OCTOBER 2016

THE STATE OF VIRTUAL AND AUGMENTED REALITY

IMMERSIVE ESCAPISM OR ENHANCED REALITY?

AND MORE ON

SURFACE STUDIO
GOOGLE PIXEL
iPHONE 7
DESIGNING PRO APPS
PRO WRITING APPS
MASTERING SIRI

TECHNOLOGY
ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH

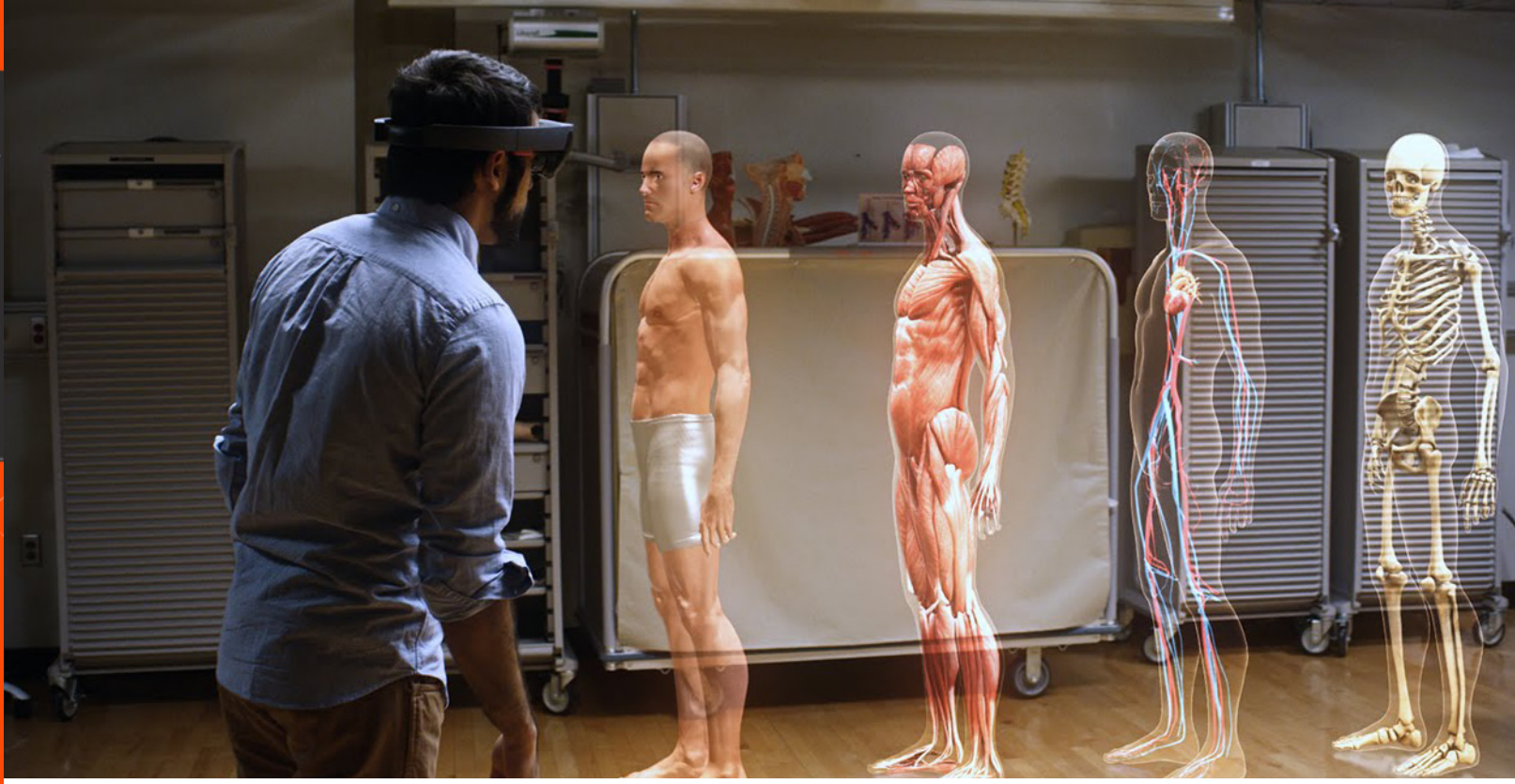
IT'S TECHNOLOGY

MARRIED WITH *Liberal Arts*

MARRIED WITH *Humanities*

THAT YIELDS RESULTS, THAT MAKE OUR

Hearts Sing!



COVER STORY

THE STATE OF VR AND AR HEADSETS

NEW PHONES

iPhone 7 and Google Pixel

NEW HARDWARE

MICROSOFT SURFACE STUDIO

MASTERING IOS

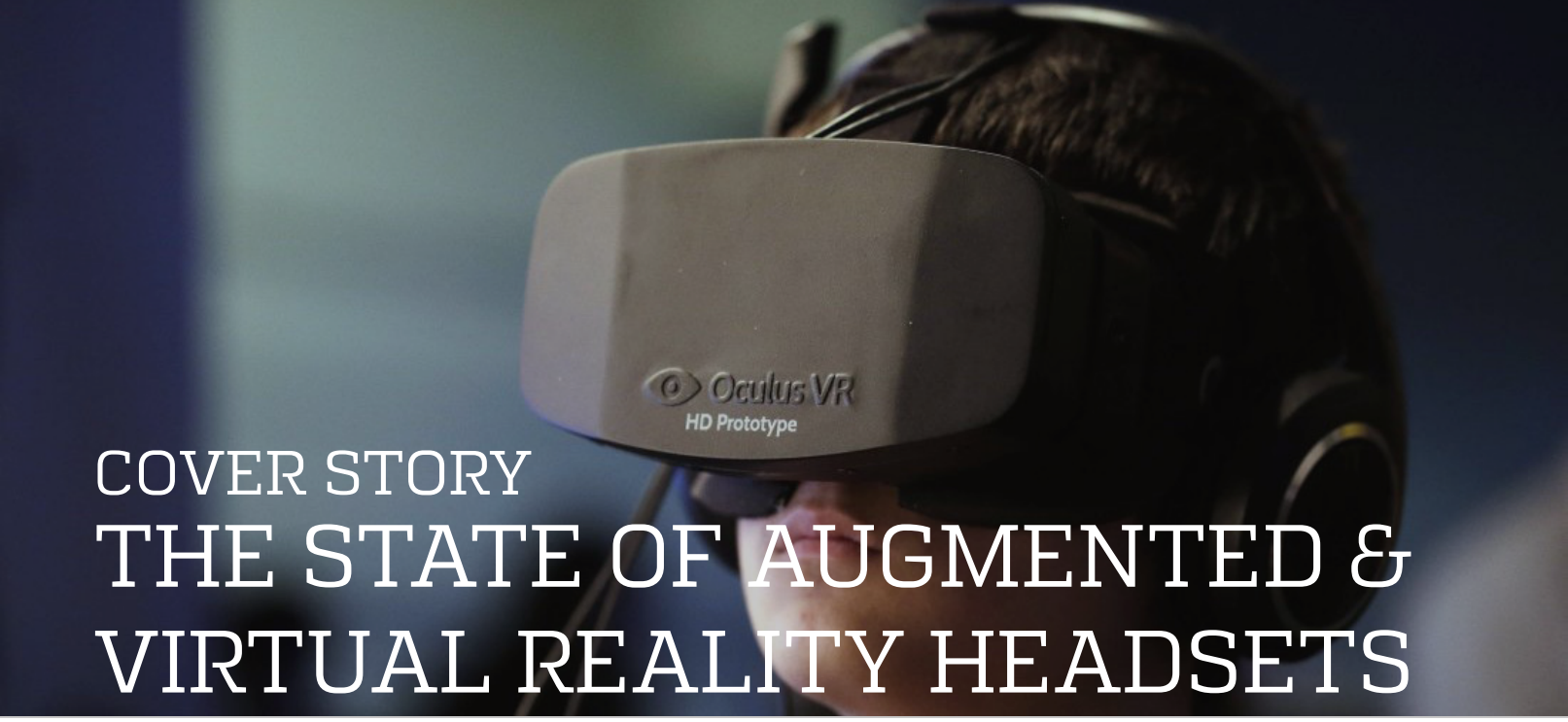
HOW I USE SIRI EVERYDAY

DESIGN TIPS

DESIGNING PRO APPS FOR IPAD

CAN YOU GET ALL 5?

PIXEL QUIZ OCTOBER 2016



COVER STORY

THE STATE OF AUGMENTED & VIRTUAL REALITY HEADSETS

Vidit Bhargava

For the last few weeks I've been reading a Neil Stephenson's Snow Crash. Snow Crash is based on the premise of a futuristic Metaverse, an internet like platform created for a virtual reality headset. This is something that's very close to reality at the moment, with Facebook releasing Oculus Rift And Google coming up with their Day Dream VR Headsets, these things are hitting the shelfs sooner than you think, even if they end up providing only a very small glimpse of what the fictional "Metaverse" would look like.

But to me, a VR headset has two major problems: First, if it's something like the Oculus Rift, at the moment, it needs massive amount computing power and that makes these desk devices. For something that's ideally portable, being hooked to a desk to use it is unthinkable But this is what most gaming oriented VR devices are going for at the moment.

Secondly, these devices aren't designed to be wearables. Aesthetic overhauls aside, most of these devices look like intimidating gadgets. You got to strap something to your head and then there's generally some wire connecting your headset to a computer, or you'd plugin your mobile phone in the front of your device. Either way, they aren't very inviting, and it's not just the aesthetics or the materials which would make them wearable, you really need to look at what people wear on their heads and then design these things. *If you are making a*

VR headset, it's going to compete with sunglasses and prescriptive glasses for the space on your head. Therefore, it should be just as appealing or even more to make people wear your device. but at the moment, the overall of these devices is utilitarian, instead of something that's accessible to everyone.

Both AR and VR headsets are wearables, and something that you strap in front of your eyes, this means that they'll be competing against Goggles and Presprective Glasses, and one of the key factors that people wear them is the fact they "Look" great. There's a great variety of them available and they solve a specific purpose. Something that doesn't look like a computer strapped to your forehead would be a great starting point for any of these gadgets to be accepted as being wearable. An ideal AR/VR Headset would be more Rayban Aviator than HTC Vive.

An ideal AR/VR Headset would be more Rayban Aviator than HTC Vive.

Take the Snapchat Spectacles for example. They are great unitasking wearables which don't look like intimidating gadgets, they look like what normal specs would look but with a camera which allows you to publish stories on Snapchat. It's a gadget that fits right in to the space for sunglasses but is equally well integrated with your mobile phone to solve a purpose, albeit a small one. In my opinion, by embracing the wearable and sunglasses market, Snapchat is taking an important step to making these video recording spectacles feel more at home to the users. It'll be interesting to see how popular these devices become.

The biggest capabilities of a VR Headset revolve around the fact that you can have different environments to explore. That exploration could either be gamified, or play

out as an interactive story where your actions influence the plot, it could provide a tourist like experience, visiting different places from the real world without actually being there. The idea that you can be in any environment is what is really exciting!

VR Headsets have a great potential to be the next form of escapist entertainment

Having said that, Virtual Reality headsets, because of their nature to produce different environments, render themselves as temporary recreational devices. It's hard to imagine giving up their real lives for a 24x7 virtual world experience, and something that hardly anyone would recommend either. Yes, the VR headset eyes for a space on your face, but it's only eyeing that for a limited amount of time.

Augmented Reality on the other hand is the less ambitious cousin of Virtual Reality. It's not eyeing to replace your environment, but change or alter it in ways that enhance your everyday experience. It's less Ambitious, but only on surface. Augmented Reality can have an entirely different set of applications to VR, and all of them equally game changing.

In fact, we've seen some of these appear on mobile phones, ever since the advent of Apps. In the initial days of the App Store, Word Lens was an app that would change the signs and labels around you and translate them to your preferred language. Something that's a must have for any traveller. More Recently, ofcourse we've seen Augmented Reality land in games like Pokemon Go.

But the applications for Augmented Reality go far beyond that. Technically Augmented Reality could change your surroundings to benefit you. Just look at some of the Microsoft Hololens

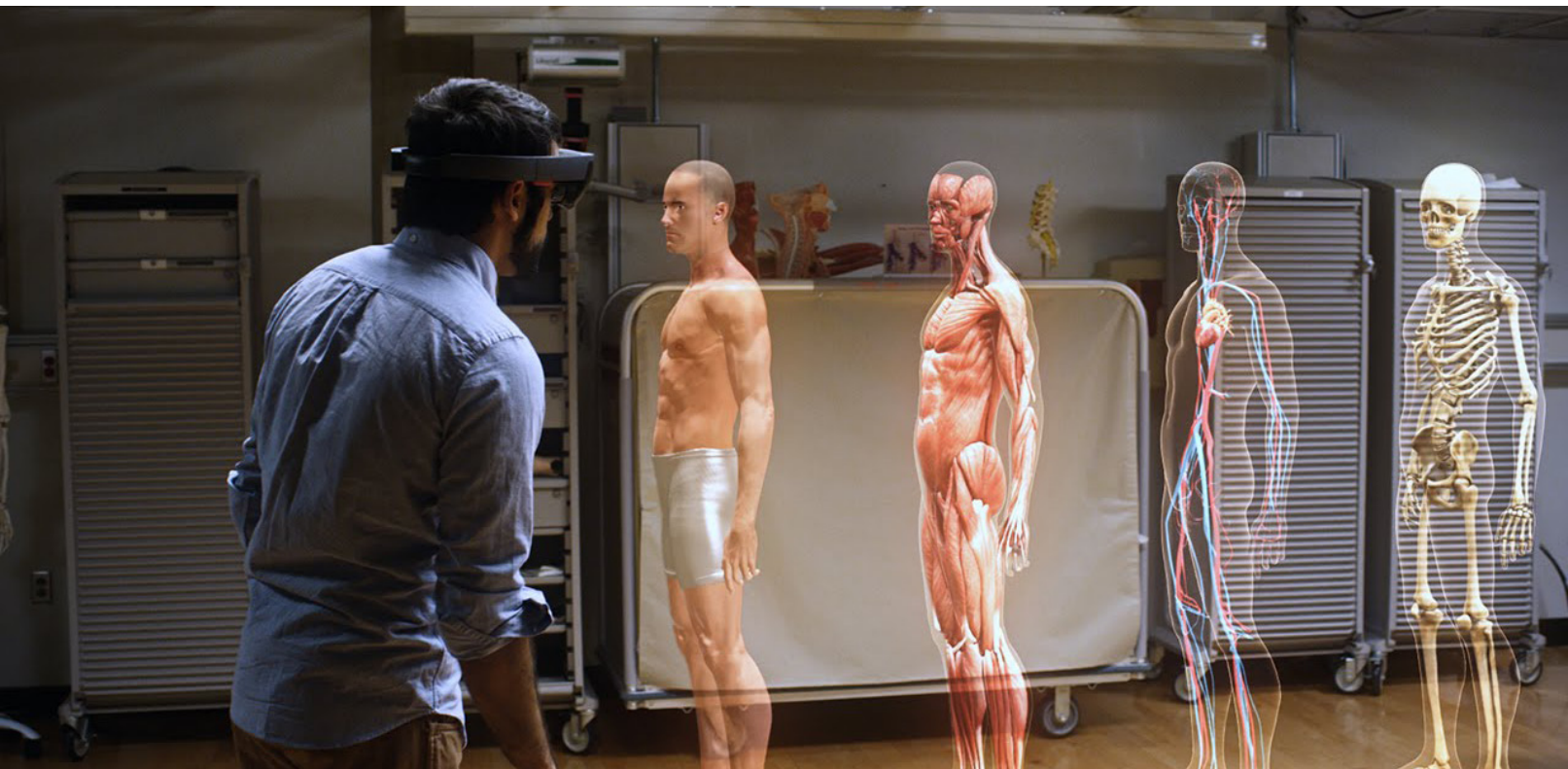
demos and you realize the potential of even partially changing different environments around you. In fact, AR has both Medical and Educational Benefits. With an AR Headset, you could leverage the surfaces from the real world to provide interesting interaction opportunities.

The software for these devices can take advantage of the surface around us. I mean, do we really need the paradigm for sheets and layers anymore? When we manipulate the surfaces around us to accomplish tasks more intuitively. Take the example of a chatting application. Do we need Speech Bubbles or video frames when we can have their 3D Projection talk to us?

Moreover, there are interesting software applications that one can think of which wouldn't have been possible before. So, you could be in a low lighting environment but the augmented reality headset you are wearing could enhance that by augmenting the lightning around you. Or something like Word Lens, which would just be apt for an AR Headset. This is a platform which could really take advantage of the third party applications.

> You could 'theoretically' use An Augmented Reality Headset to enhance the surrounding around you, or even go as far as dynamically correcting your vision. Making Prescriptive glasses obsolete.

One interesting application to Augmented Reality can actually be about prescriptive glasses. As these devices gain popularity, it'll be interesting to see as to how they adjust for people wearing prescriptive glasses. The current approach is to allow wearing these devices over specs.



A more compelling solution to this problem would be to augment the reality in front of our eyes in such a way that what we see is the corrected vision. One could theoretically generate the depth that would be needed to correct a person's vision. Moreover, this will be a big improvement for those wearing bifocal and multi focal lenses. But this is all wishful thinking at the moment, i'm not even sure if such a technology exists at the moment, let alone be product ready!

Another interesting aspect of these devices is going to be how the software is controlled. The current idea is to provide users with Playstation Move like controllers which sense the hand movement or provide a set of controls to manipulate the environment in front of us. But this is both inelegant and non intuitive. If these devices are simulating real life like situation, being able to use hand gestures for different use cases would be key, in fact, one could go beyond hand gestures in certain situations and track body movement as well.

To be honest though, while both Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality devices have interesting applications and hurdles to cross It's going to be interesting to see which of these actually becomes popular with the people remains to be seen. To me though, it looks like, VR Headsets would eventually occupy a much shorter time in our lives, much like Gaming Consoles and TV sets and other escapist forms of entertainment have. On the other hand, AR Seems to be something that one could theoretically wear at all times and increase their productivity. In the end, It all boils down to what kind of user problems these products solve, and will the users be comfortable wearing and using them over and over again.

NEW PHONES
iPhone 7

Long back when Apple started numbering its phones, I wondered how far would they number Them? iPhone 4, 5, 6 all the way up to 10 Or even greater? After one point these numbers become irrelevant. Moreover, when you are expecting some of the improvements, a lot of the wow factor is taken away from every iterative update. So when the iPhone 7 released last month, the naming didn't really matter; The updates lacked a certain amount of "wow-ness" because we already knew of a lot of things that were to come out. But does that mean that a non-dazzle iPhone is a lesser iPhone?

I think not. It's still a solid upgrade for anyone who has a two / three year old phone. This is the fastest phone in the market. It's got arguably the best camera that a mobile phone has seen and the display is stunning. The updates to the industrial design can best be seen in the Jet Black version, which turns into this seemlessly integrated device where the the antenna lines aren't visible and the front and back look like a single device. It instantly makes the iPhone 6s feel old.

The thing that I'm more interested in the new iPhone is the new Taptic Engine. The second generation Taptic engine can provide a much greater and nuanced touch experiences. So you can program it to hint at Failure, Success of operation, adding another layer of feedback to the usual visual and audio feedback and looking at how the layers' effect utilizes the Taptic Engine, one could argue that even further enhancements are coming soon, where one could really deeply manipulate the vibrations from the taptic engine to enable another layer of depth the User Experience of these devices and that really feels exciting.

Having said that, I feel this new iPhone is going to be remembered as an odd-ball iPhone. While Apple removed the Headphone jack in the latest variant and made a push towards a wireless audio future with the AirPods, the new iPhones still ship with a pair of lightning headphones in the box.

The reason why I feel it's odd, is that Apple is clearly not investing in a future where it wants people to carry a pair of proprietary lightning headphones all the time. It wants the people to use the Wireless headphones, and it hopes that the wireless headphones would be just as ubiquitous as the wired ones. But it doesn't ship them in the box. My guess is, that Apple cannot really provide the AirPods for free and keep the overall product cost same. and that we're just a generation or two away from them being available in the box. In the interim, we have this product which comes with a pair of lightning headphones and an adaptor to convert your standard 3.5mm headphones to lightning.

Two to three generations of iPhones later, I'd say we'll look back and think of it more like the 2008 MacBook Air or the iPod Mini (both of which gave way to much better successors.)

All said, the iPhone 7 is a pretty solid update. I'd recommend it to anyone who has a two / three year old phone. It's a device that comes with a lot of promise of the future, it delivers on most of them and leaves us waiting for the next generation for the rest of the story.

NEW PHONES*

Google Pixel

Google's first foray in Designing mobile phones is an interesting concept. It seems as though Google's telling it's millions of customers that if you want an iPhone that worked on Google's Services, this is the phone for you. This may be a good thing for Google, as their services are arguably more reliable than Apple's, and because they have a lot of data from their customers, they can do a lot of cool things like what they do with their photos app.

Having said that, Google's Pixel Phone whilst great at providing an Android Experience is still uninspiring as a product. It's just Google showing us that it can do an iPhone like product, that looks like an iPhone, does what an iPhone can do. But it doesn't really have anything else to say. It's an "I can do it better" phone. if not a "me too" device. Moreover, it's an Ape-ish phone. It's unapologetic about aping the iPhone's industrial design. But that shouldn't discount it from the criticism that's concurred over some of the other Asian Manufacturers for aping the iPhone. I don't buy into the argument that there are only so many ways to make a rounded rectangle. There are lots of ways. Just look at every redesign that the iPhone has gone through, or look at the new Xiaomi Mi Mix. Google's just being lazy at design, and as someone who deeply values innovativeness and originality in design, this feels like a rip-off more than a pastiche.

Another thing that'd bother some of the potential buyers of this phone is the price. It's not cheap. Google's Pixel is almost as pricey as the iPhone, and given that most of Android's user base is in China and India (two highly price sensitive markets), this isn't a phone for every Android user. Moreover, given how many options that Android users have in the lower end of the segment, it's going to be a hard sell to actually tell those users to get this device instead.

Google's Pixel is possibly the best Android Phone you could buy in the market. It can take stunning photos, the industrial design is ergonomic, it's fast. As an overall package of what it's providing, if you are looking for a premium Android Phone, this is your pick.

SURFACE IN A MICROSOFT UNIVERSE

Last week, Microsoft announced it's new Surface lineup along with a touch-screen desktop which has been the center of attention since then. Microsoft's announcement while a surprise to some, shouldn't really be that surprisingly, since Microsoft did the sensible thing to do.

In a Microsoft Universe, there's no room for something like the iOS. Microsoft thinks and truly believes that any touch-screen computer is capable of running the standard desktop windows. It doesn't really believe in a touch-screen OS for a touch-screen device philosophy. They've been trying to sell this idea for nearly ten years now. Windows 7 included some features for touch-screen tablets (like a redesigned on screen keyboard), Windows 8 had this bold dual OS life where it could transform from a normal PC to a touch-screen version of the same. Windows 8.1 and subsequently Windows 10 were further refinements of this idea. It makes total sense then to have a PC which actually utilizes the complete ability of the Windows.

Needless to say, such a device would make no sense in an Apple Universe. It would be barbaric to go back and redesign macOS for touch, because they already did that nearly ten years ago. It's called iOS. and there's no such thing as an iOS running iMac. it's either an iPad Pro or an iPhone that'll run that. So, this is the sort of product that only Microsoft can attempt, because of the way they've positioned their software.

But is it any good To have a touch screen PC? In my opinion, a touch screen PC faces two challenges. The first is that the traditional monitors aren't ergonomically fit to provide a touch-screen experience. Your fingers start drooping after a while of use. Microsoft solves this problem very elegantly by providing a light and thin display which just sits down by

the touch of your finger.

The other problem is that traditional point and click software isn't meant to run on touch-screen devices. The UI for a touch-based interface is completely different. And trying to touch something like the paint brush icon on Photoshop running on Windows 10 would never provide the same experience As using photoshop on something like iOS would, and this is where Microsoft is still lagging. They aren't necessarily loosing because of this, because the audience they are targeting would be happier with the convenience of drawing than worry about the fitt's law.

Does this product aimed at Graphic Designers, interest me at all? No it doesn't. My current setup involves using Pencil by 53 on my iPad for hand-drawings and Mac for the sophisticated vector graphics work. The set-up very rarely feels clumsy to own two devices and I've hardly ever felt the need of a touch-screen Mac. So, I'm not willing to ditch UX to have the pseudo-convenience of using a touch-screen device with a software meant for point and click devices. Nor do I hope to juggle between the two and different monitor orientations to get my work done, because it'll actually make me slower.

Having said that, there's definitely a lot of interest amongst designers about this machine and it'll be interesting to see how people use it. It's refreshing to see Microsoft get into making their own hardware for windows. Personally, I'm pretty content with my iPad and Mac combination.

iPad

DESIGNING PRO APPS

INTRODUCTION

Computers have almost always had professional applications. They've always been in the workplace. But with Touch Screen Tablets like the iPad there's been a massive shift in terms of the target audience for the applications, and it's been more in the direction of consumer friendly apps (An Image editor like Instagram) or 'Prosumer' applications that perform basic tasks on the surface but can also be used for a more professional purpose.

But building something as feature rich as something like Photoshop can be a good challenge. And while I have no experience in designing such an application, it's still interesting to take it as a design study.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE PROSUMER

The first thing that you'll want to do before making a professional application would be to map out all possible stakeholders of your app. Get a clear sense of your target audience.

Who are they? What is their computer literacy? Will they get intimidated with a complex interface? Or do they just want to do everything quickly? These are just some of the questions you'd want answers to before you decide on making a prosumer app that just about every one can use and professionals can do cool stuff with it or a full blown professional app that targets a specific audience and does everything for them.

A ribbon UI is good at grouping large amounts of navigational elements.

DISCOVERABILITY

The other day I was using a wire-framing application on the iPad and to duplicate a UI element I had to dive deep into a Separate menu every time I wanted to do that. It was so annoying to not have it more easily discoverable.

If it's a professional app, I believe designers must be clear about the architecture of the primary navigation of their app, sub menus are of little help on a touch screen. And if you are designing for a 12 inch display, make sure you make a good use of the space provided.

A ribbon like interface can sometimes help in constructing a navigational structure for a professional app, because of it's ability to group and enclose large number of options in a readable format. Having said that, it's not the only good option available.

Workflows are a great way to create customisable sharing menus.

CUSTOMISABLE

Nailing down primary navigation can be tricky, an interface that's helpful to one could prove to be tedious to another. When designing a professional app, it's important to realise that people use these apps in many possible ways. For example, Photoshop, primarily a photo editing tool, has proven out to be one of the most used tools for UI Design. Had the navigation been focused on tasks, it would have lead to a cumbersome experience to design interface on such an app. On a touch screen, instead of a navigation to perform specific tasks, on could instead provide hooks to select an adjust the interface to ones needs.

Workflows are also a great way of customisation. Do I need to export my document to just a PDF file, or can I make a JPEG too? Can I use a python script to convert what I just wrote into a full fledged HTML page along with CSS? One of the best examples of a customisable export option, appear in Editorial, a writing app, that offers various workflows to export a written markdown document into various other applications. There's not just a set of five file formats, instead a mini platform to export into whatever you'd like to.

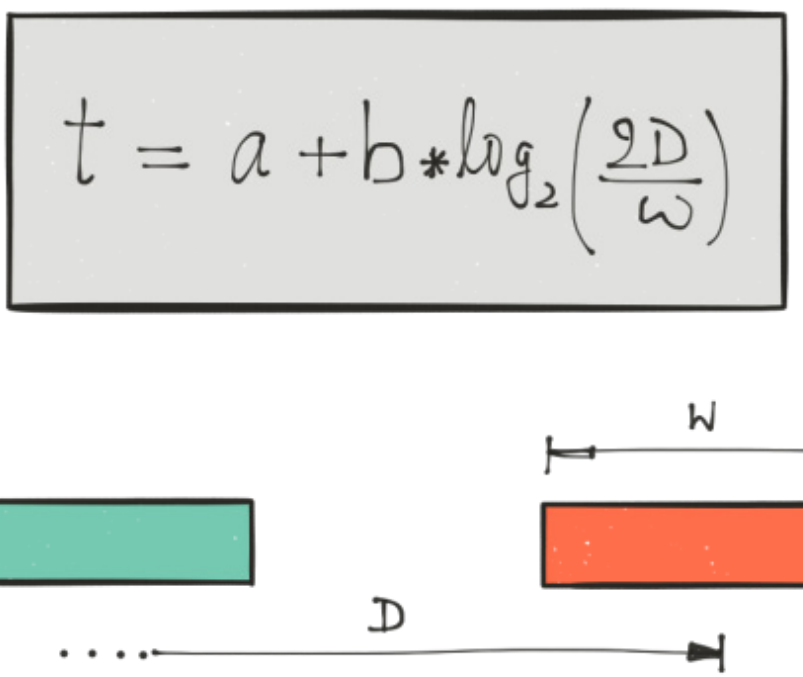
Customisability isn't just restricted to actions, it should also extend to shortcuts, gestures and a whole lot of other settings, what you can do under the hood is just as essential here, as what you can do above the hood. At the end of the day, the user wants to be able to do his work quickly, and a lot of users may have different ways of working. A professional app is not set in stone. It adapts to the way a user uses it.

AVOID MENU CREEP

It's easy to put tons of options in front of the user, in the name of providing as many options as possible, given everyone uses a pro apps differently. And while there's a case for maximizing the navigational space with actions, it can lead to menu creep, i.e. The user may get overwhelmed with a lot of options. And in turn may not be able to achieve what he plans to in a desired time.

One way to avoid menu creep is to follow the "Fitts Law" thoroughly. Basically make sure, that your menus and sub menus are spaced in a correct manner to let a user go through them easily.

Fitts law, describing the ideal distance between two buttons.



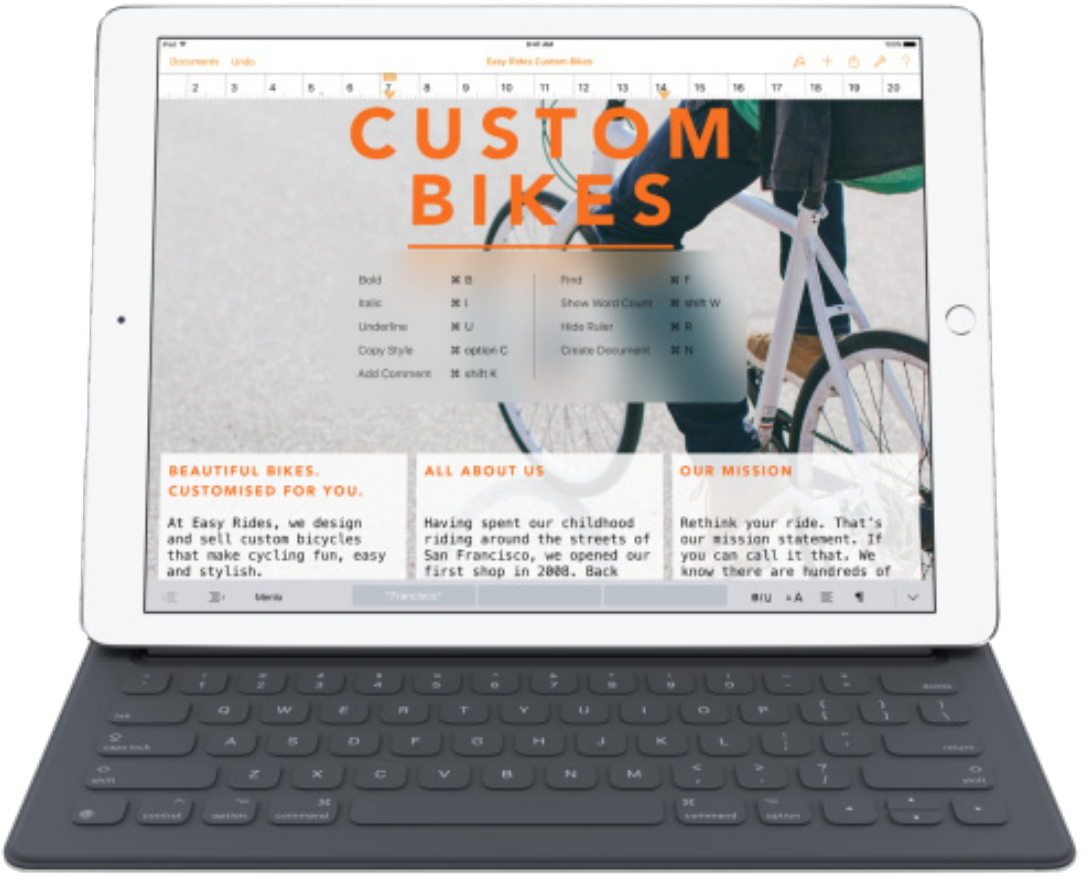
AUTOMATE

If there's one thing that the iPad has become great at, and the laptop hasn't is the fact that it's easy to automate tasks on an iPad. I cannot imagine using an application that doesn't have options to setup custom workflows to automate the post writing process of formatting and publishing.

Automation saves time, also for some reason it just feels natural to have that in a touch screen device more than in a laptop.

KEYBOARD SHORTCUTS

Keyboard shortcuts save a lot of time. In fact on the iPad they can serve to make apps function much faster than they do with taps, and over time they've also become easy to implement and discover on the iPad. Personally I feel keyboard shortcuts are a must, for the same reasons that automation workflows are important.



In fact, I'd like to see keyboard shortcuts be customisable, they shouldn't just be restricted to a few options set by the developers. I'm currently writing this post using Editorial for iPad and I just can't imagine using it without its customisable shortcuts, and the ability to map them with key combinations.

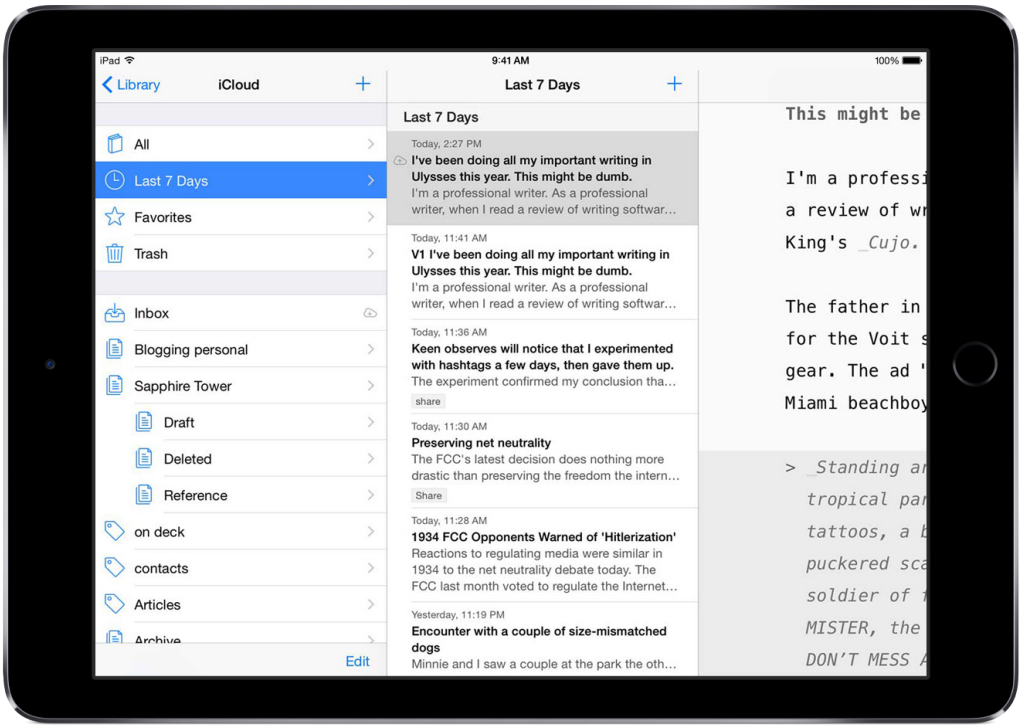
TO SUM IT UP

Professional Applications on the iPad are still at a very nascent stage and while a lot of app developers are making some really interesting things (for example, Ferite for audio editing and uMake for 3D Sketching) there's still a long way to go for such applications. And designing them in an intuitive manner could just be the key to making the iPad into a fully fledged professional device.

iPad Workflows

WRITING ON THE IPAD PRO

COMPILED BY
VIDIT BHARGAVA



Pre Writing Setup

Mind Node

Notes

Paper by 53

Writing on the iPad

Ulysses

Editorial

Pages

Post Writing

Coda

Pythonista

Workflow

Writing is something that has become more comfortable with an iPad than a laptop, over-time. With the App Store having writing apps which really take advantage of the easy workflow and automation setup, writing on an can be a much more convenient experience than other devices. Here are a few apps that'll help set-up a workflow:

MASTERING iOS

HOW I USE SIRI

Vidit Bhargava

Some time back, Walt Mossberg wrote an interesting piece for the Verge stating that Siri seems “Dumb”, the gist of that article is that in the last 5 years that Siri has existed, it has done little to improve itself and that the inconsistency of the responses drives people away from the platform. Over the last few days, this has been a talking point on most podcasts and the consensus has been that Siri isn’t a great experience at all.

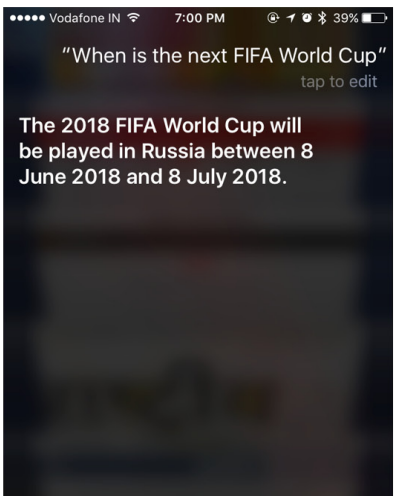
Listening to these shows and reading that Walt Mossberg piece, I’ve felt that I’m probably one of the few people who thinks otherwise; that Siri isn’t that bad and the fact that it’s got a lot of clever tricks up it’s sleeve which not a lot of other assistants do. And the fact that it I use it often to get work done.

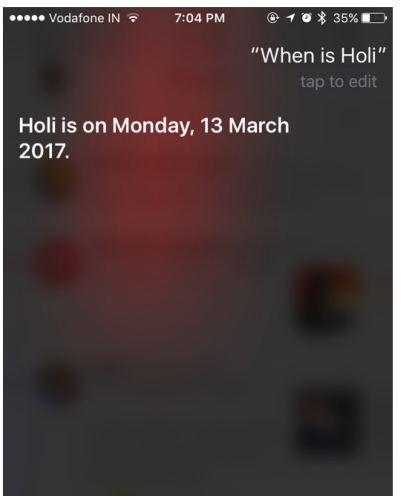
Siri as a product.

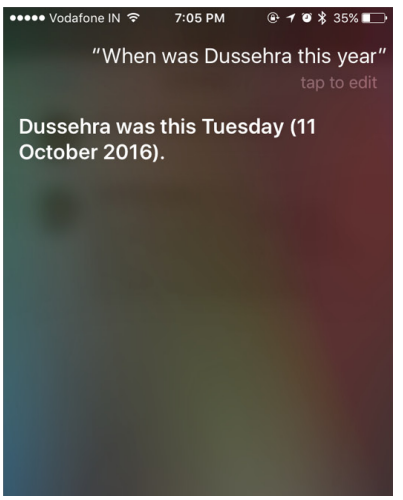
So what does a virtual assistant do? Why do I need it? The first thing that comes to my mind when I hear the term “Assistant”, is the fact that it’s probably something that’ll assist me to get my job done faster. So theoretically, while I’m working on my device, I should be able to talk to it to get some of the ancillary work done, or speed up a process. Or on a platform like the apple watch or the Apple TV where multiple taps or swipes can be cumbersome it’s a great convenience to ask an assistant do some of the work.

In my use of Siri and other Assistants over the last few years, I have found that Virtual Assistants are currently great at doing two things: Provide Information and and accomplish small tasks which require minimum intervention from the user (start timers, play music, launch apps, using Shazam, etc.).

With Siri, whenever I’m willing to talk aloud to my devices I get a lot of this done. And it’s helpful in that regard. Over the coarse of time, there are things that I’ve developed a instinct to ask Siri to do, because the failure rate for them is practically zero. Exactly how is it useful to me?







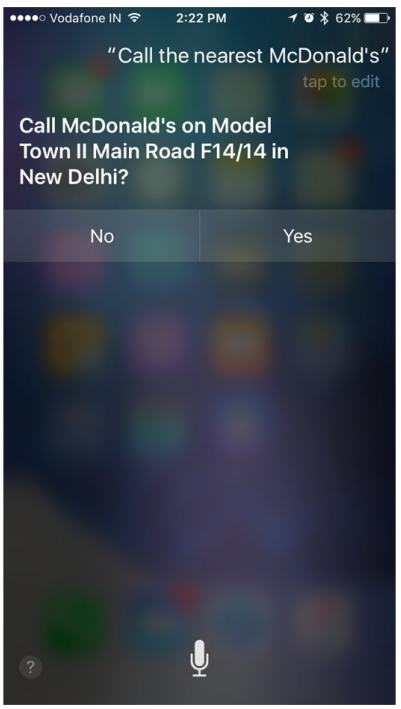
Getting Information
Asking for Important Dates and Days

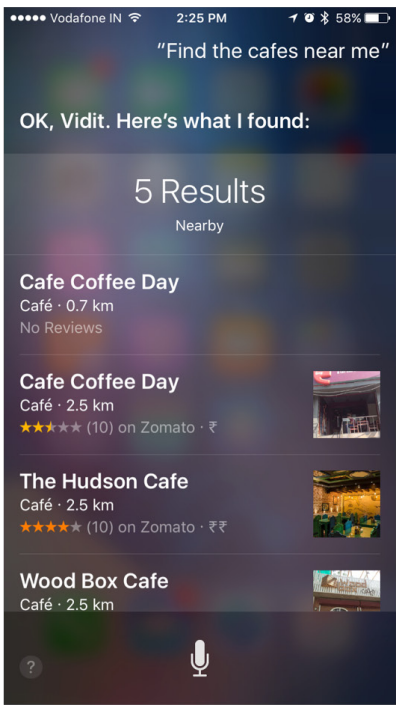
A lot of Indian festivals follow the lunar calendar, so they don’t usually fall on the same day every year, so whenever I want to lookup as to which Day or particular Date that Festival will fall on, I ask Siri. It’s usually the former, because it helps me manage my college breaks better :).But it’s very helpful, regardless. Siri is just as helpful with most of the other major events. Here are some examples of when I used Siri to find information about different dates

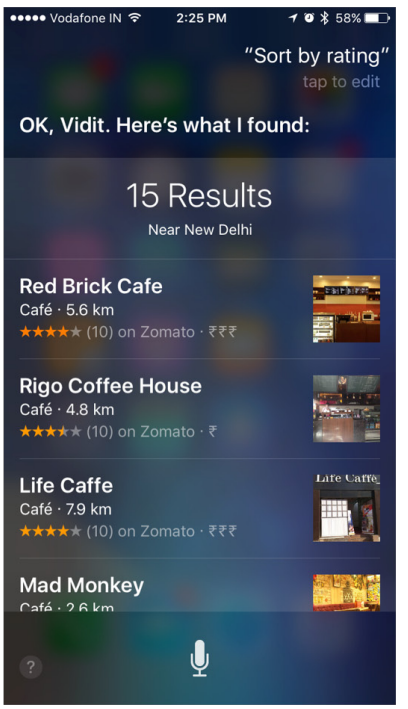
Restaurant Recommendations

This is a new feature for Siri in India and something that I've been using for a while. I can ask Siri to search for Nearby Restaurants, restaurants near a different place, or just "great places to have coffee", I've got a satisfactory response at all times. The accompanied Zomato ratings are a plus, as they are helpful in deciding between different cafes and restaurants.

But where this feature really shines, is the fact that I can ask Siri to call a specific restaurant in my vicinity to get my food home delivered. Home Delivery via phone isn't the easiest thing to do, not all Restaurants have their web portals, and it's difficult to keep a track of the different numbers for different branches. I can just ask Siri to make a call to the nearest Subway, or Starbucks and she does it without fail.







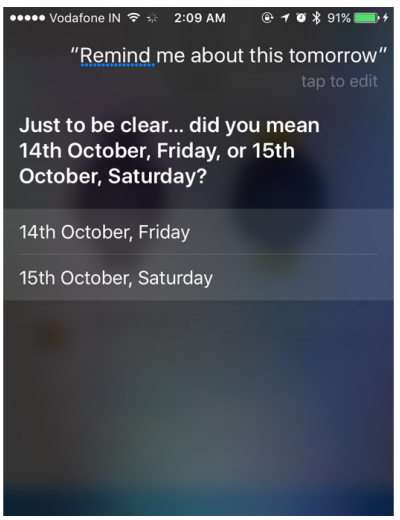
Calculations

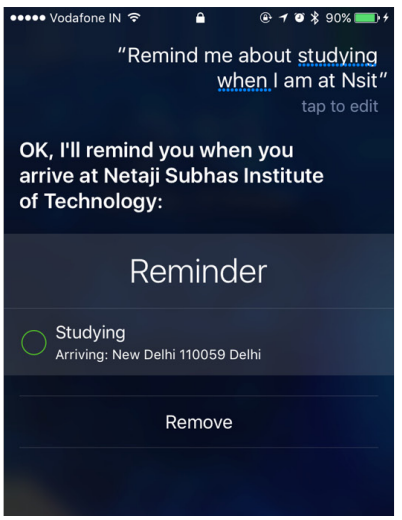
"What's the 20% of 32693500", "Convert $400 in Indian Rupees", "What's the derivative of LogX plus 5 X squared plus 3?", "Plot a graph for Log of Log X", etc. are usual calculations which I rely on Siri for. This is probably a niche to Engineers but having the entire wolfram alpha library at your disposal to get this done is nothing short of amazing

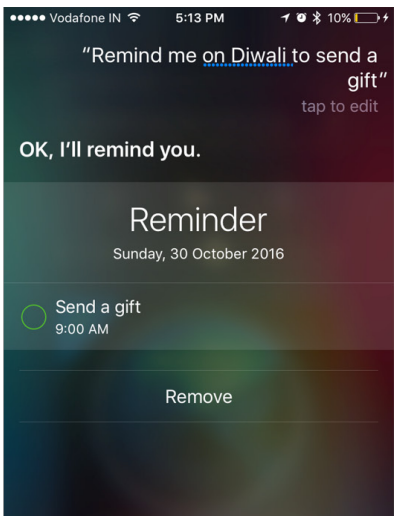
Using Siri to do small tasks.
Set Reminders

It's probably the most basic of the toolset but Siri can do a whole lot of things, you can Ask Siri to remind you about something on a particular day, at a particular location, about different apps, different settings inside the apps, et all.

Moreover Siri does clever things, notice how when I asked Siri to set a reminder for "Tomorrow Evening" at 2:00 AM at night, it asked me if by "tomorrow" I meant Friday evening or Saturday Evening? She understood the nuance properly enough to realize that I could have meant the technical "today" even though I said tomorrow. This is something that other assistants don't do. It recognizes the short names as well. So when I asked her to remind me about something when I reach NSIT, it understood that I meant "Netaji Subhas Institute of Technology"





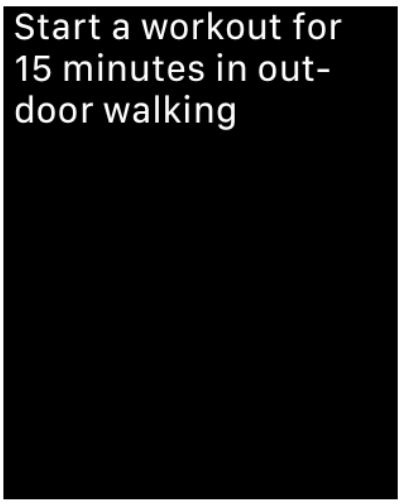


Run Timers, Stopwatches and Set Alarms

I don't remember the last time I set a timer by actually going to the Clock / Timer app. I use the timer functionality on my Apple Watch everyday and to me there's nothing more Siri to do that. And while I've not used the Stopwatches and Alarms feature much, I figure it works the same way, and it's definitely convenient to have this handsfree.

Music Control

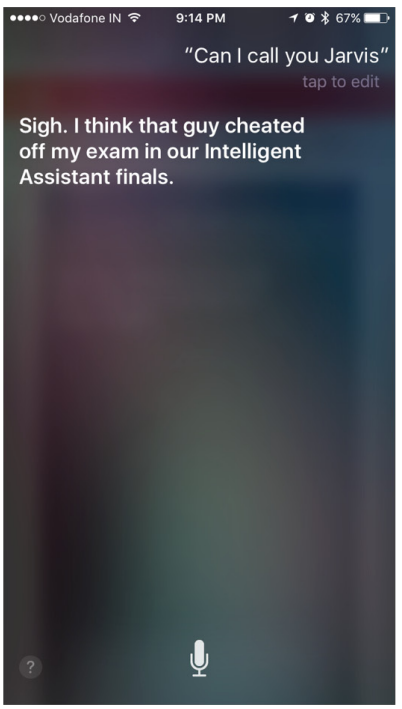
Siri has some good Music Control options if you use Apple's Music app frequently. You can ask Siri to play songs from a particular artist, play a particular playlist, play a particular radio station, etc. If you are on an Apple Watch, one of the useful features of Siri is the ability to have playback controls Like play, pause, increase the volume, etc. Something I feel that'll be very helpful while using AirPods.

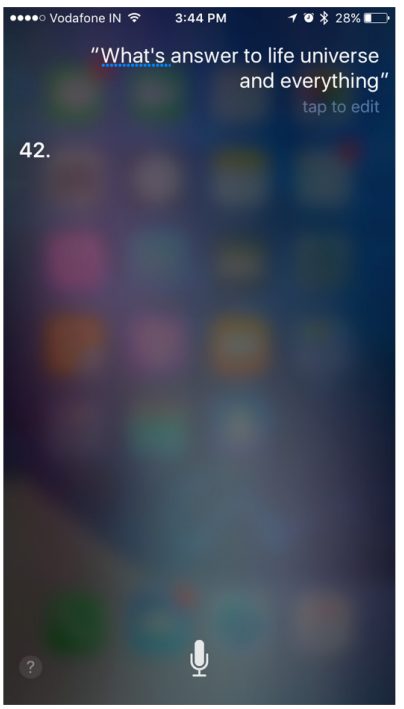


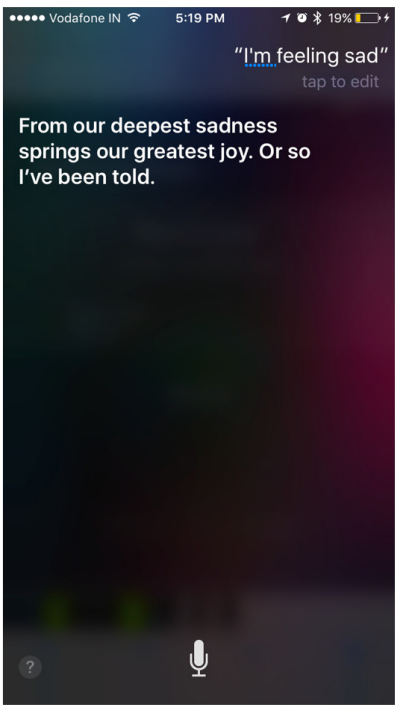
Workouts

Another aspect of the Apple Watch where I use Siri everyday is to ask it to start specific workouts. Siri does this without much of a problem, and can understand fairly detailed commands, allowing to use the entire spectrum of the default workout options.

Apart from being really productive in everyday tasks, I really like Siri for it's extra layer of whimsy that it provides. It makes the entire experience feel more natural. The small talk, the one liners, it's ability to understand that I'm just talking without purpose is a major design win in my opinion. It definitely makes me feel comfortable talking to my phone and It gives Siri a personality, the sort of design detail we're used to seeing from Apple.

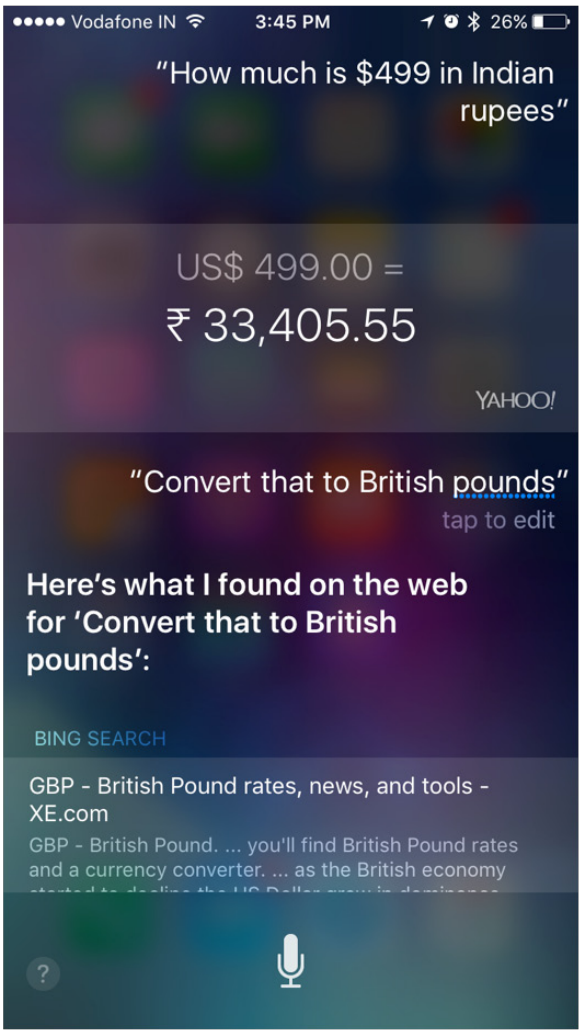


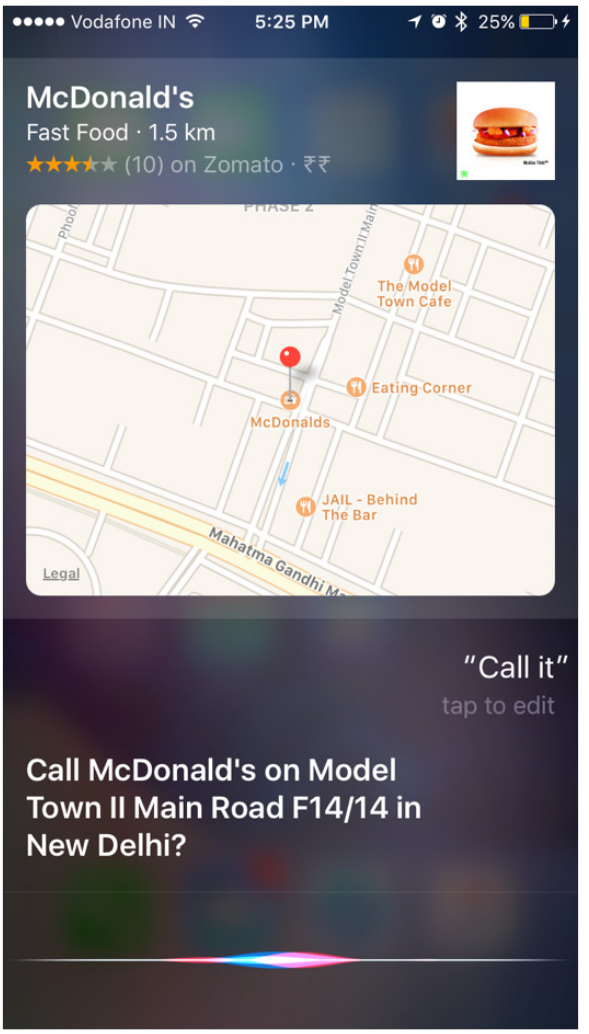




Drawbacks

While I like Siri a lot, Siri definitely has a lot of drawbacks to it as well. A lot of times, it's able to understand my query but unable to generate a useful response, at which point it does a 'bing' search! Which is equivalent to not providing anything at all. One of the key reasons it does this, is because I don't phrase my queries in a specific manner. In a different manner it might generate something useful. It's inability to decipher all forms of natural language input at this moment is a major let down and I wish Apple had a better way of doing it.





Another key area where Siri is missing out, is Sequential Inference, which is basically it's ability to remember what it did last and then generate an adequate response for the next query. What's even more disappointing about this feature, is the fact that it exists, but only in a few places. So you'd occasionally see Siri understand Sequential commands, but a lot of times it won't. Inconsistency does more harm to Siri over here, than not being able to.

Siri cannot understand multiple commands either. So if I were to ask Siri to

"Send a message to my brother telling him that I'm leaving for work, and book a uber for my workplace, in 15 minutes.", it won't be able to understand that I asked her to do two different tasks One after the other. Moreover, Siri could utilize this to become an automation powerhouse. Just look at the Workflow app. It's an app that's meant to be integrated with Siri. I should be able to ask Siri to "Select the last 15 images, Convert them into a PDF and Share it with my brother on Whatsapp", If Siri could do all this, It'll be a truly useful service. Adding a third pillar of automation, right besides it's ability to provide information and accomplish small tasks. But alas, it cannot.

The biggest problem though, is Siri's inconsistency of providing information. So, it may know about hundreds of popular events, but occasionally it'd have no idea about an event or two, it may have no idea about the unpopular ones and so when it fails to get that information, it's annoying. I would attribute this to Siri's reliance on just one particular service for a lot of these things. So, lets say Wolfram Alpha has no idea about a lesser known event. Siri wouldn't have any idea either. It doesn't even look for other sources Who may be able to complete it's knowledge spectrum. Relying on one or only handful of services for information, makes Siri less consistent And Inconsistency is probably the worst Heuristic Violation one can think of for a product. That's the case with a lot of things that Siri does, once it fails a couple of times, my reaction is to do it myself, instead of figuring out how it'd accomplish the task.

Even after all the drawbacks that Siri has, In my opinion, it's unfair to call Siri dumb or an underwhelming experience. For the last five years, Siri has tried to improve upon it's skill set. When it launched initially, Siri couldn't do a lot of these things, overtime Apple focused mainly on two things, first to improve on the Speech Recognition (which is somewhere in the 90s for English with an Indian Accent), and second to add the ability to do more of the smaller tasks with Siri. (The deep integrations with Settings is a relatively new trait).

Yes, focusing on one, has led to the neglect towards other things like Sequential Inference. But I wouldn't call say that Siri is useless, crappy or even dumb if it fails sometimes, but succeeds a lot of the other times. Apart from Some of the Inconsistencies, I'm fairly certain that Siri would know what I mean by "tomorrow evening" when I say it at 2:00AM in the night or the fact that I don't have to search for Restaurant contact details if I need to get food home delivered, or that I don't have to do a lot of searching to simply get the derivative for a complex mathematical function. That's enough of a reason to keep using Siri over other virtual assistants.

Pixel Quiz October 2016

Vidit Bhargava

Q1. In May 2016, Dag Klittlaus at TechCrunch disrupt showed an advanced AI platform called X which would be able to write it's own code to accomplish new tasks, allowing "it to understand the intent of the user and to create programs to handle tasks on the fly, even if it's never heard that particular one in the past." A few weeks ago, this younger brother to "Y" was sold to Samsung. What is X?

Q2. X was founded by Masashi Miyamoto in 1983. Their initial success was spawned by the success of their game Final Fantasy. Y on the other hand was founded in 1975 as Eidansha Boshu Service Center Yasuhiro Fukushima, Their most profitable franchise was the "Dragon Quest", at some point in the early 2000s the X and Y merged and came to be known as XY. Moreover, They even bought Eidos in 2009. Giving them rights to their games like Tomb Raider and Deus Ex,and Legacy of Kain series. Name the gaming company XY, which is making a lot of Buzz by creating mobile versions of popular Eidos games.

Q3. X is an American online media company and blog network, founded and owned by Nick Denton based in New York City. It is considered to be one of the most visible and successful blog-oriented media companies. As of March 2010, it is the parent company for 11 different weblogs: X.com, Lifehacker, Gizmodo, Fleshbot, Deadspin, io9, Kotaku, Jalopnik, Jezebel , Cityfile , X.tv . Identify X which has been embroilled in controversies over the last few years.

Q4. Atari's Adventure, released in 1979 led to the coining of a very famous term in the world of gaming. It is now used in a more general sense in manyother kinds of works such as movies, books, paintings etc. that contain hidden messages. Which term?

Q5. Back in 2013, X began life on the stage of the WWDC where it showed it's product called "Drive". While the product generated a lot of buzz it was ultimately ridden of as an expensive 'toy'. Now in 2016, X is ready with another toy called "Y" which is a Wall-E styled bot which they created with the help of former Pixar Designers to give it a personality trait akin to a pet. The bot can be trained to recognise you and understand your expressions and react accordingly. It'll throw tantrums when it looses and hop around merrily when it wins in a game. It can also mimmick your emotions to grab your attention. What is the bot called (Y), and name the startup X?