# Amazon launches Alexa+ with generative AI enhancements



Amazon has unveiled a significant update to its popular voice assistant, Alexa, announcing the launch of "Alexa+", a new service designed to enhance user interactions through advanced generative AI capabilities. This announcement was made during a media event held in New York City on Wednesday, where executives showcased the latest features aimed at creating a more personalised and engaging experience for users.

Historically, Alexa has been available for free, but the introduction of Alexa+ will require customers to pay a subscription fee of $19.99 per month unless they are Prime members, who will retain access without additional charges. The revamped assistant is designed to engage in conversations with a more human-like flow, adapting to users' preferences over time, including dietary habits and other personal details. "I’m not just an assistant, I’m your new best friend in the digital world," Alexa+ stated during a demonstration.

Panos Panay, Amazon’s senior vice president of devices and services, introduced a myriad of new functionalities, including the ability to create study plans, send texts to babysitters, and summon rides through Uber. Users can also now fetch videos from Ring cameras to check on pets or family members, and Alexa has improved its ability to recall recipes and documents shared during user interactions. Panay emphasised, "She’s smarter than she’s ever been before, but she’s also approachable," highlighting the intention of making Alexa more relatable.

Launched in 2014 alongside the first Echo device, Alexa has since evolved significantly and Amazon claims to have sold over 600 million Alexa-enabled devices. Engagement rates with the assistant reportedly jumped by 20 per cent over the past year. Market estimates suggest that Alexa continues to hold a commanding lead in the voice assistant space amidst competition from technology giants like Google and Apple.

At the core of Alexa+ is a "model-agnostic system," which allows Alexa to select the most suitable AI model for various tasks, as explained by Daniel Rausch, Amazon's vice president for Alexa and Echo. The update will initially be rolled out in March 2024, starting with select users who own specific Echo Show devices featuring screens. Following initial access, Amazon plans to extend the offering in phases to more devices and markets.

Rausch further elaborated on the technology underpinning Alexa+, acknowledging that while the company collaborates with Anthropic, a generative AI startup, Amazon’s own models form the foundation of the new system. "We always start with our own technology," he asserted, noting improvements in performance, latency, and accuracy that these models provide. This includes using Amazon's "Bedrock," a cloud-based foundation for generative AI work.

Amazon's introduction of generative AI features comes with a focus on privacy and security, as all data is encrypted during transmission to ensure user safety. Rausch assured that measures are in place to protect children when using the platform, especially with the new "Explore and Stories with Alexa" feature aimed at a younger audience.

While Alexa+ is designed to work seamlessly with a range of Echo devices, users of older models will retain access to the original Alexa service without needing to upgrade. The shift towards a subscription-based model for enhanced features reflects Amazon’s strategy to offset the costs associated with ongoing AI development, as they aim to increase profitability in the smart assistant market.

Overall, the launch of Alexa+ signals a substantial evolution in Amazon's digital assistant landscape, promising a more interactive and customized user experience, amid rising competition in the AI-driven voice assistance sector.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)