

Forget fiddly phones, older technophobes enjoy a chat with Alexa

Matthew Moore, Media Correspondent

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Smart speakers such as Amazon Echo, which connect to the Alexa virtual assistant service, and Google Home allow users to listen to the radio and podcasts by issuing voice commands
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Smart speakers are proving surprisingly popular with older people as they are less fiddly to use than other technology, according to a report.

Young people have traditionally led the uptake of new gadgets but older age groups are helping to drive the rise of voice-activated speakers, the research suggests. The new generation of speakers are most popular in the UK with those aged 35 to 44 but usage among the over-55s is higher than for the 18 to 24 age group, the study found.

Smart speakers such as Amazon Echo, which connects to the Alexa virtual assistant service, and Google Home allow users to listen to the radio and podcasts by issuing voice commands. The devices can also answer questions, set reminders and make phone calls. Unlike smartphones and computers, they do not require people to press buttons or interact with small screens.

“It’s so simple, you just say it,” one older user told researchers from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. “[My husband] can’t work the telly very well, but Alexa, he loves it.”

A woman in her sixties from London added that Alexa “brings a lot of laughter to the house”. It had given her husband the confidence “to be in the loop of something modern”, she added.

The researchers also came across a man in his seventies who had never mastered a computer but learnt how to use his Amazon Echo within days.

“The simplicity of these devices and the lack of the need for fine motor skills has made them a surprise hit with older groups and those with disabilities,” the report’s authors concluded.

The report, *The Future of Voice and the Implications for News*, found that use of voice-activated speakers had doubled in the past year. About 10 per cent of the British population use them.

Nic Newman, the report’s lead author, said: “The shift to voice clearly requires a significant change of mindset for consumers.”