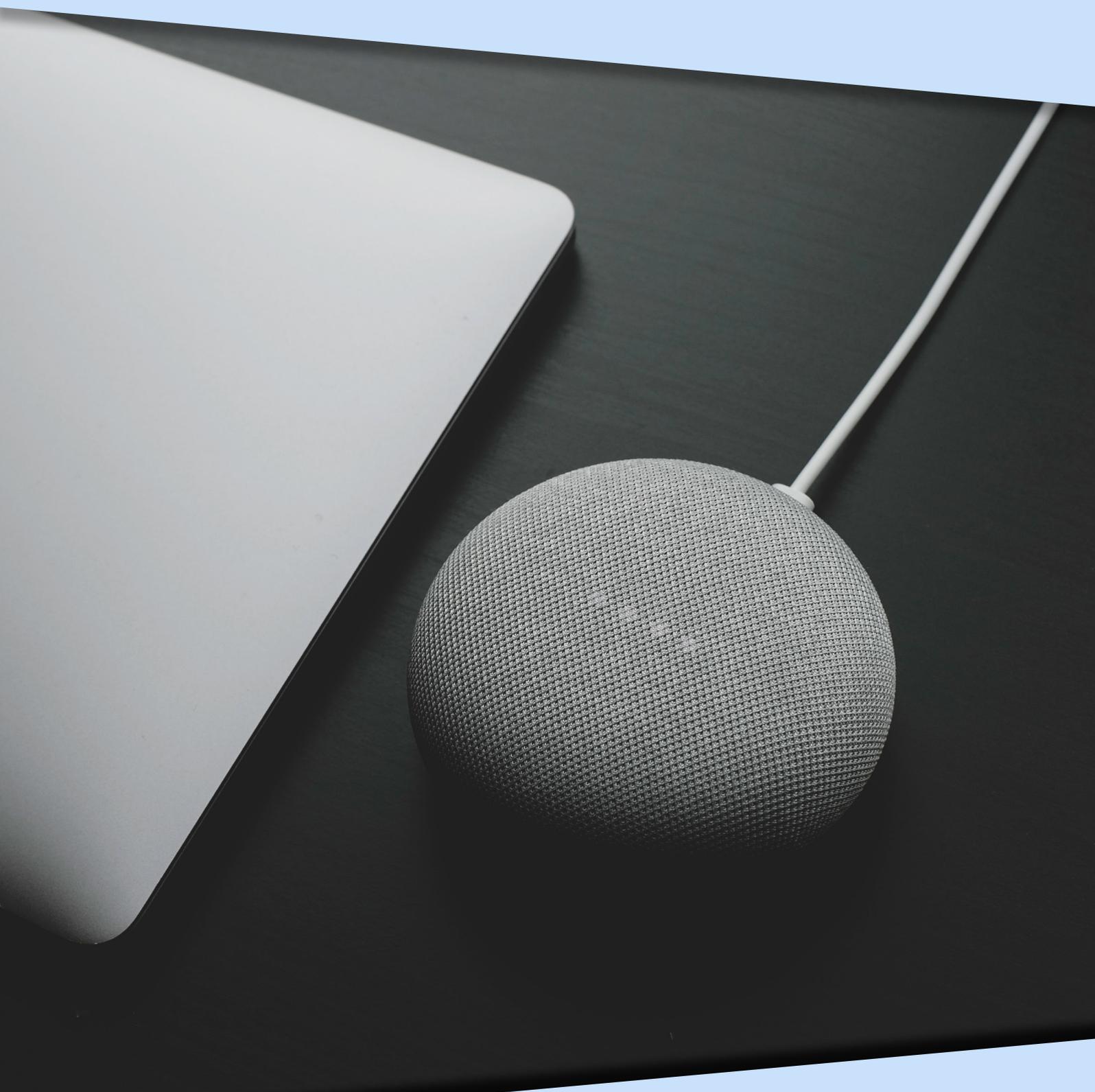


The SHW Guide to Smart Assistants



Voice search and smart assistants have seen a huge rise in popularity in just a few years. Here are the facts for the uninitiated.

Once upon a time, the idea of having a conversation with an electronic device was strictly the stuff of science fiction. Today, the fantasy has become a reality, with the rise of smart assistants.

Smart assistants (sometimes also known as virtual or voice assistants) such as Amazon's Alexa, Siri from Apple, and Google's Assistant, make it possible for you to search the internet, switch on your heating, or order a pizza all via voice commands. There's no need to type anything or unlock your device—it's almost like having your own butler.

But, if you're new to voice technology, the whole thing can seem a bit daunting. To help you, we've put together this complete guide for beginners. We'll cover off the main players, the big products, and some tips and tricks. It's everything you need to get started in the world of the smart assistant.

What is a smart assistant?

Smart assistants are essentially clever bits of software that can be downloaded onto mobile devices, such as smartphones, or that come installed in smart speakers or home hubs.

Once set up, your smart assistant will be able to carry out certain tasks or functions on your behalf. All you need to do is speak a certain command, and the assistant will carry out that task. For example, say your chosen assistant is Amazon Alexa (don't worry, we'll go through all of the different voice assistants in just a minute), you can simply say 'Alexa, what's the weather today?' and you'll get an instant answer.

That, of course is just scratching the surface. Once you're confident with using your smart assistant, you'll be able to use it to order shopping, book flights, and control your home security. And the technology is getting cleverer all the time, so as it learns about your routines things will get more and more efficient.

What smart assistants are available?

There are five smart assistants available in the UK from the big manufacturers. First we'll look at the three offerings that are by far the most popular, and then we'll take a look at the other two.

First, the major players:

Alexa: Created by Amazon, and available on Android and Apple devices as well as Amazon's own Echo and Dot smart speakers, Alexa is currently by far the world's most popular voice assistant.

Google Assistant: As with Alexa, Google's Assistant is available on Android and Apple devices, as well as a selection of smart speakers – including Google's own range of devices.

Siri: Apple's voice assistant is exclusive to Apple devices such as the iPhone, iPad, and the HomePod smart speaker.

There are two other assistants available, both of which have struggled to get a foothold in the UK:

Cortana: Microsoft's smart assistant is available on Windows devices, but support for iOS and Android devices ceased in early 2020 due to limited interest.

Bixby: Developed by Samsung for its Galaxy range of devices, Bixby is not yet a serious competitor to the big three—but that could change if investment continues.

What can a digital assistant offer?

If there's one word that sums up the benefits of a smart assistant, it would have to be convenience. Of course, at first it feels slightly strange to be barking orders at an invisible entity that lives in your smart device as you walk into the kitchen or sit on the sofa.

But, pretty soon, you'll find yourself using your assistant in a myriad of domestic situations, wondering how you ever managed without it. Here are just a few examples of when we find it really useful:

When you're busy in the kitchen: If you're chopping veg or washing the dishes and you want to listen to your party playlist, just ask your digital assistant to do it. No need for washing and drying your hands!

Switching off your alarm: Is there anything more annoying than your morning alarm blaring away while you fumble around for your phone in the dark? With a simple voice command you can cut that annoying noise out instantly. Just make sure you don't fall back to sleep.

Get your routines automated: When you get in from work, it's likely you have a mini-routine: walk around the house switching on the lights, turning up the thermostat, putting the kettle on, and turning on the radio, for example. With a few smart products and the assistance of your helpful smart assistant, this time-consuming activity can be reduced to a simple command.

Do you have any questions about smart assistants? Or perhaps you'd like to let us know about how you find life after using one. We'd love to hear your opinion. Join the conversation on **Facebook** or **Twitter**.