

SIRI WINNING BATTLE OF THE VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS IN CANADA: POLL

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TORONTO — In the heated battle between Amazon, Apple, Google and Microsoft to get consumers hooked on their virtual assistants, Siri seems to be enjoying the first-mover advantage.

Just shy of 40 per cent of Canadian adults recently used a virtual assistant, according to a report by the Media Technology Monitor, which polled almost 8,200 Canadians by phone late last year.

About 25 per cent said they had used Apple's Siri in the past month, 15 per cent had said "OK Google" to interact with one of the search giant's devices, four per cent had used Microsoft's Cortana, and one per cent had chatted with Amazon's Alexa.

Rene Ritchie, the Montreal-based editor-in-chief of the Apple-focused website iMore, said he expected Siri would have the lead given that it's been available to consumers the longest, since 2011.

But Apple does face challenges given that Siri's competition has leapfrogged it in some respects, he added.

"Siri famously had networking issues early on and now sort of doesn't match up well against Alexa from Amazon or Google Assistant," Ritchie said.

He expected that Alexa's usage numbers are likely higher today given Amazon's recent push into Canada.

"Amazon was slow in getting Alexa to Canada. And when they did, it didn't do very much at first. But if you checked today, because of the low price (the company's Echo Dot device with Alexa sells for \$69.99) and the convenience of being tied into the Amazon ecosystem, I would guess it would not be significantly higher yet, because it's still so new, but certainly (the adoption) would have a huge amount of acceleration."

Ritchie, himself a fan of using virtual assistants, believes it's a trend that will only grow in popularity.

"As things become more automated you get used to having 'ambient computing' in your life — like in my house I have almost everything automated. I can say 'turn on the blinds,' 'turn off the lights,' 'unlock the door,'" Ritchie said.

“It becomes this entirely different interface level, it starts to become transformative and once you start doing it, it becomes habitual.”

Forum Research Inc., polled 8,189 Canadians on behalf of the Media Technology Monitor between September and December of last year. The results are considered accurate with 1.1 percentage points 19 times out of 20.