



# HEALTHCARE MARKETING IN THE AGE OF VOICE ASSISTANCE

In the age of virtual assistants such as Amazon's Alexa, marketing to patients presents exciting opportunities for brands. As the healthcare space itself continues to evolve, marketers looking for an edge are exploring new ways to reach consumers through various devices and platforms, while consumers are excited at voice assistance's possibilities to "have the world at their fingertips"—even if it's their voices, not their fingers, that are utilized.

According to Med Ad News, by 2020 a full [30% of all web searches will be conducted without the use of a digital screen](#). Utilizing voice assistance to answer questions or perform simple tasks quickly is becoming a way of life for many patients, allowing them to more easily manage their day-to-day tasks; and Amazon recently released software that enables Alexa to securely transmit patient-level information between healthcare professionals and their patients in a HIPAA-compliant manner.

Six specific voice "skills" were developed in partnership with Cigna, Boston Children's Hospital, and Livongo:

- **My Children's Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS):** This tool helps parents access information regarding their child's surgery and recovery and gives them the opportunity to better manage upcoming appointments.
- **Livongo Blood Sugar Lookup:** This offering allows consumers to track their blood sugar checks just by asking Alexa.
- **Swedish Health Connect:** This tool, developed by Providence Health, allows patients to locate nearby care clinics and schedule appointments at urgent care locations.
- **Cigna Health Today:** This skill allows consumers enrolled in the Cigna plan to track their wellness goals and access wellness tips and rewards.
- **Atrium Health:** This skill allows patients to locate nearby urgent care locations and schedule same-day appointments.
- **Express Scripts:** This offering lets members track prescription orders and receive alerts related to delivery status.

In 2018, Amazon acquired pharmaceutical start-up company PillPack and developed technology that detects unusual voice conditions such as coughing and sneezing. Amazon continues to leverage its voice technology offerings, making it one of the company's [most promising lines of business](#). These efforts are directed toward giving patients and caregivers alike better access to managing their health conditions.

Interest in voice-activated device applications across the healthcare space is growing rapidly; and although most devices are not yet able to transmit health-related information, the potential for these devices, with their high performance and accuracy rates, presents exciting possibilities in the industry.

Stone Temple Consulting Corporation's 2018 study found that Google Assistant was the best performing voice assistant on a smartphone device. Nearly 80% of users' questions were answered with an accuracy rate of 95% (Stone Temple). While Google Assistant is not yet HIPAA-compliant, its high performance signifies its potential to become a leader in the healthcare space further down the road. In comparison, Microsoft's Cortana had an accuracy rate of 90% after answering 60% of all questions asked. Siri had an accuracy rate of about 80% and only answered 40% of questions. As for Alexa, the device surprisingly decreased in accuracy, falling from a 90% accuracy rate in 2017 to 84% in 2018 (Stone Temple).

Younger generations use voice assistance devices daily to obtain information they historically have consumed on their smartphones—be it reminders or alerts about medications or data that monitors and tracks their health and fitness goals. Since millennials, America’s largest and most diverse group, traditionally expect **instant gratification** from knowledge at their fingertips, why should it be different when it comes to their healthcare-related questions?

*“More than 80% of millennials say they use digital assistants to monitor health, and 74% use the technology to receive medical alerts.”*

*– Deloitte 2018 Survey of U.S. Health Care Consumers*

In years to come, voice assistance devices have the potential to become data hubs for everything from patients’ medical histories to their scheduled appointments. Voice assistant solutions have already begun to make this data more accessible to users. With this advancement in technology, those who utilize voice assistance have the opportunity to improve daily tasks, specifically by accessing important health information so that they can better manage their medical situations and even become more knowledgeable about their conditions. Additionally, these devices present branded and unbranded opportunities for brands to engage with consumers differently than they have in the past.

Healthcare marketing’s interest in voice assistance reveals how important it is to incorporate this tactic into media planning. Moreover, the behavioral data of users that can potentially be accessed from these devices provides additional opportunities to directly strengthen targeting. Ways to further incorporate voice technology and digital assistants into the world of healthcare marketing are plentiful. We see this as a win for brands looking to build both brand and disease awareness, share treatment and prescribing benefits, and connect with patients and caregivers in ways that add tremendous potential value to both groups.