

How Brands Can Get Noticed Through Voice in China

Think beyond voice assistants

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An interview with:

Nate Shurilla

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Given the complexity of the Chinese writing system, rapidly maturing voice technology will bring real convenience to people's lives in China. And that means marketers should pay attention. eMarketer's Man-Chung Cheung spoke with Nate Shurilla, Asia-Pacific head of innovation at global digital marketing agency iProspect, about voice usage in China and the next big opportunities for marketers to reach voice users in the market.

eMarketer:

How are consumers in China using voice technology today?

Nate Shurilla:

Our April research revealed that consumers in China have broad usage patterns for voice technology. More than half of users surveyed engage with voice for in-app functions like voice messaging, as well as personal entertainment and voice applications—what Google calls Actions and Amazon calls Skills—like playing music or booking a cab.

Voice users in China also reported high adoption across all of the other areas in our survey, including surfing the internet or voice search (49%), operating smart home devices (47%) and engaging with digital assistants (44%).

“China has been much quicker than the West at adopting smart devices outside the traditional smart speaker.”

eMarketer:

How do consumers in China use voice technology as opposed to their counterparts in the West?

Nate Shurilla:

In China, voice technology is becoming ingrained in daily life, greatly fueled by the ease dictation provides—it's 2.8 times faster to dictate Mandarin and comes with a 63.4% lower error rate vs. typing. English is even more efficient to dictate—it's three times faster with a 20.4% lower error rate.

Voice usage in Western markets is generally more concentrated in voice assistants. This is evident in the smart home space where 47% of voice users in China operate smart homes, compared with just 31% in the West.

eMarketer:

How often do consumers in China use voice technology to online shop?

Nate Shurilla:

Twenty six percent of voice users we surveyed reported that they use voice technology when they want to make a quick purchase. Our research suggests that consumers in Asia, particularly in China, are open to making voice purchases.

Though we didn't investigate the specific devices used to purchase, 81% of respondents reported using smartphone personal assistants, while only 28% reported utilizing personal assistant-controlled devices—the category smart speakers fall into—which suggests that voice purchases are more likely to be done via smartphones than smart speakers.

Although Amazon recently announced that Alexa is now in 20,000 devices, China has been much quicker than the West at adopting smart devices outside the traditional smart speaker. That means smart device commerce in China will be an interesting area to watch in the coming months and years. Voice assistants paired with augmented reality [AR] and virtual reality [VR] will only further accelerate this trend.

“We found that 46% of voice users in China use search —it's a very large audience.”

eMarketer:

Besides retail, what are some other big opportunities in voice for marketers?

Nate Shurilla:

Voice is the future of influencer marketing. Currently influencers may post or live stream to fans and consumers, but this is largely one-directional and non-interactive. Whether a marketer is building a virtual influencer or digitizing a current celebrity, building influencers into voice-activated digital assistants will allow these influencers to have one-on-one conversations with fans.

Other areas to consider are productivity and B2B applications in a smart office. Having a digital assistant that can fetch data without having to open a dashboard or application, schedule meetings or rooms and make calls can be a huge time saver. Think the next stage of Google Duplex.

And lastly, voice search is a key area for brands. We found that 46% of voice users in China use search—it's a very large audience. Making sure your store or restaurant is recommended when people ask for nearby recommendations or ensuring your site sources the answer for a brand-critical question can have a lasting effect as voice SEO continues to gain steam.

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