

Alexa, Cortana finally get the conversation going

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Amazon's Alexa and Microsoft's Cortana are coming soon to a smart device near you ☞ together, with new integrated features that allow the digital assistants to talk to each other.

The two companies said the integration would be live for U.S. customers Wednesday, the first public launch for the joint service since the companies began testing it more than a year ago.

Alexa, which does everything from play music to buy items from Amazon on Echo speakers and other Alexa-enabled devices, will be able to summon Cortana to read emails or check calendar appointments from Microsoft Outlook. Alternately, Cortana will be able to ask Alexa to set the temperature of the room through an internet-connected thermostat and access many of the third-party skills other companies have built into Alexa.

The idea is to capitalize on each company's strength—Amazon's in consumer technology, and Microsoft's in workplace software. The integration will bring more work-focused functions to Alexa through Cortana and general life capabilities to Cortana.

U.S. customers who use any Echo [device](#), computer with Windows 10 or a Harmon Kardon Invoke speaker—which turns Cortana into a stand-alone digital assistant—can test the new skills starting Wednesday.

Microsoft may benefit from having popular Alexa skills available on Cortana, which got a slower start in the smart speaker game. Although Cortana has been available on Windows 10 devices since 2015, Amazon Echos had been on the market for nearly three years before the Harmon Kardon [speaker](#) with Cortana was released last fall.

The companies first announced plans to have their personal assistants work together a year ago, saying the integration would launch by the end of 2017. But things went silent after the initial announcement, until Microsoft and Amazon executives debuted a working demo onstage at Microsoft's developers conference in Seattle in May.

"This is a first-of-its-kind collaboration that involved lots of work and learnings from both the teams at Amazon and Microsoft," a Microsoft spokeswoman said. "We want to provide quality experiences, and that takes time."

Now U.S. customers will find out if it's been worth the wait. Microsoft says the integration will start rolling out to customers Wednesday and will reach all U.S. customers within days.

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