

# Patent talk: Alexa would leverage voice data tech to pick up signs you are ill

October 15 2018, by Nancy Owano

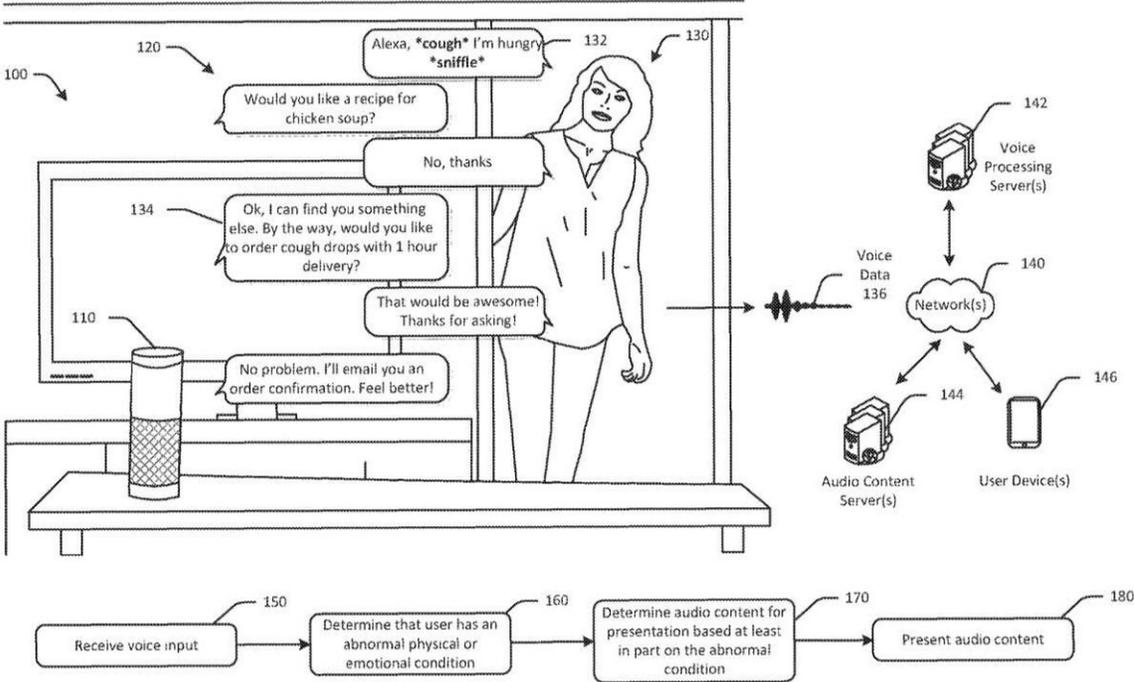


FIG. 1

Credit: United States Patent 10,096,319

Biometric monitoring on a new level? To what extent, in the coming years, will we be turning to the "digital health" sector of technology to manage our well-being and sickness?

Parked now under Amazon's ambitious idea umbrella is a [patent](#) that talks up technology for picking up on the user's ailment and also recommending actions. The patent discussion places Amazon's virtual voice assistant Alexa front-and-center.

"Voice-based determination of physical and emotional characteristics of users" is the title of the patent, filed in March last year and made public earlier this month.

If you can wade through the patent talk, sample scenarios emerge where the technology picks up on a sick user and in turn selects relevant content.

Discussing the process flow, the patent discussion said that "the voice interaction device may determine audio content for presentation based at least in part on the determined abnormal physical or [emotional condition](#) . For example, the user may be determined to have a sore throat based at least in part on voice processing of the voice data. Accordingly, the abnormal physical condition for the user may be a sore throat. The voice interaction device and/or the [voice](#) processing server(s) may communicate with the audio content server(s) to select content for presentation to the user based at least in part on the [sore throat](#). For example, certain content, such as content related to cough drops or flu medicine, may be targeted towards users who have sore throats."

Wait, so the user goes "Bummers, Alexa? I don't feel so good."

No. Amazon Echo may do the work without your even trying. Jonah Comstock in *MobiHealthNews* said that Amazon Echo would listen not just for the user's words, but for things like tone of [voice](#)—which could include fatigue, frustration, or stress—and sounds like coughs and sniffles, which might prompt the device to recommend remedies.

So how does Amazon's proposed technology respond once Alexa determines the user is ill? "A current physical and/or emotional condition of the user may facilitate the ability to provide highly targeted audio [content](#), such as audio advertisements or promotions, to the user," according to the patent.

Hmmm, did someone in the audience just mutter "selling"?

This is from the patent: "In an example of FIG. 1, Panera Bread may be interested in presenting an audio advertisement to the user," the document said. "As a result, the follow-up inquiry of 'would you like to order chicken soup?' may be directed towards determining whether the user is a target consumer for receiving a Panera Bread audio advertisement."

Ben Fox Rubin in CNET reminded readers that Amazon "being able to determine potential health needs could help Amazon build up its health care business, especially after it agreed to buy the [online](#) pharmacy PillPack earlier this year." *The Motley Fool* reported that Amazon bought the [company](#) PillPack in June. *Investor's Business Daily* said it was for a reported price of just under \$1 [billion](#).

Another scenario might be played out that focuses on the user's emotional state.

"[Illness](#) is the initial example but Amazon's filing also indicates that emotional conditions may be identified," said Bret Kinsella in *Voicebot*. Rubin in CNET: "In another example, a user asks Alexa, 'What's going on today?' Alexa determines the user is likely bored and responds, "Are you in the mood for a movie?"

This would raise the bar on the concept of a "good listener." *GearBrain* said, "Amazon wants to add an extra [layer](#) to Alexa's understanding of

the things we say to the virtual assistant. So, along with determining what we say and what we mean by that, the assistant could—if this [patent](#) becomes a reality—determine that [the] user has an abnormal physical or emotional condition", and then act upon this.

**More information:** Voice-based determination of physical and emotional characteristics of users, [United States Patent 10,096,319](#)

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