With iPhone 8 on tap, Apple doesn't need to be a first mover in artificial intelligence

The angst over Apple's artificial intelligence chops is palpable and likely overblown. Why is AI different than any other enabling technology? AI research papers don't equate to products.

By [Larry Dignan](#) for [een the Lines](#) | September 5, 2017 -- 10:00 GMT (03:00 PDT) | Topic: [Artificial Intelligence](#)

Apple will soon launch its iPhone 8, which will also bring iOS 11, and you can expect a massive upgrade cycle, reportedly three devices and a bevy of tweaks that will make it easier to develop augmented reality applications.

And none of those features to the new crop of iPhones or iOS 11 will necessarily be first movers. Most of what Apple will highlight in its latest iPhones can be found in other devices. [Reports have surfaced](#) that the high-end new iPhone will shrink bezels, remove the home button and include gesture controls, facial recognition and essentially be all screen. [The new features](#) sound downright Samsung-ish.

Not that Apple has to be first. The company has made hundreds of billions of dollars making technologies easier to use after they have hit the market. The iPod wasn't the first music player. The iPhone wasn't the first smartphone. And tablets were launched without mainstream adoption before the iPad.

I provide that hardware backdrop to put some context around all that angst about Apple's artificial intelligence efforts relative to Google, Amazon, Microsoft and others. Why is artificial intelligence any different than any other enabling technology for Apple? Apple didn't have to invent cloud computing just use it.

Somehow, Apple's ability to deliver research and development breakthroughs on the AI front are front and center news. Apple's Siri is in the octagon duking it out with Google Assistant, Amazon's Alexa, Microsoft's Cortana **or any other AI with a catchy name**.

To wit:
- [The Wall Street Journal noted](#) that Apple is playing catch-up in AI and isn't communicating as well with the research community.
- [Craig Federighi, Apple's software chief, now has Siri in his orbit](#). The upshot is that Siri will be more integrated with iOS and macOS. The swap in leadership was taken to mean Apple is sweating AI. Richard Windsor, an analyst at Edison Investment Research, said:

Responsibility for Siri has moved from services (Eddy Cue) to software (Craig Federighi) which is pointing to much deeper integration of Siri into the Apple ecosystem. The way this kind of development works is that the services are developed on top of the finished product of the software department. With Siri as part of the software department it can be much more deeply integrated as the software is created and refined which should allow its functionality to be meaningfully enhanced. However, what is unlikely to change is that fact that Siri is just not that smart and is easily outperformed by Google Assistant and even Amazon Alexa on occasion. This is due to the fact that Siri has not been in existence for very long and that its global learning capability is hobbled by Apple's implementation of differential privacy. The net result is that Siri is falling behind in the AI race and moving Siri to software will not really solve the problem.

To really improve, Siri needs to be used and this is where the problems really begin. Usage of Digital Assistants primarily occurs when users' hands are busy which currently means in the car and in the kitchen. Apple's position in both of these areas is quite weak.

- Apple has highlighted new intelligence behind Siri, but is seen as late to the game. On Apple's recent earnings conference call, CEO Tim Cook didn't mention the terms AI or artificial intelligence, but did note Siri would become more intelligent. "iOS 11 will make iPhone better than ever with Apple Pay peer-to-peer payments, an even more intelligent and natural Siri," he said. Cook also added: "As an intelligent

home assistant, HomePod is a great way to send messages, set a timer, get updates on new sports and weather or control smart HomeKit devices by simply asking Siri to turn on the lights, close the shades or activate a theme."

OK, Siri will become a bit smarter than a brick. Hopefully, Alexa will grow beyond the command line syntax too. Google Assistant may be everywhere, but Google has some serious competition for developers.
Here's the bottom line: None of these digital assistant, AI, machine learning tools are perfect. Amazon turned Alexa into a product brilliantly. Google has brilliant technology, but lacks the product chops. Apple has the product chops, emotional connection and AI technology that will probably improve to be good enough.

What can you make of Apple's AI strategy? I think the approach is simple. Apple needs intelligence in its products, but that requirement doesn't mean hundreds of researchers publishing papers on AI and machine learning. I expect Apple's approach to rhyme with what SAP -- and every other company at some point -- is doing. [SAP has its own machine learning and AI](#) for its core offerings, but [will partner with Google Cloud](#), Amazon Web Services and IBM's Watson to give customers an intelligent app portfolio. There's no reason why Apple wouldn't take the same approach. Apple can leverage AI technology from multiple suppliers and then use its own intellectual property to differentiate its products from the field.

We've seen this before. Apple is using ARM intellectual property to build its processors for the iPhone. Apple uses open Web standards for some of its software and then differentiates. Why wouldn't Apple do the same for AI? You don't make money publishing research. The art is taking research -- homegrown or not -- and turning it into a product people didn't know they wanted.

A CIO I recently talked to noted that his company had five or so AI platforms actively being used. Some of these AI platforms were industry-specific and some were broad like IBM's Watson. Apple will be no different. Siri will get help from Apple as well as a bevy of other providers that'll never be disclosed. AI will be mainstream when no one knows it's there.

original article:
http://www.zdnet.com/article/with-iphone-8-on-tap-apple-doesnt-need-to-be-a-first-mover-in-artificial-intelligence/?loc=newsletter_large_thumb_featured&ftag=TRE-03-10aaa6b&bhid=23405847687286447375579737817622