

SAMSUNG JOINS THE AI RACE WITH ACQUISITION OF VIV, AN AI ASSISTANT PLATFORM DEVELOPER

VIV

Radically simplifying the world by providing an intelligent interface to everything



- 1) Samsung Electronics has acquired Viv Labs, a US-based startup that has developed an open artificial intelligence (AI) assistant platform. The startup was co-founded by the creators of Siri.
- 2) The acquisition will help Samsung fill a major gap in its smartphone product portfolio, allowing it to compete with other tech giants such as Apple and Google.
- 3) The AI assistant platform could penetrate into other platforms more quickly, as Samsung is one of the largest manufacturers of home appliances and wearables. Samsung can eventually build a seamless AI assistant platform across all of its devices, and this might disrupt how companies interact with their customers.

Samsung Acquires Viv, an AI Platform Developer

Samsung Electronics announced on October 6, 2016 that it had acquired Viv Labs, a US-based startup that has developed an open artificial intelligence (AI) platform. The startup was co-founded by Dag Kittlaus, Adam Cheyer and Chris Brigham, the creators of Siri, which was acquired by Apple in 2010. Viv Labs was founded in 2012 after the co-founders left Apple, the new startup has developed an open AI assistant platform, which allows developers to build their own AI assistants, and plug into any device.

As an open platform, Viv welcomes third-party integrations, which is a key differentiating factor compared with other AI assistants. This was demonstrated during TechCrunch’s Disrupt conference in May, where the AI assistant was called on to make a payment through the Venmo third-party integration, as well as to book a hotel room and order flowers.

In addition, Viv has a unique feature known as “dynamic program generation”, which, according to TechCrunch, allows the AI personal assistant to understand intent and generate a program itself to best answer the query. This allows developers to simply describe what they want to do rather than coding every instruction, and to use the platform to build any experience they want.



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A Bid to Catch Up With Other Tech Giants

Most of the tech giants, such as Amazon, Apple, Google and Microsoft have been racing to develop or improve their own AI personal assistants, enhancing the experience of using their devices or services. This was covered in our note, [AI Personal Assistants](#), earlier this year.

After years of development and a series of acquisitions, the AI assistants developed by the tech giants have become more and more capable. For instance, Apple has spent over US\$50 million to acquire VocalIQ, a speech technology startup. In the latest version of Siri on iOS 10, Apple has integrated HomeKit and CarPlay, where users can control their home appliances or the climate control in their vehicle.

The day before Samsung announced its acquisition of Viv, Google launched its revamped AI assistant, Google Assistant, which is only available on Google’s own Pixel smartphone and Google Home device.

Figure 1. Major AI Personal Assistants

Software	Main Platform	Last Updated	Initial Release
Amazon Alexa	Amazon Echo	Sep. 2016	Nov. 2014
Apple Siri	iOS devices	Sep. 2016	Oct. 2011
Google Assistant	Pixel Smartphone	Oct. 2016	Jul. 2012*
Microsoft Cortana	Windows devices	Sep. 2016	Apr. 2014

* First released as Google Now

Source: Company Websites

Although Samsung tried to develop its own AI assistant called S Voice several years ago, it has had limited success and lags far behind the tech giants. The acquisition of Viv will help the South Korean electronics giant to fill the AI personal assistant gap in its portfolio.

Adoption of an AI Assistant Beyond Smartphone

The tech giants have been trying to adopt an AI assistant platform that extends beyond smartphones. Both Amazon and Google have released their own smart speaker equipped with an AI assistant. Amazon’s Echo has proven to be a successful product, as indicated in a report by Consumer Intelligence Research Partners (CIRP) – as of December 2015, 3 million Amazon Echo devices were already sold.

As one of the largest manufacturers of home appliances, Samsung can build a seamless AI assistant platform across all of its devices, ranging from flat panel TVs to refrigerators, giving it an advantage over the other tech giants. Indeed, Injong Rhee, CTO of the Mobile Communications business at Samsung stated that Viv is an ideal candidate to integrate with Samsung home appliances, wearables and more. With the input from Viv, Samsung can eventually build a seamless AI assistant platform across all of its devices, and this might disrupt how companies interact with their customers.



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