

BUSINESS & FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Google says there will be 1 billion devices with Assistant by the end of the month

Alphabet Inc.'s Google, already the king of advertising, is ramping up its efforts to be the king of your home as well.

The company announced Monday that it expects its Google Assistant to be built in to a billion devices by the end of January, including Android phones and tablets. In contrast, Amazon.com Inc. AMZN, +0.18% said Friday that it has sold more than 100 million Alexa devices, though the company doesn't benefit from a massive presence in phones.

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Google's GOOG, +0.77% GOOGL, +0.74% announcement coincides with the start of CES, the annual tech confab taking place in Las Vegas this week. The event has increasingly become Google's show, and this year the company will take up three times more space than it did a year ago, when it already boasted a big presence outside the main convention center.

Amazon didn't immediately respond to a MarketWatch request for comment about the size of its CES presence or comparisons to its presence at last year's show.

Alphabet's stock has lost 8.0% over the past three months while Amazon shares have shed 15% and the S&P 500 index SPX, +1.32% has lost 13%.

Part of Google's plans for this year's CES involve a ride that mimics "It's a Small World," in which attendees will get a glimpse at the various ways the Assistant can be used in everyday life.

Google will be highlighting a number of these through announcements with partners at the show. Whirlpool Corp. has previewed a KitchenAid smart display that controls your smart devices while using guided recipes.

Read: How we are using voice assistants, in one chart

Expect more announcements from Google and its partners during the show, as the Assistant makes its way into more categories of home devices. Also look for more flexibility from device makers; whereas manufacturers have typically featured just one of the two major voice assistants in their products, some companies are beginning to introduce devices that are compatible with both the Assistant and Alexa, so that users can choose which they want to use.

Both Google and Amazon are setting themselves up to capitalize on the growing market for smart devices. Sales of smart speakers are projected to rise 5% this year, to 36.6 million units, according to the Consumer Technology Association, which runs CES. The organization expects that 29.4 million smart-home devices will be sold in 2019, up 23% from a year earlier.

