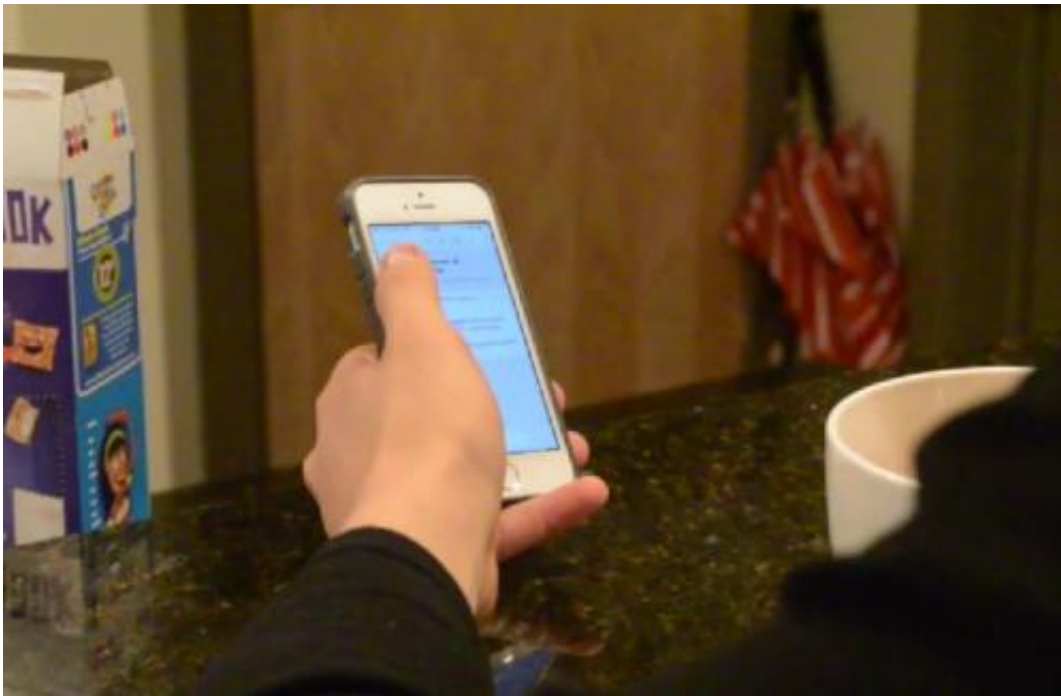


Hackathon team's GoogolPlex gives Siri extra powers

April 17 2014, by Nancy Owano



(Phys.org) —Four freshmen at the University of Pennsylvania have taken Apple's personal assistant Siri to behave as a graduate-level executive assistant which, when asked, is capable of adjusting the temperature of the phone owner's Nest thermostat or playing a song of choice on the Spotify playlist, or turning on the lights, or unlocking a car. Their efforts have not been ignored by numerous tech-watching sites. As important, a premier university hackathon PenApps, sponsored by

numerous company heavyweights, gave the quartet [third](#) prize. Their entry was GoogolPlex. "We hacked Siri in iOS 7 to interface with Spotify and other third-party apps," they said. "Imagine being able to control your Nest thermostat and unlock your car through Siri. With GoogolPlex, these are now possible."

They went on to explain that "GoogolPlex is a [hack on Siri](#) (iOS 7 compatible) that allows Siri to integrate with third-party apps and hardware with custom commands like 'turn on the lights.' Setup takes a minute and no jailbreaking is required. GoogolPlex already allows you to play songs in Spotify, pay friends through Venmo, Instagram selfies, and control Philips Hue lights with simple [voice commands](#), all through Siri."

The name GoogolPlex does not, in spite of resonance with the sound of the word Google, exactly roll off the tongue or lend itself to swift keyboarding. So why the name? They said it was to symbolize the near-infinite number of possibilities Siri could reach with their hack. Another reason, they said, was strategic. When a user says "GoogolPlex, turn off the lights," Siri hears this as "Google 'Plex turn off the lights,'" interpreting the user wants to Google something. "Siri then searches Google for the words 'Plex turn off the lights,' and this is where GoogolPlex comes in."

They said that after receiving a string of commands like Plex turn off the lights, "our server uses [natural language processing](#) methods to understand the command. If the user said 'Plex tell me a programming joke,' and the appropriate response is text, we load a webpage with the response."

The team, while proud of their use of technology netting a prize and recognition, had this to say about Apple and Siri: "While this hack demonstrates an awesome use of technology to get around restrictions,

the only true way to get a great experience with third-party apps in Siri is if Apple [builds](#) in an open API." The four said they hoped to [eventually](#) start something that turns into a viable business.

More information: www.betterthansiri.com/

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Citation: Hackathon team's GoogolPlex gives Siri extra powers (2014, April 17) retrieved 30 January 2023 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2014-04-hackathon-team-googolplex-siri-extra.html>

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