

Hey Siri! Why are food retailers so slow to embrace technology?

By [Sylvain Charlebois](#)

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Your own voice will likely become the most significant focus for food retailers and restaurants over the next little while. Voice searches are increasingly becoming the norm. A recent study suggests that more than [50% of all online searches will be voice-activated by 2020](#).



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To a lesser extent, grocery shopping is also done through voice activation. Since Siri, Cortana, Alexa and Google Assistant have entered our world, voice searching has become a game-changer for the food industry.

The main reason is convenience. Short of having our own personal robot, this is the new frontier of affordable personalised assistance. These virtual assistants will offer us advice as well as perform tasks for consumers. They are, of course, the “voices” of Apple, Microsoft, Amazon and Google. These companies have been connecting with us for years through many devices, including phones, tablets and even video game consoles.

[Consumers now use voice search](#) as they conduct other activities, like driving. Search results generally result in purchases, so for businesses, coming up as a top result of a voice search can be highly profitable.

The same rule applies [for the food industry](#). Voice search assistance will zero in on our awareness of brands, our perceptions, biases and many other things we are subconsciously influenced by. And so the food industry needs to start marketing through apps and websites that are easily readable by virtual assistants.



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Voice recognition is really about data and algorithms. It is about connecting with the market in a way few grocers or restaurants have done. After all, we're still receiving grocery flyers every week to sell us food in our mailboxes or newspapers – that is if you still subscribe to one.

Voice assistance allows all of us to cut through all the marketing noise and find what we really want.

The average Canadian consumer is exposed to more than 5,000 advertisements per day, many of them food-related. Food service and retail options are [often overlooked by consumers for a variety of biased reasons and perceived flaws](#).

Algorithms and data will cut straight through preconceived notions about food choices and will open a world of possibilities for many companies. A recent survey shows that [68% of consumers search by a cuisine or food item](#) rather than by restaurant or franchise name. In other words, voice searches foster and enable curiosity.

What is making most players in the food industry lose sleep is the fact that Amazon, Google, Microsoft and Apple are tech-savvy and data-centric organisations, more so than companies in the agri-food sector.

Voice assistance is purely an extension of what these tech giants have been offering for years, just without the typing. In fact, research suggests that many consumers would rather talk than type. According to a U.S.-based survey, [30% of web browsing sessions will be done without a screen by the year 2020](#). This trend can only add to the pressure on grocers and restaurants to comply with a changing marketplace.

Google has been [investing heavily](#) in voice-activated searches since 2016. Amazon, Microsoft and Apple are too.



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This is a field the food industry will need to embrace quickly.

With the rise of voice-enabled assistance, people don't need to view a screen to get an answer, as all the data is captured from websites and web-based data. Mobile-friendly, responsive websites are going to be key.

Since consumers rely on voice assistance and smartphones for most of their voice searches, a fully functional website for a food retailer will be more critical than most of the marketing dollars being spent on antiquated flyers, posters and ads. Instead of thumbing through flyers, [many of us could potentially browse through weekly bargains](#) with the help of voice-activated searches.

It's so much more civilized. And even small, local businesses can generate more business if adapting these strategies.

In the end, these changes are all about data, and how we manage and exchange data. Embracing this new reality for the food industry won't be easy, but the cost of doing nothing will be significant.

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