

Amazon unveils a 'smarter and more conversational' Alexa amid AI race among tech companies

September 20 2023, by Haleluya Hadero



This image provided by Amazon, shows an Amazon Echo device. Amazon has unveiled a slew of gadgets and an update to its popular voice assistant Alexa, infusing it with more generative AI features to better compete with other tech companies who've rolled out flashy chatbots. During a demonstration in

Washington D.C. on Wednesday, Sept. 20, 2023, Amazon's devices chief Dave Limp said the latest language model will allow consumers to have more human-like conversations with a "smarter and more conversational" Alexa. Credit: Amazon via AP

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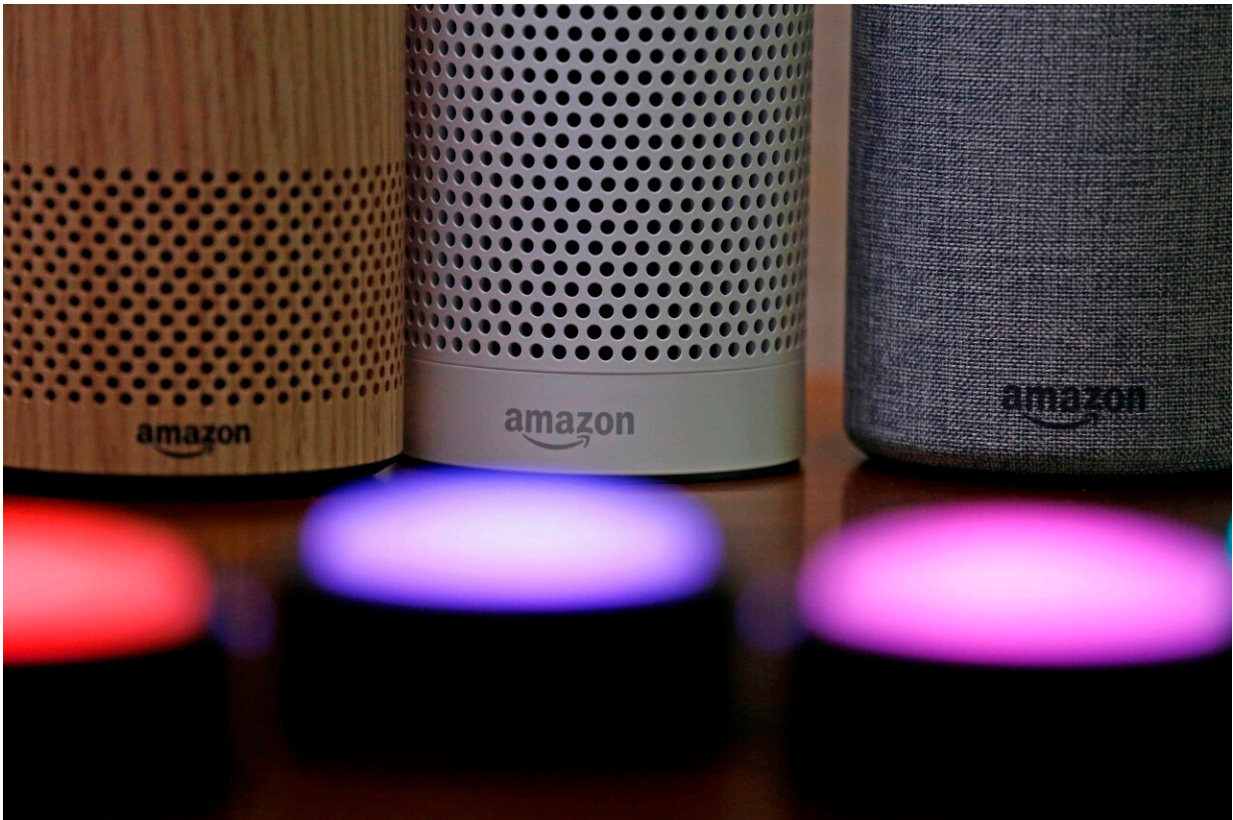
During a demonstration at the company's second headquarters in Arlington, Virginia on Wednesday, Amazon's devices chief Dave Limp said the latest language model will allow consumers to have more human-like conversations with a "smarter and more conversational" Alexa.

The company showed different interactions through a pre-recorded video and a live demo where Alexa responds to prompts to write a poem, give ideas for a date night and provide a breakdown of a football game. Limp also demonstrated a capability where the voice assistant can prep a [text message](#), though his exchange with Alexa included some awkward pauses where he had to repeat some prompts twice before getting an answer.

The company says its also working on a "speech-to-speech" model that will, for example, allow Alexa to exhibit human-like attributes, such as laughter and phrases like "uh-huh" during conversations.

Amazon holds the annual gadget event to exhibit new devices in front of journalists and industry insiders before they officially hit the [market](#). Among other things, the tech giant also showcased a fee-based emergency service for Alexa that allows users to call for help without

using the phone, new Echo smart speakers as well as Amazon Fire tablets for kids.



Amazon Echo and Echo Plus devices, behind, sit near illuminated Echo Button devices, Sept. 27, 2017, during an event announcing several new Amazon products by the company in Seattle. On Wednesday, Sept. 20, 2023, Amazon unveiled a slew of gadgets and an update to its popular voice assistant Alexa, infusing it with more generative AI features to better compete with other tech companies who've rolled out flashy chatbots. Credit: AP Photo/Elaine Thompson, File

In August, Amazon CEO Andy Jassy announced Limp would retire after almost 14 years with the company, where he's overseen innovations in

Kindle readers, Amazon's Fire TV and Echo devices. Although the devices unit has rolled out a large number of gadgets over the years, not all of them have caught on. Think the Alexa-enabled microwave or the roaming Astro robot, which Amazon unveiled in 2021 at an introductory price of \$1,000 but has had a limited rollout.

The devices unit was hit by Amazon's company-wide layoffs several months ago. The company's hasn't announced Limp's replacement.

Amazon is a leader in the U.S. smart speaker market, commanding nearly 64 million monthly users of its Echo devices, according to Insider Intelligence. But the market research company forecasts that the devices will lose some [market share](#) in the next few years as the number of smart speakers continues to grow. Consumers have also become more likely to use their smartphones to access voice assistants instead of smart speakers.



The Amazon logo is seen, Sept. 6, 2012, in Santa Monica, Calif. On Wednesday, Sept. 20, 2023, Amazon unveiled a slew of gadgets and an update to its popular voice assistant Alexa, infusing it with more generative AI features to better compete with other tech companies who've rolled out flashy chatbots. Credit: AP Photo/Reed Saxon, File

For years, Amazon has been seeking to drive consumer purchases from its Echo devices, a dream that hasn't been fully realized.

Amazon said last year 50% of Alexa customers used their [device](#) to shop. Limp noted on Wednesday that more customers have been using Alexa to shop year-over-year. According to Adobe Analytics, consumers typically use their [smart speakers](#) to play music, check the weather and set alarms and reminders.

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