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# Is 2015 The Year Voice Assistants Take Over Your Home?

By Daniel B. Kline – Jan 25, 2015 at 8:03AM

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Apple
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Today's Change (-0.26%) $0.70
Current Price $268.30
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**Voice assistants are coming, but when they become a key part of your house is yet to be determined.**

Voice assistants, which once seemed like a technology from science fiction, have taken over phones. Despite this major advance you have seen anything yet - they might be on the cusp of invading our homes.

Two of the largest consumer technology firms in the world, **Microsoft** (MSFT 0.88%) and **Amazon** (AMZN +0.65%), have made voice control a key part of their latest products.

Microsoft has made vocal commands central to its overall strategy. The company made a point to, at a recent press event, show that its Cortana voice assistant will be a core feature in Windows 10, moving from phones to desktops and laptops -- putting Cortana into people's homes.

Amazon has built its new Echo around verbal controls. The device -- which is part helpful assistant, part music player -- is only available by invitation, but its functionality shows Amazon believes voice assistants will be integrated into people's living rooms.

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**Apple** (AAPL 0.26%), which popularized voice assistants when it added Siri to iPhone, does not offer it on its Mac computers, but that might change soon.

Broadly, voice assistants are quickly becoming more prevalent, and that growth is likely to continue given the previously mentioned initiatives.

"We're really just at the cusp of imagining all that's possible when we can use voice assistance and control in ways that untether us from devices," Todd Thibodeaux, president and CEO of CompTIA, a nonprofit trade association serving the information-technology industry, told the Fool via email. "It won't be long until we look back at tapping away on a touch sensitive interface as primitive and clumsy and 2015 is absolutely the first year in that paradigm shift."

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**It's coming, but is 2015 too soon?**

While the Cortana announcement and the slow rollout of Echo suggest that voice assistants are on there way to becoming part of people's homes , many in the industry believe it will take time for these devices to become mainstream.

"Will voice assistants take over the home? Yes. In 2015? No," VoiceBox Technologies CEO Mike Kennewick told the Fool via email.

Kennewick, whose company creates software that powers "natural language" voice-based applications, said it's not a question of technology or even consumer acceptance, but rather about building up a sufficient infrastructure.

"While most of the technology exists, the emerging ecosystem has a way to go. Issues like standards and security need to be ironed out; the question of who will emerge to occupy key places in the value-chain will evolve," he wrote. "A number of leading players have come to VoiceBox for help building their home products, indicating it's simply a matter of time before voice assistants take over the home."

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Chad Taylor, who serves as Connect Store manager for Abt Electronics, the nation's largest single-store retailer of electronics and appliances, said voice assistants are the future, but aren't there yet.

"I have a windows phone with Cortana. And much like Siri, it is great for adding notes and appointments to my calendar. However it is still limited to what it can understand. I have had many instances with both Siri and Cortana that have led to wrong messages sent, or called the wrong person," he said via email.

His colleague, Josh Davis, known as "The Technologist" at Abt, has a more bullish view, but also said he feels 2015 won't quite be the year.

"The technology is great. The accuracy is almost there. However, 2015 is not the year we'll see this technology greeting us when we walk in the door," he said in an email to the Fool.

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**The kinks need to be worked out**

Anyone who has used a voice assistant on their phone knows the technology is not quite functioning at the optimum level. When I use Siri on my iPhone to "call mom" it insists on calling a former co-worker, Bob, who must wonder why I call and hang up on him so often. Echo, too, has its drawbacks, often being unable to answer simple requests.

But while voice assistants might not take over our homes in 2015, it seems inevitable that they ultimately will be part of the home automation package for many households.

"As the cost for hardware and software supporting voice assistants goes down this functionality will become more common," Tom Coughlin, a senior member of IEEE, the largest professional association of engineers and technologists, told the Fool via email. "However there are factors that will limit the use of voice assistants in the home, including background noise that distorts the voice translation algorithms. Thus I think voice assistants will be one of several developing human to machine interfaces that will make our lives easier."

**Growth could be huge**

Voice assistants will benefit from the overall explosion of the home automation market, which a new report from Transparency Market Research asserts will rise from $4.4 billion in 2013 to $21 billion in 2020.

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Voice assistants could offer a logical method to control those systems, but for that to happen, Microsoft, Amazon, Apple, and others must make the technology work flawlessly. My phone example above is amusing, but it's less funny if I say "lock doors" and my oven turns on, making it a race between whether someone will

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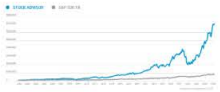

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break in before my house burns down.

Voice assistants are coming. For some of us they are already here, but work remains before they become more than a mildly helpful novelty.

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made regular appearances on Radio BDC and hosted the Boston.com live blog during the Boston Marathon bombing coverage. His latest book, "Worst Ideas Ever," (Skyhorse) can be purchased at bookstores everywhere. In addition to his financial writing, Kline wrote a syndicated opinion column that appeared in hundreds of newspapers. He lives in Connecticut with his wife, Celine, son, Joshua, and cats Caroline and Cookiepuss.

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*Daniel Kline owns shares of Apple and Microsoft. He successfully got his Echo to tell him a joke. The Motley Fool recommends Amazon.com, Apple, Google (A shares), Google (C shares), and Netflix. The Motley Fool owns shares of Amazon.com, Apple, Google (A shares), Google (C shares), Microsoft, and Netflix. Try any of our Foolish newsletter services free for 30 days. We Fools may not all hold the same opinions, but we all believe that considering a diverse range of insights makes us better investors. The Motley Fool has a disclosure policy.*


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