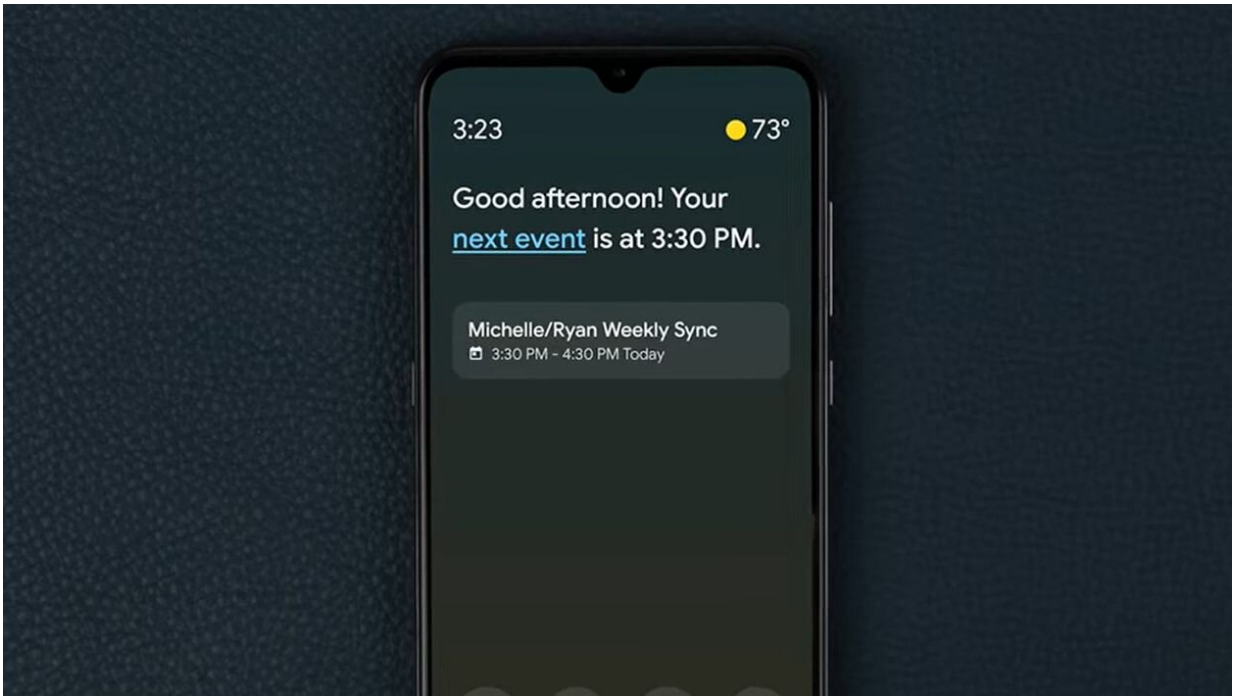
Ambient Mode announced for some Android phones

November 28 2019, by Nancy Cohen



As far as Android announcements go, the one for Google Assistant Ambient Mode was more like a pleasant cowbell ring than a blasting trumpet but nonetheless it is a new feature and will please those who like the idea of being reminded about information important to them.

Google announced Ambient Mode via a Tweet and YouTube video

rather than a press announcement or blogpost. As *Ars Technica* said, this was all about an "Ambient" mode taking over "the lock screen any time you charge the phone."

Google's YouTube video on Nov. 25 did tell the world about a new Google Assistant experience in the wings,. "We are now announcing Ambient Mode for Android," said Google Assistant Product Manager Arvind Chandrababu. He said this will be available on select devices on Android 8.0 and above. It's fundamentally, he said, moving from an app based way of doing things to an intent based way of doing things.

You have one missed call. Breakfast meeting tomorrow. You have 3 notifications. Partly cloudy tomorrow. Lufthansa flight number and its departure time.

When your phone is charging, this info spray is what happens, setting your mind in motion for planning ahead. Matthew Humphries in *PCMag,* said, "when your phone is charging the lock screen is filled with important information pulled from your calendar, notifications, etc. (but not on Google's own Pixel devices)."

One key word being used to promote this new feature is that it is "proactive," anticipating what the user wants to know and be reminded about, and available to a user whenever the device is being charged, using the idle screen time, to deliver a note service such as flight number of plane to catch the next day, or weather outlook, or team meeting time. So, said *The Verge*, the idea is that you see useful information right on your lock screen when your Android phone or tablet is plugged in.

Chandrababu said the Ambient Mode advantage was helping users get things done faster. He saw this as a shift from app-based interactions to intent-based interactions. The Ambient Mode could reduce the "mental bandwidth" of hopping between apps.

Ron Amadeo, *Ars Technica*, made the point, however, that this is only coming to a handful of phones. And, *The Verge* said, "Oddly, Google's own Pixel products aren't yet on the list." So, which phones get his new feature and when?

Amadeo said that after asking Google for details, they got a statement that Ambient Mode will roll out to the majority of users starting next week across Android devices including: Sony Xperia phones, Nokia phones, Transsion phones, Xiaomi phones, Lenovo Smart Tab M8 HD when placed in its smart charging station and Lenovo Yoga Smart Tab when you pop out its kickstand, and the feature will be available anywhere on these devices where Voice Match is supported. Devices will need to be running Android 8.1 or newer and the latest version of the Google Search app.

Some reader reactions in *Ars Technica* indicated not all smartphone users, even business professionals navigating their work and travel schedules throughout the week, will embrace Ambient Mode as a way to relieve the so-called mental bandwidth that one exerts in checking to see what the temperature will be in Helsinki or which hotel is hostng the keynote.

One reader confessed that "really don't understand Google's Android strategy at all. It seems to be 'lets throw everything at wall and see what sticks.'"

Another reader commented that "What's needed is Ambien Mode."

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