

Amazon's Alexa voice assistant arrives on Fire tablets

26 October 2016, by Anick Jesdanun



This undated file image provided by Amazon shows color options of the new Amazon Fire HD 8 tablet. Amazon's Fire tablets are getting the Alexa voice assistant. The previously announced feature will start rolling out to customers Wednesday, Oct. 26, 2016. It's meant to complement what users get on other Alexa devices, such as the Echo speaker. Through voice commands, users can get the news read out to them or listen to music from services such as Amazon Music or Pandora. (Amazon via AP, File)

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The Fire tablets will go beyond Echo by offering full-screen cards with additional details. For instance, when you ask for the weather, Alexa will speak out the current temperature and offer the day's forecast, just as she does on Echo. But the visual card will also display the week's forecast. For news and music, the card offers playback control such as pausing and skipping.

For those with both Fire and Echo, making a request on Echo will trigger the Fire's screen to turn on and present the detailed cards, as long as a Voicecast feature is enabled through the Alexa app.

Amazon says Alexa will differ from Apple's Siri and Google's Assistant in being designed for tablets first, rather than phones. That means focusing on tasks typically done at home, such as entertainment, recipes and timers. For tasks on the go, such as finding nearby restaurants, Alexa performs a standard web search or directs you to the Alexa app. Apple and Google have special interfaces with restaurant ratings, price ranges and more, and both integrate that information into their chat apps, too.

Although the overall tablet market has been slumping, Amazon.com Inc. has managed to stay strong by slashing prices and encouraging people to buy more than one. Its bare-bones base model costs just \$49. Last month, Amazon introduced a new 8-inch tablet for \$90, down from \$150 for similar models in the past.

So far, Amazon is avoiding business-oriented tablets such as Apple's iPad Pro and Microsoft's Surface. Aaron Bromberg, a senior product manager for Fire tablets, said that while such devices work well as laptop replacements, "we also see an awful lot of people that want tablets to use around the house for entertainment."

"We see the market kind of dividing a bit," he said.

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