



POINT OF VIEW

Alexa, show me my treatment plan



Jose Araujo
Engagement
Strategy Director

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The proliferation of smart speakers and smart voice assistants has come a long way from the first Siri-enabled iPhone in 2011 and the first Alexa-enabled Amazon Echo speaker in 2013. In 2020, almost 90 million adults reported having used a smart speaker in the US¹, and the number is unlikely to slow down any time soon as these devices continue to improve and add more features.

Use of smart voice assistants in healthcare is not a new thing, but we have come a long way

You may remember back in 2017, some buzz emerged when Mayo Clinic released an app that works with Alexa. It was able to answer some zero-touch, everyday mishaps that were mostly first aid-related. Think — “Alexa, what do I do about this bee sting?”

Let’s be honest: this all sounds great, but how is that better than a Google search that may take roughly the same amount of time?

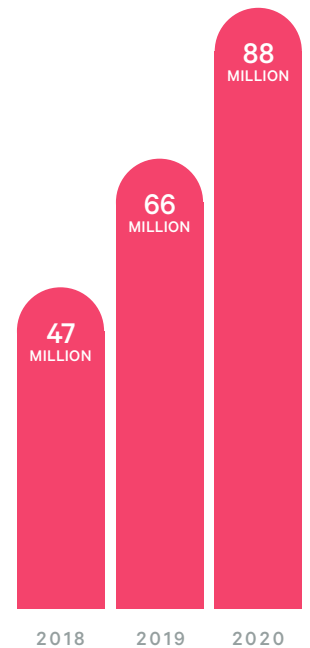
Truth be told, maybe it isn’t. But we have come a long way. There are new and exciting things happening in the smart voice assistant space as it relates to healthcare. It all starts with a straightforward yet impactful change that has first come to Alexa and will likely be growing into other voice assistants in the future: HIPAA compliance.

Alexa, can you handle personal information?

Amazon first announced Alexa HIPAA compliance in 2019, but, understandably, the ramp-up period has been slow given the complexities associated with it and the early stages (in relative terms) of the overall technology. As with many things in healthcare, Mark Zuckerberg’s “move fast and break things” ethos doesn’t apply. But as developers and organizations become increasingly comfortable with the technology, its compliance, and its capabilities, we have started to see an expansion in the tangible use cases for healthcare and pharma in particular.

HIPAA compliance is a game-changer for smart voice assistants in healthcare applications. Being able to handle personal information means that Alexa (and likely eventually other voice assistants) can provide more value than the bee sting example mentioned earlier. Alexa’s HIPAA compliance means companies can develop Alexa Skills (essentially the equivalent of an app) that securely use a patient’s specific information to give personalized answers according to the patient’s unique profile. As we’ll see below, this can mean a myriad of things, from answers about an individual’s insurance plan to connecting them with members of their healthcare team. These types of services were not possible without HIPAA compliance.

US SMART SPEAKER USERS





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As smart voice assistants continue to evolve and their adoption expands, healthcare brands should start thinking about the value voice can provide to their patient base. The below is a brief set of examples that can show you how to bring voice into your brand ecosystem and better take advantage of its features:

TREATMENT ADHERENCE

Did I take my meds?

It is not news that treatment adherence is a constant challenge across all of pharma and that brands have tried to come up with clever ways to remind their patients to take their meds. Voice might be the thing that can move the needle on this. Imagine an Alexa skill that intakes entire patient profiles, automatically sets up all necessary reminders, and then speaks them out when relevant to patient-specific needs. No more having to go into the calendar app or set up post-it notes. Voice assistants may be the tool that some patients have been waiting for.



Companies such as Orbita provide a suite of products for pharmaceutical companies to use their platform to develop these Alexa skills in a HIPAA-compliant way. Through Orbita, pharmaceutical companies can create a brand-specific Alexa skill to carry out several tasks such as providing adherence reminders or answering on-label FAQs, even escalating specific questions to a call center if needed.

PATIENT ACCESS INFORMATION

Alexa, is this medication covered by my insurance?

As we all know, navigating the insurance landscape can burden patients, especially when looking to understand their coverage. The question-and-answer format through which smart voice assistants work can be a valuable tool to allow patients easier access to this relevant information. By working closely with payers or third parties developing Alexa skills, brands can ensure patients have access to accurate, personalized coverage information by simply asking the question.

Several payers have already begun developing their own Alexa skills to answer customer questions. For example, Cigna's "Answers by Cigna" or Independent Health's Alexa skill allow members to ask questions such as "Where can I get urgent care?" or "What's my cost for prescriptions?". The ease of this experience can be a true facilitator in accessing relevant information, especially compared with the current access to insurance information, which can be challenging and overwhelming.

PATIENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Alexa...help?

Patient support programs are a cornerstone of many direct-to-patient efforts for most pharma brands. As brands look to make their programs more accessible, smart voice assistants can be the gateway through which patients contact their nurse navigator or other care coordinators on their support team. The convenience and familiarity of the voice experience can significantly improve access to these offerings versus someone having to search for the support program's phone line or attempt to get in touch via chat or email. This can help patients take full advantage of the resources at their disposal.

TAKEAWAY:

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We are in the early stages, but some companies have already started developing these Alexa skills. For example, Bristol Myers Squibb has an Alexa skill for On Call™, their patient support program for ORENCIA. It allows patients to ask questions about ORENCIA or On Call™ and helps get them connected with a Care Counselor. Even though there are other ways to get in touch, such as phone or email, smart voice assistants remove friction even further and allow for a facilitated access experience that can be easier to approach for certain patients.

As with most new technologies in healthcare, things are constantly evolving, and smart voice assistants are no exception. The technology is still in its early days, and valid questions arise surrounding patient privacy or the availability of ecosystem partners ready to take advantage of voice. But smart voice assistants are here to stay, and as the overall technology continues to evolve and get further ingrained in daily life, other uses will become apparent for pharma.

The Evoke AI Center of Excellence helps pharmaceutical and healthcare marketers discover how to best leverage smart voice assistants or other similar AI-enabled technologies to improve experiences and build deeper customer relationships. Our approach begins with an audit to identify the white space where these technologies can make the most positive impact. To learn more, contact business@evokegroup.com.

Source:

1. Kinsella, B. (2020, April 28). Nearly 90 Million U.S. Adults Have Smart Speakers, Adoption Now Exceeds One-Third of Consumers. Voicebot.Ai. <https://voicebot.ai/2020/04/28/nearly-90-million-u-s-adults-have-smart-speakers-adoption-now-exceeds-one-third-of-consumers/>