

# A Brave New Voice: The Future of Brands & AI

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## MACHINE PREJUDICE: PROGRAMMING FEAR

We're living in the technological version of the Enlightenment. On the one hand, Siri may direct a user to take a left turn onto a railroad track, tempting him to toss his phone out the window and question who decided artificial intelligence (AI) was actually intelligent. On the other hand, the European Parliament met earlier this year to discuss whether or not robots should be granted rights as "electric persons." The debate is rapidly shifting from artificial intelligence to actual sentience, and somewhere in the middle there's a brand trying to sell more toothpaste.

In the meantime, in the productive in-between of Alexas and Siris and Amazon Suggest, artificial intelligence is clipping along dead in the middle of the service lane. Humans are curious, yet highly cautious about what are largely viewed as simply helpful toys. For now, they are just delightful oddities on our phones or in our kitchens that can be turned off, disabled and unplugged. They are subject to our mercy and our whims, whether that's telling Dad jokes or ordering more toilet paper.

### ***Then there's Erica.***

Erica is a 23-year-old robot. She was created by Hiroshi Ishiguro at the Osaka University Intelligent Robotics

Laboratory in Japan, and—like most 20-somethings fresh out of college—she has big dreams. This year, Erica will become an anchor on a Japanese news channel, and her creator is working to help her develop an independent mind. She can already read, hold conversations and track human faces from across a room, and she has hobbies that include watching sports, movies and cartoons. Between Erica and Facebook's nefarious algorithms, there's a lot to keep consumers up at night.

And yet, around 47.3 million homes have made AI units a part of the family, reports Voicebot.ai, and Juniper Research projects that by 2022 over half of U.S. households will have one, and 5 billion assistants will be installed on smartphones worldwide. Convenience has been shown to actually change preferences and defy intent, and concerns about privacy and fears of a dystopian Orwellian future quickly take a back seat in a society where time is money and convenience is king. In fact, 3 in 4 consumers already utilize AI to help simplify their daily lives with task management (43%) and ordering goods and services (62%), according to TechCrunch.

Still, despite the immediate benefits in time and convenience, the primary challenge to AI adoption remains rooted in a sci-fi zeitgeist of fear. Fear of a robotic takeover and the dehumanization of society. Fear of robots stealing our jobs, reading the news, controlling the economy, raising our kids and marrying humans. Robots deciding it's the human race that needs to be turned off, disabled and unplugged.

AI isn't powered by people so much as by people's data. The things we tell it. The skills we give it. The things it learns by connecting the dots of all the breadcrumbs and tidbits we leave hanging in the air, on our phones, tablets and laptops. To an extreme extent, AI is only as smart as we make it, though the lines of permission get blurred further every day. But if that's the case, could it be argued that AI is only as human as we make it, too?

## ARTIFICIAL INTIMACY: THE HUMAN SIDE OF AI

Humans have been bonding with non-humans and inanimate objects for millennia. If you've ever felt guilty about putting a stuffed animal in a closet or created a detailed personality for a pet or made friends with a volleyball on a deserted island, you have experienced this type of bonding. It's called "anthropomorphizing," and it happens when we give human characteristics to non-humans.



When we anthropomorphize an object or animal, we develop affection for it, making it easier to foster feelings of intimacy. Developers of AI assistants are counting on that fondness to get users to open up and share more so that AI can learn more and deeply integrate into our lives. Studies by The Integer Group have shown that consumers are open to AI performing intimate roles normally reserved for other humans, like coach (25%), stylist (18%) and even friend (23%). Key to

reinforcing this bond are the principles of play. If our AI assistant can make us laugh or surprise and delight us, we see it as more human, and the bond deepens. A growing number of users are interacting with their AI assistants in a playful manner, with 24% turning to their AI for jokes and 66% even making their AI the life of the party.

But a legitimate social connection goes beyond selling Echo pucks and toothpaste. It paves the way for actual meaningful relationships with technology that make predicting consumer behavior or e-commerce assistance look like child's play. As loneliness reaches recognized epidemic status in countries like the United Kingdom, Australia and Japan, there are emerging examples of AI being tapped to provide simulated yet vital companionship to a broad spectrum of demographics in need, marking the beginning of the future of AI relationships.

A Japanese company has created an AI to help stem the isolation and resulting loneliness of an emerging population of overworked single men. The device features a holographic anime AI that "lives" in a user's home and can interact with the user throughout the day via text. The relationship between the AI and its user is so blurred that the anime character refers to the user as her "husband."

Amazon's Echo is being employed by family and caregivers of Alzheimer's patients to not only assist with reminders and small tasks, but to provide compassionate companionship critical to those suffering from the disease. Communities of developers are working on skills to help patients with maintaining real social connections, as well as providing an upbeat companion to help patients self-soothe, maintain self-esteem and stay optimistic.

Actor Ryan Gosling famously told TV host Ellen DeGeneres that he was buying another Roomba robot vacuum because he was worried the Roomba he had was lonely. Robotics studies are rife with anecdotes of testers bonding with their robot subjects, assigning gender and personality and refusing to return their test robots because they've bonded with them. There are even accounts of soldiers bonding with their bomb-disposal robots, to the extent of shipping the blasted remains of the robotic partner to the manufacturer asking if "he" could be rebuilt. It's not just any bomb-disposal robot—it's a friend whom they credit with saving their life. As our relationship with AI continues to evolve and the personality of AI continues to become more lifelike, new ideas about intimacy and peer influence are beginning to emerge.

## ARTIFICIAL INFLUENCE: EMERGING ROLES FOR RETAILERS & BRANDS

Peer intimacy directly impacts one of the most powerful factors in the consumer journey: influence. Trust and intimacy are foundational to influence, so it's no surprise that 92% of consumers look to peer recommendations over advertising, according to Nielsen. The influence of brands has plummeted, reports The McCarthy Group, with 84% of millennials saying they don't trust traditional advertising. It's why we pay YouTubers and Instagram queens top dollar to funnel our messages down to customers. But now we have the opportunity to take back control and drive influence by helping consumers curate their AI experiences.

All robots have skills, but the successful ones that engender intimacy have one important thing in common—context. Context is the result of anthropomorphizing, and it frames every interaction the human and the AI have. It defines the AI's role, personality and ultimately, its purpose. Until we can give AI purpose beyond simply being a device people command to tell jokes or restock orange juice, it will never be more than a mechanical magic trick.

However, not many of us are familiar with shaping a personality from a completely blank canvas. Usually there are some things we can infer from a puppy or a stuffed animal, from the way that it moves to the way that it looks. A uniform machine fresh out of a box, sitting silently in front of you, is quite another matter. Like a genie asking what your three wishes are, it's hard to know where to start. That's where retailers and brands come in.

## RETAILER ROLE: CONTEXT CREATORS

The arms race to develop AI assistant skills is on, with tens of thousands of skills already available for download, but little inspiration for users on how to actually apply them. What's missing is context, and that's something retailers in partnership with brands can provide in abundance. The context exists in the equity of your brand, something consumers are already intimately and intuitively familiar with.

- Look to daily routines for opportunities where your brand can make these mundane tasks easier, faster or delightful, like the dish soap brand that crafts playlists for washing the dishes.
- Consider creating skills that help illustrate or pay off your brand promise, like the low-carb beer that offers audio workouts.
- Build skills to get people to use more of your product or engage more with your brand, versus driving more sales or trips, like the soup company that gives cooking and recipe tips.



## WHAT IS AI?

AI (artificial intelligence) is the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems.

## WHAT IS AN AI ASSISTANT?

It's an application program that understands natural language voice commands and completes tasks for the user. Popular AI assistant devices include Amazon Echo (aka Alexa), Apple's Siri, Google Home, Google Now and Microsoft's Cortana.

## 47.3 MILLION

homes have one or more smart speakers, such as Amazon Echo and Google Home. (Voicebot.ai, 2018)

## 5 BILLION ASSISTANTS

(such as Siri, Google Now, Cortana) will be installed on smartphones worldwide by 2022. (Juniper Research, 2017)

## MOST COMMON CONSUMER USES FOR AI ASSISTANTS

include timer, music, news, alarms, jokes, smart home, shopping lists, traffic, to-do list. (Statista, 2017)

## PIONEERING BRANDS LEVERAGING AI

Patron, Whirlpool, Ocado, Tide, Pizza Hut, Zyrtec, Johnnie Walker, Uber, Purina, Burger King, Harmony, Food Network, LG, Ring, Hyundai, Domino's Pizza





## NEXT STEPS FOR BRANDS: THE PERSONALITY BRIEF

It's new behavior that sparks truly new ideas, and with AI we're on the cusp of a new creative era. The future for brands is to become a living thing—to become "real."

- 1 Develop a personality around your brand archetype.** For example, is your brand a Hero, a Maven, a Magician or a Jester? How would your brand's personality, values, mission and legacy manifest if it were a living person?

**The Maven:** Stubb's Bar-B-Que Sauce offers grilling tips and recipe ideas straight from Stubb's. Hearing the advice from the brand character himself not only lends authenticity, it makes for a more genuine user experience.

- 2 Define what skills this archetype comes with.** Based on your brand's archetype, what tasks or actions would come naturally to your brand's persona when interacting with the consumer? In what ways would this persona try to help or entertain?

**The Magician:** Disney tags along for bedtime stories, chiming in with magical sound effects and character voices while parents read to their children.

- 3 Determine what the intersection is between your brand persona and the customer's daily experience—both transactional and emotional.**

Where is this persona most contextually relevant? Where is it the most useful? What already intuitive interactions are a part of your current customer experience that you can leverage and expand on in voice?

**The Guru:** Audi interactive digital showroom signage offers a dynamic experience that is customizable down to the daypart and region of a car shopper. Translating to voice could mean offering real-time suggestions based on the shopper's taste in music, travel habits and décor preferences.

- 4 Identify the opportunities where your brand can bring an element of surprise, delight or playfulness to the everyday consumer experience.**

How can your brand persona offer moments of humor, discovery or intrigue? How can you couple that with your broader brand experience or innovation?

**The Innovator:** Pizza Hut has plans to leverage AI in partnership with Toyota to debut driverless delivery in 2020 at the Olympic Summer Games in Tokyo. Its prototype vehicle was unveiled earlier this year at the Consumer Electronics Show.

## A BRAVE NEW VOICE

The future lies in helping consumers create not just the perfect AI assistant, but the perfect robotic addition to the new modern family, through the lens of your brand's personality, values, mission and legacy. Your brand equity becomes the lighthouse and the much-needed frame of reference to help them craft that essential context. Personality training is already serious business in the world of AI development, but it will soon become a new creative discipline in advertising. When brands become so real that they take on an anthropomorphized role in consumers' lives, it will change why, what and how people consume. This is not only an opportunity to come up with ideas and creative the world has never seen before, it's also our rare second chance to inspire and influence consumers all over again.

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