

Amazon wants to get Alexa into your car

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

The floor of the sprawling Los Angeles Auto Show is filled with fancy vehicles showing off their ultra-flashy, state-of-the-art infotainment systems, with giant screens that drivers really shouldn't be looking at while driving.

(But come on, you know they do.)

Inside the car, "it makes more sense to use voice," says Ned Curic, the vice-president of Amazon's Alexa Auto division. "You want to keep your hands on the wheel and eyes on the road, so using your voice makes more sense."

To that end, Amazon is looking to bring to bring the Alexa [personal assistant](#) to autos to help drivers with important tools like mapping and music navigation and to help find the nearest gas station and the like.

Curic came to the Auto Show this week to make a pitch to automakers and third-party vendors.

He's not alone. Apple, via its CarPlay system, and Google, with Android Auto, have been targeting the lucrative car market for several years, with the features available as part of step-up packages at the time of car purchases or as stand-alone accessories on sale (for around \$250-\$500, plus installation) at [auto](#) and electronics shops.

Amazon will have its own, non-visual device for the car, Echo Auto, available in 2019. It currently sells for \$24.99 as a pre-order now, but will be bumped up to \$49.99 when it launches. At his presentation, Curic showed slides of car hacks Amazon discovered online, where car owners brought the entry level, compact Echo Dot speaker into the car, hooked it up to the cigarette lighter for power, used the internet signal from their

smartphones and got Alexa playing music and offering information.

"We realized there was something there," he said, and got to work on its own device.

The end goal is to have manufacturers embed Alexa into the dash entertainment, so that it's totally seamless, he said.

"Connected to a smartphone is one way," he says. "Our future is all about having Alexa embedded directly into the car, so you don't have to buy a device. It's there, it's integrated, you don't have to do much, just engage with Alexa."

Audi has a new electric car for 2019, the (\$75,000) e-tron, that will do just that, and BMW will add Alexa functionality to all new BMWs produced from March 2018 on beginning next year.

Curic hopes to make more announcements in January at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

Meanwhile, there are several stand-alone products that currently bring Alexa into the car without hacks. They include:

—Roav Smartcharge F2: Touts the ability to charge your phone and use it to bring hands-free phone calling and entertainment into the car, via Alexa. It plugs into the cigarette lighter for power and has two USB ports for phones to bring you music and Alexa commands. But fine print alert: The Amazon listing for the \$26.74 unit notes that it won't work with several models by Audi, Honda, Toyota, Dodge, VW, Hyundai, Mazda and Nissan.

—Garmin Speak is a \$49.99 device that rests on the windshield and connects to the smartphone and the Garmin Speak app. The app directs

Alexa to connect to music services like Pandora, offer navigation through Garmin maps and weather information.

—Muse Auto Alexa Voice Assistant is a similar \$49.99 device that connects to your smartphone to bring in Alexa commands.

James McQuivey, an analyst with Forrester Research, says Amazon is in for a challenge getting to automakers, since Apple and Google have been at it for so long, and bring something to table—smartphone devices they make that can be easily connected to the car to connect to the entertainment systems.

"Amazon doesn't have that," he says.

The bigger question, he says, is which personal assistant consumers would want to live with in the car—Siri, Google Assistant or Alexa.

While Apple says Siri is the most used personal assistant, producing over 1 billion daily queries, "Alexa blows Siri away in terms of minutes spent," he says. "Fewer people use Alexa, but they spend more time with it."

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