

Move over, Siri and Alexa, and make room for Bixby.

April 11 2017, by Troy Wolverton, The Seattle Times



That's the name of Samsung's virtual assistant, a key feature of the new Galaxy S8 phone. The Korean company has big plans for the voice-based technology, seeing it as a fundamental way its customers will interact with a wide range of its devices in the future.

"Bixby is at the heart of our software and services evolution as a company," Injong Rhee, an executive vice president at Samsung Electronics and head of its software and service research and development, said in a blog post recently. "With the continued investment from Samsung on artificial intelligence, the possibility of what Bixby can become is endless."

Samsung's new assistant, which users of the S8 will activate via a dedicated button on the side of the phone, joins a growing number of voice control agents and bots. Apple's Siri, which pioneered the space, is built into its iPhones, iPads and Mac computers. Amazon's Alexa is included in its Echo and other smart speakers and is now being built into a host of new products from other companies.

Additionally, Microsoft offers Cortana on its Windows computers; Google Assistant is built into Google Home device and some of its smartphones; and IBM is offering its Watson artificial-intelligence technology for other companies to use. Meanwhile, Google, Facebook and Microsoft are building automated text-based bots into their messaging apps.

Samsung is hoping to distinguish Bixby from the competition by making it more capable than its rivals. The [company](#) is promising that the technology will be able to trigger just about any feature you can access in a smartphone app via a finger tap. It also says that Bixby will understand context - it will know where you are and what you've been doing in a particular app and be able to respond based on that information. And users will be able to interact with Bixby more freely than with other

voice agents; instead of having to state commands using particular words or a specific order, users will be able to speak to it more naturally.

"Fundamentally different from other voice agents or assistants in the market, Bixby offers a deeper experience," Rhee said in his post.

That's the promise, anyway. At launch, Bixby will be somewhat limited. It will only interact with an unspecified fraction of the applications that will come with the S8, Rhee said. Samsung plans to increase that number over time and to eventually open up the feature to outside developers and apps, he said.

It's been clear since last fall that Samsung was interested in virtual assistants. In October, it purchased Viv Labs, an [artificial intelligence](#) startup founded by the creators of Siri, which was reportedly working on a more advanced version of a voice bot. However, Bloomberg reported that Bixby is not based on Viv's technology.

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