

Five years ago Amazon introduced Alexa. The name may never be the same. Here's what happened

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About 4,250 Alexas are turning five in the U.S. this year. One of them is Amazon's.

The voice-computing technology that can now control more than 85,000 different devices debuted Nov. 6, 2014. Some 10,000 people work at Amazon on various parts of the system of technologies, which is used by "tens of millions" of customers each month, according to a company blog post marking its birthday.

In 2015, the year after Amazon Alexa debuted, Alexa was the 32nd most popular female baby name in the U.S., bestowed upon 6,052 newborns that year, according to Social Security Administration data.

Alexa as a baby name has since declined in popularity.

"As the Alexa device becomes more ubiquitous, Alexa baby girls will become less so," said Pamela Redmond, co-founder of baby names site Nameberry.

Thousands of other [babies](#) each year are named variants such as Alexandra and Alexis, the latter peaking as the third-most-popular female baby name in 1999.

The arrival of the voice-computing system and its microphone-equipped device has been a mild annoyance for some of the other Alexas.

One writes on Nameberry that she loves her name, but wishes everyone called her Lexi now. "Meeting anyone under the age of 12 or over the age 45 means them saying, "Oh, like Amazon Alexa' after I introduce myself."

Pop culture influences baby naming trends, but not always in predictable ways, Redmond said.

"Kylo as in (Star Wars character) Kylo Ren was one of the fastest-rising names last year even though the character was not strictly positive," she

said. Indeed, Kylo Ren kills his father in 2015's "Star Wars: The Force Awakens." Nevertheless, the name entered the top 1,000 male baby names in 2016, climbing to 865 in 2018.

Amazon named its voice-computing technology Alexa as an homage to the Library of Alexandria, a company spokeswoman said. Amazon also controls the name commercially, having acquired Alexa Internet, which ranks websites by traffic and provides marketing tools, in 1999, and which was also named to honor the Egyptian library, an important storehouse of knowledge in the ancient world.

More than 50 humans named Alexa currently work at Amazon, according to LinkedIn.

Alexa ended up with a female voice and persona, Amazon executives have said, because that's what customers preferred in early voice testing. The company so far has not offered the option of a male-voiced assistant.

If your name IS Alexa, this is worth noting: The "wake word" that activates the device can be changed to Echo, Amazon, or computer, evoking the ambient voice-controlled computer system from "Star Trek" that Alexa is modeled on.

That option is apparently not available yet on every Alexa-enabled device, however.

"I just got my Echo Auto and after setting it up realized I couldn't change the wake word the same way I have changed my other devices in the house," one person wrote on Amazon's device forum in September. "My daughter's name is Alexa, so not being able to change it is really a deal breaker for me."

Other female-identified digital assistants have much less common names. Siri, the name given to the Apple assistant that debuted in 2011 and Cortana, which Microsoft unveiled in 2014, were highly unusual names to begin with, Redmond said. They've become less popular since: 20 baby girls were named Siri in the U.S. in 2018 and five were named Cortana, Redmond said.

Alexa was first heard in a commercial on Nov. 6, 2014 on YouTube. Multiple parodies that replaced Alexa's voice quickly followed. Amazon later took down the ad. YouTube user Smart Home uploaded the original commercial in 2016.

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