

With Alexa and an Innovation-First Approach, iRobot Is Building the Future of the Voice-Enabled Smart Home



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Alexa Developer Spotlight Smart Home



Since 1990, iRobot's goal has been to create robots that make everyday tasks easier. iRobot devices have been vacuuming and mopping customers' homes ever since, but the 2017 addition of the [iRobot skill for Alexa](#) to enable voice control took the customer experience to new heights. With a steady addition of voice capabilities to their [smart home](#) robots, iRobot has seen an increase in how much customers interact with their devices.

Innovation is a top priority for us," says Chris Jones, iRobot's chief technology officer. "Customers love the increased functionality, especially with voice. Voice is a preferred way of interacting with the robots, and the more voice-enabled capabilities we add, the more voice is used."

With the new voice-driven capabilities of its latest robots, iRobot continues to expand how it leverages voice to give customers even more control and personalization of their devices. This lets the company deliver features the customer wants, such as cleaning specific rooms by name, while also looking for new ways to innovate and integrate their products into the smart home environment.

"Voice control and Alexa are vital to the latest trends in smart home technology," says Jones. "With voice, customers can interact with our products and their entire smart home in the most natural and intuitive way."

Controlling Robots with Simple Voice Commands

iRobot's first Alexa skill allowed customers to initiate basic functions with their Roomba. They could use their voice to tell the robot to start vacuuming, stop vacuuming, and dock at its charging station. While functionality is core to the iRobot experience, the latest robot models—and the updated iRobot skill with "clean by room" functionality—let customers do so much more.

For example, multiple iRobot devices can coordinate with each other to perform a series of tasks with a single voice command. A simple command like, "Alexa, tell Roomba to vacuum and Braava to mop the kitchen," can send a [Roomba](#) vacuum to the customer's kitchen, then send a [Braava](#) robot to mop the floor after the vacuuming is complete.

"There's a lot of innovation and technology that goes into executing the coordinated actions represented by this simple command," says Jones. "The result is a rich, magical voice experience for the customer."

Each additional voice command and function iRobot adds makes the robots more intuitive and accessible to the customer. According to Jones, customers have responded by using their robots more often.

"We want our products to become a part of the customer's everyday life," says Jones. "Using them should be an engaging, intuitive experience. Thanks to voice technology and our work with Alexa, it is."

In addition to providing customers the voice integration they want via the iRobot Alexa skill, the [Roomba](#) and [Braava](#) robots are [Works with Alexa \(WWA\)](#) certified devices. WWA certification helps increase customer confidence that the products they buy will operate smoothly with Alexa. These iRobot devices carry the Works with Alexa badge and appear in the [Amazon Smart Home store](#), and Jones says it increases customer awareness and confidence when they purchase iRobot products.

"We believe the Works with Alexa badge is valuable recognition that positively affects device sales and is additive to our positive brand image and category leadership," says Jones.

Voice Technology Keeps Making the Smart Home Smarter

Jones foresees a voice-controlled smart home environment that's becoming more and more natural to interact with, thanks to both iRobot's and Amazon's innovations in robotics and voice technology. For instance, iRobot's ability to map the home and define named spaces has already paved the way for simple, intuitive commands. Now, an iRobot customer can give Alexa one command, such as, "Alexa, tell Roomba to vacuum and Braava to mop the kitchen," and the skill can initiate a series of actions by multiple robots.

In the future, Jones believes this understanding of the home will extend to even more detailed operations, such as being able to say, "clean under the table in the dining room after we have dinner"—and the robots will have the context and memory to do that.

"There's nothing easier than just asking, 'Alexa, clean the kitchen,'" says Jones. "We'll keep making it possible for customers to interact more naturally with their devices in their homes."

Jones believes this will lead to future integration and coordination of actions with other smart home devices, not just iRobot models. Alexa voice technology, along with robot-mapping information, will allow customers to use voice controls on any connected smart home device—without the hassle of first defining it and setting it up. This integration into the smart home is part of iRobot's overall desire to innovate and create products that make their customers' lives easier.

With Alexa, iRobot is Shaping the Future of Robotics in the Smart Home

iRobot looks forward to developing new voice-enabled capabilities for its products. The company sees voice technology as a major part of their innovation strategy, as well as a way to provide customers with a more engaging and intuitive way to get things done.

"Robot intelligence is advancing and maturing," said CEO Colin Angle at re:MARS, Amazon's global AI event. "The core of this evolution is the importance of mapping, spatial context and voice, as a user interface for the future of the smart home. Voice technology and Alexa are instrumental to building that future, enabling home robots' to further enrich customers' lives."