

Apple, where's the smarter Siri in iOS 12?

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Apple this week had every opportunity to show off new voice skills for Siri, the personal digital assistant, and to prove that it could be competitive with Amazon and Google.

Instead, it pretty much took a pass.

At its annual developers conference Monday, the company spent 15 minutes on new augmented reality updates, nearly a half-hour on updates to a fall macOS software update and over an hour on the new version of iOS12, the mobile operating system upgrade for the iPhone and iPad that will be out in the fall. This includes improved privacy controls and tools to curb our cellphone addiction with parental controls.

It did announce some new features, touted as "Shortcuts," but they're way more about text than voice and touted as "suggestions," that can be set up with a pre-arranged set of text categories.

Compare Apple's presentation to Google's recent developer conference, where the Google Assistant, which Google calls its voice-activated computing tool, stole the show. Google demo-ed a new tool to make hair and restaurant reservations by having the Assistant place a human sounding phone call. The person on the other end of the phone was fooled into thinking they'd been speaking to a real live person.

And not a week goes by that Amazon doesn't make an announcement about some new skill available for the Echo speaker line, which is powered by the Alexa voice assistant.

With iOS12, "It's as if Apple has given up entirely on Siri," notes analyst and blogger Jeremiah Owyang.

Alexa and Google "are setting a furious pace of innovation and making it harder for Apple to catch up as each month passes," said Bret Kinsella, the publisher of the voicebot.ai website.

Siri is the most widely used of the assistants, due to the size of the iPhone universe, which has over 1 billion users, but consistently lags behind Alexa and Google in usability surveys.

What Apple did showcase at the WWDC new feature intro was a new app, out in the fall, called "Shortcuts," which uses "Siri suggestions," to create automatic actions. For instance, you can choose from pre-set ones like "Send ETA," or predictive ones to buy morning coffee. The feature is based on an app Apple purchased in 2017, Workflow, which it had named best app of the year in 2015.

Since the keynote, Apple has put out a new webpage touting iOS12 features, and spotlighted ten Siri additions.

Beyond the Shortcut app, Apple also said Siri would have more languages available for translation and expand the categories Siri could use to help locate images in the Photos app.

Additionally, new databases of celebrity, motorsports and food questions have been added to Siri. Compared to what Google showed at the I/O developer conference, these would be considered very incremental.

The overall message from the WWDC presentation is with so much disappointment over Siri's accuracy rate, perhaps Apple is just subtly trying to expand the meaning of what Siri is, says Kinsella.

Maybe it's no longer a voice assistant, but just a name for shortcuts on the iPhone and iPad. "It's too fine a point for consumers to understand," he says. "Siri was introduced as a [voice assistant](#) in 2010, and it's hard to reframe that now."

Apple didn't respond to our request for comment.

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