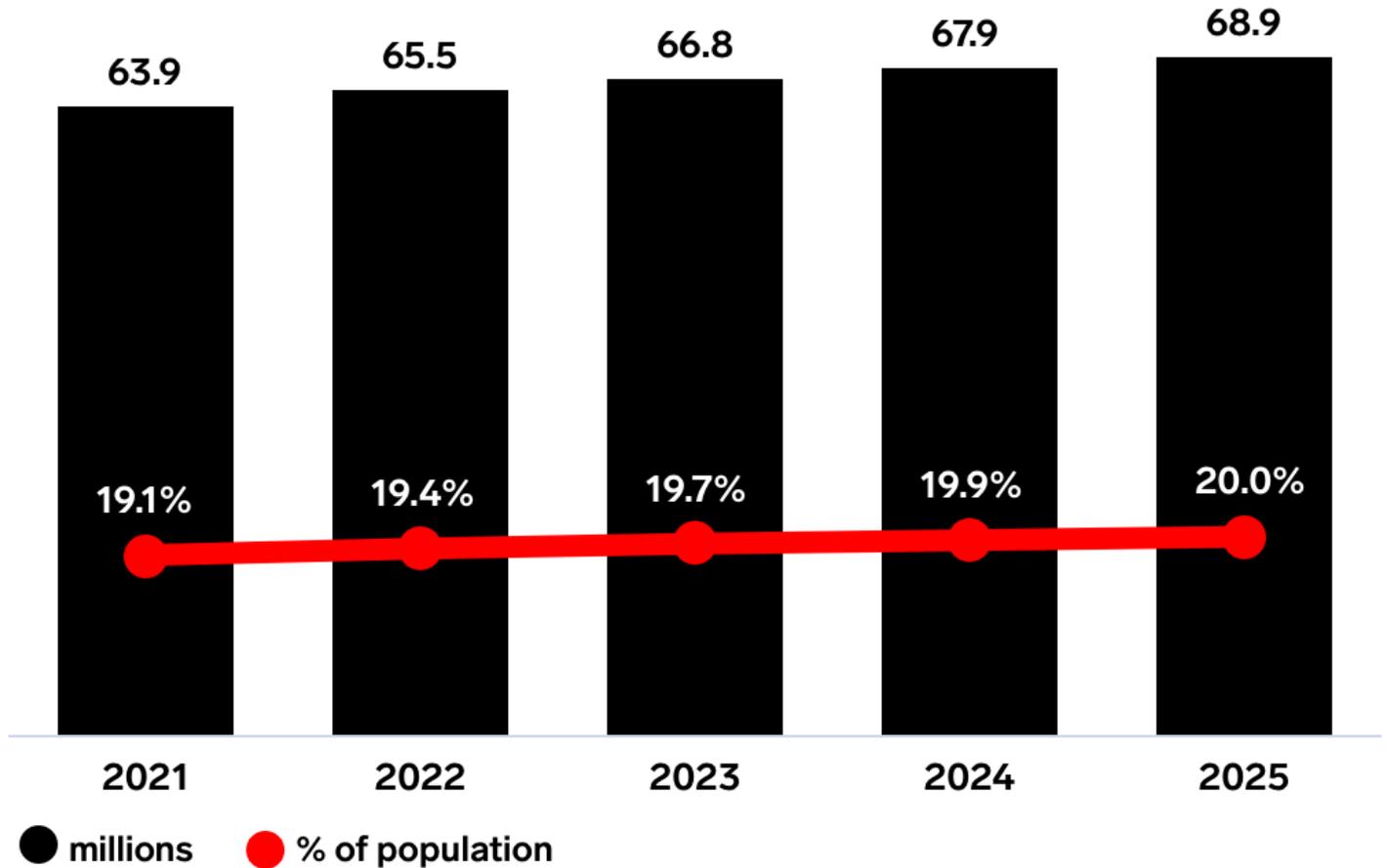
Counterpoint: Reanimating [dead personalities](#) and relatives crosses various ethical lines.

- One issue is the manipulation of the likeness and voice of people who have died and can no longer advocate on their own behalf, especially if used for profit.
- While celebrities may have executors who can make decisions about the use of their intellectual property after their death, the average person might not.
- **The AI voices could be co-opted for advertising, marketing, other voice assistants, and even navigation**, potentially without consent of the individual. Or it could serve more nefarious purposes.
- Amazon, **Microsoft**, **Google**, and **Apple** could have vast repositories of customers’ voices used to interact with their voice assistants. Having this data in the wild opens up potential for misuse.
- [AI voices can be used in deepfakes](#), increasing cybercrimes such as social engineering. A call from a coworker [requesting a wire transfer](#) could easily fool an unsuspecting employee.

Key takeaway: This could be a situation where ethics is slow to catch up with the progress of artificial intelligence. **Generative AI, voice synthesis, and deepfakes are becoming more ubiquitous and transcending novelty into an easily marketable and monetizable product.**

Amazon Echo Users

US, 2021-2025



Source: eMarketer, June 2021

eMarketer | InsiderIntelligence.com

4. TikTok's unprecedented expansion despite the down economy

The news: Leveraging its popularity with Gen Z as well as its high level of engagement, ByteDance's TikTok began its expansion into a super app in 2022.

We outlined the five possible growth areas for TikTok in August, which predicted its entry into [ecommerce](#), [streaming music](#), [gaming](#), [online learning](#), and [search](#). Little did we know that TikTok's expansion plans in all these areas were already well underway.

TikTok is considered the go-to platform for [discovering new music](#), which has propelled obscure songs into the **Billboard 100** and **Spotify Viral 50**. The company already runs a music app called **Resso** in India, Brazil, and Indonesia.

Mobile games: ByteDance already has [mobile gaming aspirations](#). The Chinese tech giant produced **\$1 billion in player expenditures** across its mobile games, a 16% increase from the year prior, [per](#) Sensor Tower. It could easily create a library of games exclusive to TikTok users.

Search: TikTok is already nipping at the heels of **YouTube** in [user time spent](#), and the service beat **Google** as the [most visited website](#) in 2021. This positions it perfectly for a search play as well as a vital cog in any super app aspirations.

The big flex: TikTok's biggest flex in 2022 is that it was one of the only companies hiring tech talent while the industry shed thousands of jobs.

Augmenting its braintrust with talent from its biggest competitors will only make TikTok more formidable as it spreads its tentacles across the technology landscape.