

Microsoft's Cortana now works on Google, Apple phones

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Microsoft's Cortana is now answering requests on Google- and Apple-powered smartphones.

The voice-activated digital assistant, designed to organize users' calendar and email items, the weather, and news interests, is available from Apple's App Store and Google Play in the U.S. and China starting Wednesday, Microsoft said.

Cortana is the Seattle-area company's entry in a crowded field of assistants aimed at simplifying basic tasks and Web searches by allowing users to carry out functions without fumbling on a phone keyboard or opening a Web browser. Other voice offerings include Apple's Siri, Amazon.com's Alexa, and Google Now.

To some software developers working on the tools, digital assistants promise the next advance in human interaction with computers, perhaps supplanting the Web search box or mouse and keyboard for some tasks.

Microsoft said in May that Cortana, introduced in 2014 for Windows Phone, would migrate to smartphone operating systems built by competitors. It's part of Microsoft's goal to broaden its reach on mobile devices beyond the tiny sliver of the global smartphone market using Windows.

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