

THE NEXT STEP IN DIGITAL MARKETING EVOLUTION: RISE OF THE VOICE AI

Thinking about voice AI conveys the images of a genie from the Aladdin's lamp: it talks, it listens and it tries its best to fulfill our wishes. It may not be almighty, but with the proper approach, it could make our wishes come true – at least as far as business and revenue go. It makes connecting brands and their customers easier than ever and humanizes that relationship. The catch is, though, for a brand to get discovered. In this article, we explored how to overcome the challenges and best utilize the opportunities which this new channel presents for digital marketers.

CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL MARKETING FOR EUROPEAN MARKET IN 2018

Digital marketers in the EU are facing big challenges in 2018, as several major developments occur.

Upcoming new EU rules will restrict data gathering and handling. The EU's [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#) comes into force in May 2018. The GDPR is designed to unify data privacy laws across Europe. It aims to protect and empower digital consumers' data privacy and to modify the way organizations approach data privacy. Predictions are that it will cause shockwaves to digital advertising – at least for the immediate period after it comes to force - and marketers should be aware of that fact.

New regulation and harmonization of [Digital Market and e-Commerce](#) will impose new standards for retail and delivery across the region. With Brexit happening, other member nations are pursuing greater integration of the standards and processes governing digital commerce.

Lastly, development of new technologies, set to improve the ways we experience the world around us, presents both: an opportunity and a challenge for digital marketers.

And while all of the above is something to keep in mind while planning our digital marketing strategies, we wanted to take a closer look at a new emerging technology which is predicted to have an enormous impact on online marketing in the upcoming years: **Voice Artificial Intelligence (Voice AI)**.

FROM MOBILE-FIRST TO VOICE-FIRST

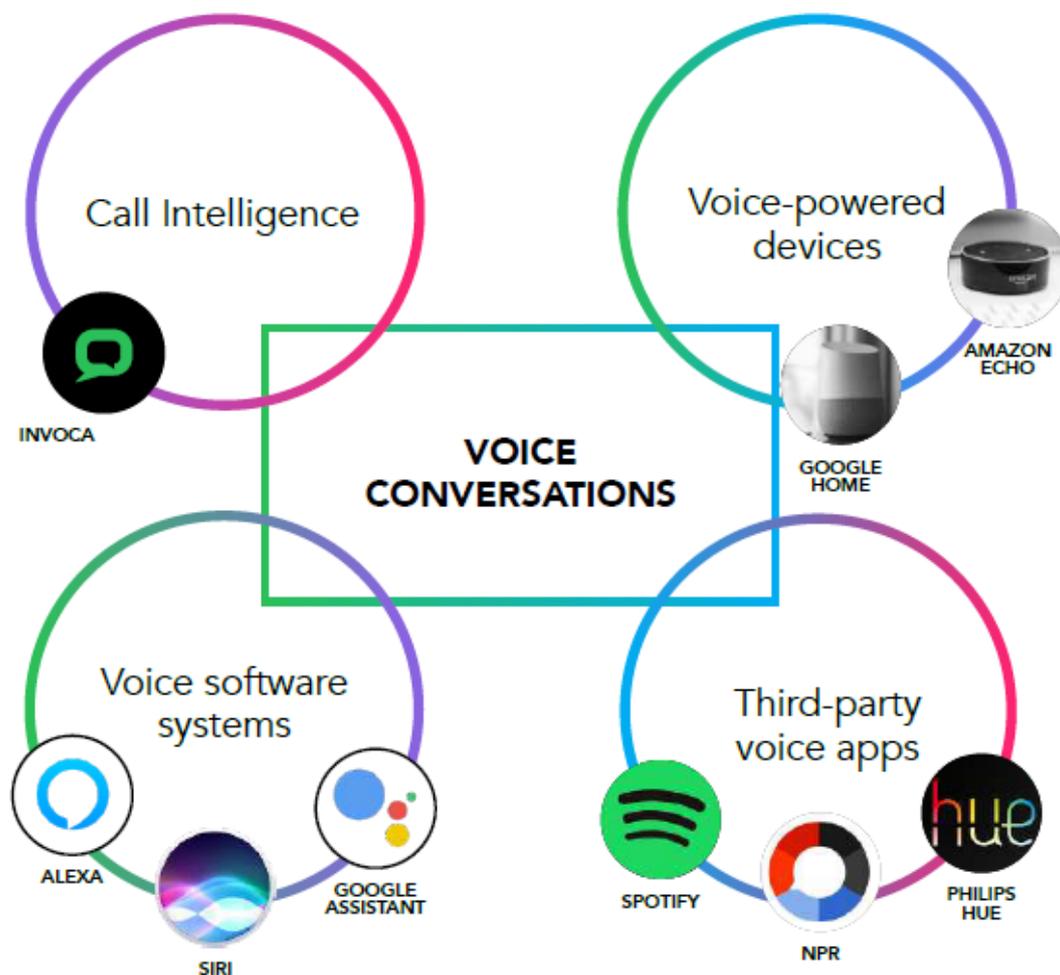
Nowadays, mobile is still dominating when it comes to marketing. Not so long ago it was a matter of science fiction. Let's take a moment to see how (quickly) we got to the point where we are today. Launch of an iPhone, only ten years ago, set in motion transformation of clunky phones into smartphones. Then, as wireless standards improved, numbers of social networks and app market grew rapidly, which shook traditional marketing methods to the core and opened new possibilities, creating new opportunities for digital marketing.

Similar is happening now – a revolution in the way we communicate. Predictions are that 2018 will be a crucial year for voice-activated services, bringing changes to the ways of purchase and selling, for consumers and the brands. In Western Europe, smartphone users are already accustomed to using their inbuilt voice assistants daily: to search, gain quick access to information or play media. However, in-home assistants are gaining popularity. More people are interested in getting these devices as they are getting increasingly affordable. Currently, the major personal voice assistance services are Apple's **Siri**, Google's **OK, Google**, Microsoft's **Cortana**, and Amazon's **Alexa**. They are utilizing voice technology for a much wider range of functions— leading a transition towards voice (and video) advertising in response to queries. It is safe to claim that these AI-enabled devices will be the next big driver of widespread change, which is, coincidentally, backed up by statistics too.

According to [Invoca's Report](#), the usage of voice assistant increased by an estimated 130% in 2017. Google says that more than 20% of searches now happen by voice and estimates that figure will reach 50% by 2020. This statistic means that web browsing information traditionally conveyed through images and text will need to be delivered by voice.

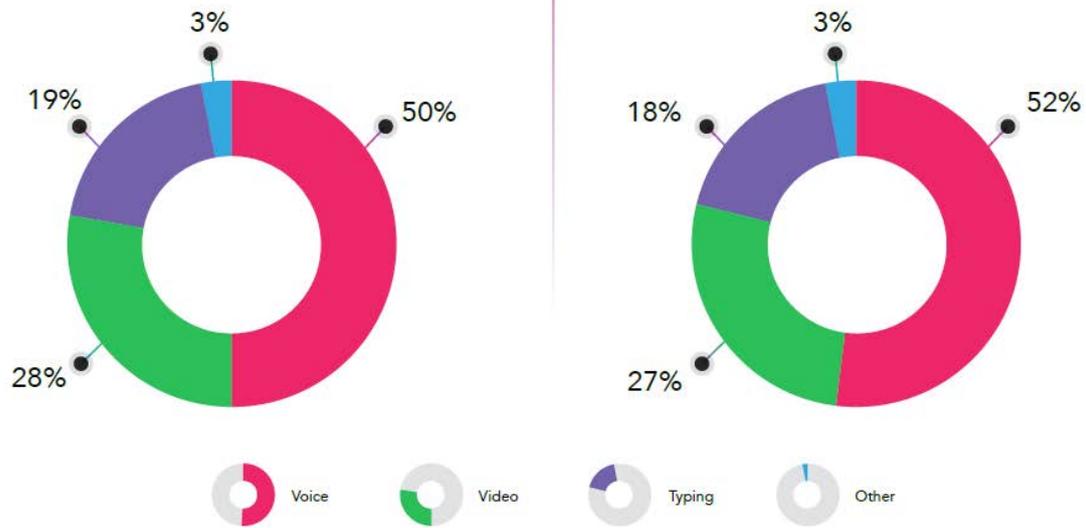
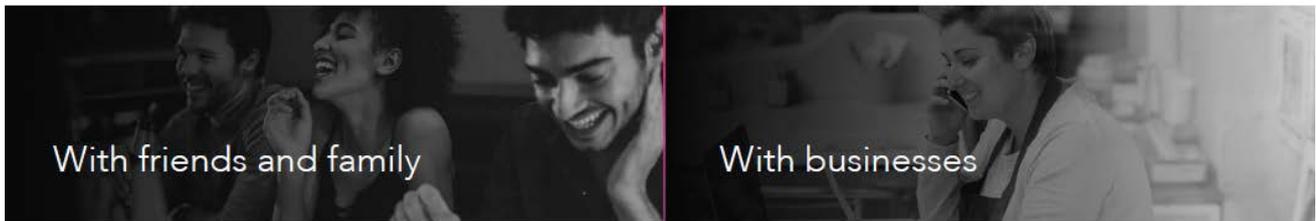
VOICE AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR DIGITAL MARKETERS

While the benefits of voice for consumers are obvious, implications for marketers are ample and still developing. AI-enabled voice recognition is becoming a normal part of how we interact with technology. What humans say is becoming valuable data that businesses can use to sell products and create a personalized customer experience. The words that consumers use during phone calls with customer service can be used to personalize messages across channels. Phone data can intelligently be applied to brands' next vawe SEO efforts to reach the top slots in Voice Assistents' search. Digital ads can retarget consumers based on product interest expressed via phone. And voice conversations are in the center of all of it. Voice has evolved, but always stayed the main way of human communication.



New power of Voice (source: Invoca)

People are now equipped to use their voice – interacting with brands more quickly and easily than ever before. As people get accustomed to using their voice to accomplish tasks with their assistant, they are speaking more and clicking less! According to the above-quoted Report, 58% of surveyed accomplish tasks they used to do trough typing and swiping with their Voice Assistant and 49% say they've been looking at their phone significantly less since using voice assistant. Which means that voice is emerging as a new user interface and a potential source of revenue. Early adopters are using their voice listening for recommendations instead of reading them and purchasing by simply saying a word.

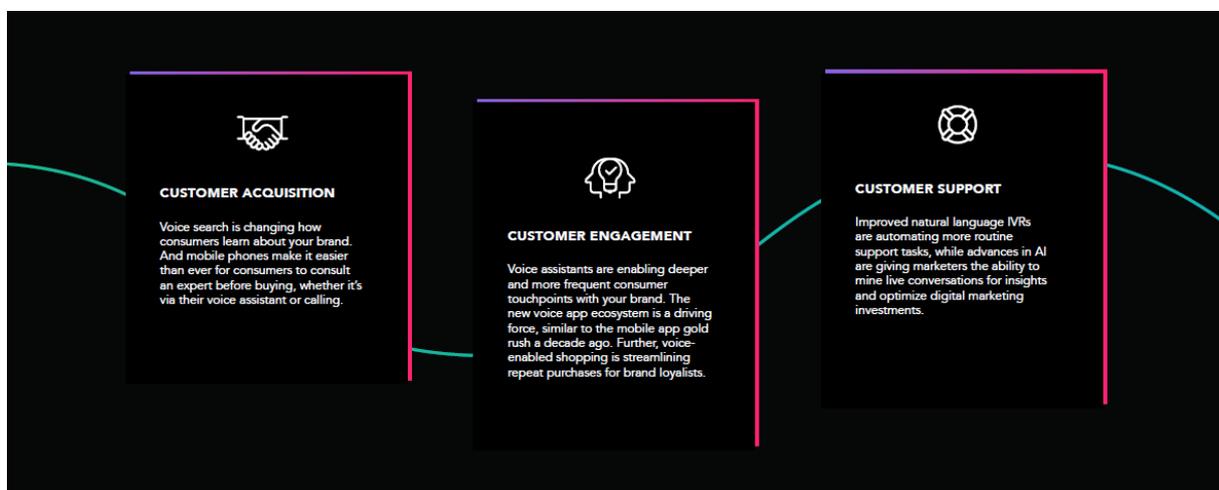


An estimate of communication in next two years (Source: Invoca)

Another important aspect is advertising. Voice devices don't currently support ads, but it's likely to change. According to the Report, consumers are willing to receive ads on their devices as long as they are relevant and integrated into the experience.

HOW TO CONNECT WITH CUSTOMERS IN A VOICE-FIRST WORLD?

The key is to think broadly about how voice will impact entire customer experience: from discovery through purchase. Understanding voice AI is not only necessary to keep up with the latest in tech – but also to understand customer and how voice can enhance the business-customer relationship.



Approach to voice from a customer experience standpoint (source: Invoca)

Prioritize the voice experience

When content is returned by a voice assistant, it defaults to available audio. Sometimes it will pull information from Wikipedia and use text-to-speech to deliver the output. If the brand has no way to deliver audio, it is very likely silent in that consumer exchange and misses a consumer engagement opportunity. Therefore, building a voice presence for the brand is paramount.

With their conversational user interface, Voice Assistants are putting a human touch into technology. The goal is for the consumer to interact with the device as it would be a real person. With powerful AI analytics, these devices can assess tone and sentiment in the user's voice. By intuitively anticipating their needs and preferences best, brands can create an entirely adaptive customer experience that's personalized to each user at scale. Unfortunately, content assets for web, print, and video typically are not suitable for voice delivery. It should be noted, too, that audio assets need a method to deliver the audio through voice assistants and to enable conversational interactions with consumers. However, a good voice strategy can enhance interaction of a customer with the brand – in the ways unseen by now so it is worth the effort.

Rethink search strategy

Mobile search is a primary driver of calls. Voice search, on the other hand, involves a different set of behaviors. Discovery of the brand is the biggest challenge here because the number of top search results is very limited. And Voice AI will share only top results. It is, at its core, *marketing to an artificially intelligent machine*. Therefore, brands should refine their SEO, so that voice assistants are picking up their products first. AI is the key here. It can help brands optimize their search campaigns for Voice Assistants better than ever before, as well as forecasting how particular search campaigns will fare over extended periods of time.

Here are some suggestions how to improve SEO on Voice Assistant devices:

- Use natural language over basic keywords. Include questions and phrases that your audience may ask or want to know, and present them in a way that makes sense and flows well. Brainstorm different ways person in a conversation might ask the same thing.
- Make it easy and clear for Google to understand the topic and how best to serve it up to users. Virtual assistants may pull excerpts from your page to answer a user's question, so include content that would best fit this.
- Provide content that matches the user's search term intent. The more relevant and useful the content is, the better.

Improve customer service

Industries where people make considerable purchases (insurance, financial services, healthcare, home services and travel) have the most gain in investing in voice. When customers have complicated or specific inquiries or are about spend a lot of money, voice communication is very important. Still, consumers claim for the Report, conversations they have over the phone influence their purchase decisions more than speaking with AI device. Therefore, if businesses are aware of communication between person and voice AI device, they would be able to be pick up the conversation where voice assistants left off and help the customer.

Voice AI is still a novelty – and brands can take advantage of it by making **product reviews** and **user feedback** more immediate and engaging. Voice is the quickest way to share a reaction – but it needs to be well-timed and not overwhelming. A suggestion is, few days after the purchase, for voice AI to ask a customer up to three questions regarding their satisfaction with product and brand.

For the loyal customers of the brand, **replenishment** can be automated. AI tracks previous purchases and reminds a customer when it's time to buy new supplies; or briefs them about the special offers.

Another area where voice AI can significantly help customer experience is automating the **returns**. The more people shop online, the more they return. And customers have very little patience with it. Important is that customer is satisfied with return process because then they are more likely to purchase again from the brand.

Voice AI can help here by reminding the customer to send back all the unwanted items by a certain date; ask them for reasons of return and mail them and print the form for the customer to fill in.

Connect digital and voice initiatives and gain new customer's insight from the conversations

Offline conversations, with help of call intelligence, can be tied to digital marketing initiatives to drive more revenue and create more consistent customer experience. Conversations, both digital and analog, are rich source of data. AI is being used to find data most meaningful to given business, by analyzing conversations in real time and indentifying language patterns. Marketers can use these insights to optimize their digital marketing investments, improve offline conversations, increase ad spend efficiency and drive revenue.

Know your audience

To ensure voice-enabled experiences are as personalised as possible, and consistent from place to place, marketers will need to ensure their Voice Assistant experience is contextually aware. Consumers say in the Report that they would use their voice assistant more often if it sounded more human – voice commands are not the same as conversation. Voice assistants need to work on understanding context – through getting to know the person and their history and engaging in long conversations.

Long-term marketing trends predict that contextualizing will extend to all devices which customer is using. The goal is to provide a consistent, seamless experience across multiple Voice Assistants, which recognize the user and their preference no matter where they might be.

Find more customers who want to talk

Customers who call are high-intent. They usually want to have a conversation after they did their research online are ready (or almost ready) to buy. **Conversion rates of phone calls are 10 to 15 times higher** than those of the web clicks. It is vital that marketers understand who is calling, which of their marketing tactics are driving high – value calls and how these trends differ by demographic and industry.

To conclude; shifts in consumer behavior may seem subtle now, but they have long-lasting effect on our expectations, buying habits and relationships with brands. Voice Assistants are increasing their presence in our everyday lives, with potential of becoming as indispensable as the mobile devices. If 2017 was a year of experimenting with voice AI, this year marketers should learn how to cater to Voice Assistants, and ensure they are fully integrated into the customer experience. Market strategy should be versatile and adaptable in order to be able to take advantage of the next big thing! Voice has passed that fine line where it was just an add-on to usual marketing channels. It's time to give it due attention and start including it in our marketing strategies. The early bird catches the worm!

KEYWORDS:

- voice AI in digital marketing
- voice AI
- voice assistant
- digital marketing trends 2018
- European digital marketing trends 2018
- online marketing trends 2018
- voice software systems in marketing
- Invoca Report Rise of Voice

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- [3 Ways Voice Ai will Change the Way We Shop in 2018](#)
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