

Voice control

How is voice technology transforming business and making work and management easier? EMMA BANNISTER looks at how this emerging technology can benefit FMs and businesses.



123RF's Sergey Nivens.
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As a busy CEO and business owner with 30 staff members, the idea of using technology and my voice in an effort to save time in the office is very appealing.

Data released by the Center for the Digital Future in its report 'Sharpest Edge: Digital Assistants' says that 51 percent of 35- to 49-year-olds and 62 percent of under 16-year-olds are already using digital assistants. Voice is becoming the new black. This is creating a huge impact – and also opportunity – for our businesses and for the everyday office environment, too.

FRIEND OR FOE?

Currently, the main rivals in smart speakers and voice-first technology are Amazon and Google, with Apple's HomePod launched early last year and with Microsoft's plans yet to be announced.

While I don't personally know anyone (yet) with a set-up like this in their office, it does make sense – especially if you're an office or facilities manager who has to reorder stock on a regular basis. Imagine just having to yell out what you need and then it being delivered.

For myself, I choose Google over Amazon Echo, mainly because I've heard the reports of search and shopping requests defaulting to Amazon products, with simple things like batteries topping the charts. As a consumer I see this as an advantage – less choice makes life easier – but as a business, it is concerning and could cause issues.

Plus, from a business perspective, having an Amazon product that only promotes its own products means there will be even less competition out there. So other businesses will only be able to sell through Google, leaving a large portion of the market unattainable.

Also, businesses will need to ensure that websites are optimised for voice technology so that they can be found and suggested easily.

Data privacy is dead. I'm mostly OK with that, as it makes life easier, but I do worry about when these devices stop listening. Is it after they have answered your requests, or do

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they carry on listening and collecting data? As consumers, should we unplug them? Where is the line for both consumer and business?

At the moment, this is still very much a grey area with no real concrete answers. So it is something that facility managers, and all of us, need to be mindful of before jumping in headfirst.

EMERGING MARKETS

On the other hand, yelling at my Google Home Mini to add cotton buds to my shopping list or play meditation music at the crack of dawn is one thing, but I see benefits to consumers and businesses alike, such as with an emerging market of apps (like Alexa Skills and Google Actions) that help fast-track learning.

At home now, we are not bound to reading books on screens. We've moved on from just audiobooks and podcasts to using smart speakers in our environments to help us.

That means the demand for short-form training and education tools via these apps will increase as they become more popular. Think curated content based on your preferences, giving us fast and up-to-date information and education in bite-size

segments, as well as quick searches for information, data and location-based services.

Above all else, for users, it's about finding what makes our lives and jobs easier and our businesses smoother, and what makes us smarter and more efficient. So the opportunity for us as businesses is to ensure we embrace technology and use it to our and our business' advantage. ●

→ *Emma Bannister is passionate about presenting big, bold and beautiful ideas. She is the founder and CEO of Presentation Studio, APAC's largest presentation communication agency, and author of the book Visual Thinking: How to Transform the Way You Think, Communicate and Influence with Presentations. Find out more at www.presentationstudio.com.*