

CHAPTER 1



Introduction to Virtual Assistants

This chapter gives a detailed overview of what virtual assistants are, common virtual assistants in the market, what qualities a virtual assistant should possess, and the basic workflow and design for building a scalable virtual assistant. You also learn about the various tools required to build Melissa (your own virtual assistant) in upcoming chapters and the methodology you follow in this book.

The advent of virtual assistants has been an important event in the history of computing. Virtual assistants are useful for helping the users of a computer system automate tasks and accomplish tasks with minimum human interaction with a machine. The interaction that takes place between a user and a virtual assistant seems natural; the user communicates using their voice, and the software responds in the same way.

If you have seen the movie *Iron Man*, you can perhaps imagine having a virtual assistant like Tony Stark's Jarvis. Does that idea excite you? The movie inspired me to build my own virtual assistant software, Melissa. Such a virtual assistant can serve in the Internet of things as well as run a voice-controlled coffee machine or a voice-controlled drone.

Electronic supplementary material The online version of this chapter (doi:10.1007/978-1-4842-2167-9_1) contains supplementary material, which is available to authorized users.