

Jawbone earpiece makes it easier to love smartphones

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A woman displays "Siri", voice-activated assistant technology, on an Apple iPhone 4S in Taipei on July 30, 2012

Jawbone on Thursday began making it easier to love Siri, Google Now or other virtual assistants in a hint at the future portrayed in the Oscar-nominated film "Her."

The San Francisco-based company behind sophisticated and stylish

wireless ear pieces released a new ERA model packing big technology in a diminutive form and enabling users to speak more naturally with software on their mobile devices.

"I hope they don't fall in love with their operating systems, but they will at least rekindle a relationship with voice commands," Jawbone audio product manager Gernard Feril said while providing AFP an early look at the new ERA.

Feril was making a playful reference to the Spike Jonze film "Her" starring Joaquin Phoenix, who plays a man who falls in love with a personal computer operating system.

Advanced Siri and Google Now software, which combine natural language exchanges with contextual awareness and even anticipating what users might want, have created a place for an ERA ear piece with enhanced technology for speaking to smartphones as one would a person, according to Feril.

Jawbone built in wide-band audio, high-quality microphones, and "NoiseAssassin" software to block out unwanted sounds to make voice quality closer to what is found in Internet telephone calls than in typical ear pieces.

Being able to speak commands and have spoken exchanges with virtual assistants through the ear piece frees people to either ignore smartphone screens or use them for other tasks, such as email, games or maps.

"This device has become so powerful," Feril said of the smartphone in his hand, "that holding it to your face limits what you're doing."

And, as screen sizes of mobile devices have grown, they become awkward to hold up to faces, he noted.

The annual Consumer Electronics Show gadget extravaganza that played out last week in Las Vegas was rife with headsets. Jawbone set out to distinguish itself with a tiny, high-quality ear piece crafted with style and brains to complement smartphone lifestyles.

Feril billed ERA as the smallest, lightest, best-sounding ear piece available.

ERA was priced at \$99 at jawbone.com, but could be purchased with a protective charging case for \$130 to increase talk time to 10 hours from four. The ear piece was less than half the size of its predecessor.

Since ERA is tiny, Jawbone added a "locator" feature that signals an ear piece to chirp to disclose where it is.

A Jawbone "Nerd" USB device can be used to automatically synch the ear piece to laptop computers.

"It's the Internet-of-me," Feril said. "It is not about the things, it is about the person. You can see that, at least in Spike Jonze's interpretation, the Internet is going to be with you at all times."

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