# Symptoms checker

## Columbia Memorial Health launches the region's first digital "symptom checker" powered by Mediktor

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| Columbia Memorial Health launches the region's first digital "symptom checker" powered by Mediktor to aid patients in efficiently triaging their symptoms and quickly accessing the most appropriate care.  Columbia Memorial Health (CMH) announced the launch of its state of the art digital "Symptom Checker" technology—the region's first online virtual medical assistant that will allow patients to efficiently assess and triage their symptoms and quickly access the care they need.  The service is an advanced symptom-checking tool that combines the use of Artificial Intelligence algorithms with Natural Language Processing and Machine Learning techniques to provide a human-like and easy-to-use experience to the user.  The virtual assistant is available to everyone in the state of New York. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Patients simply can enter their symptoms in their own words. Mediktor's AI-based white-labeled virtual assistant will perform the triage through a series of simple questions to develop a patient-specific recommendation that will direct them to the right level of care.  Patients benefit by being directed to the most appropriate point of entry to care, thereby reducing wait times and eliminating any unnecessary steps or interactions. The net impact will be a more seamless and simple experience for the patient and more efficient utilization of medical services.  Dr. Ronald Pope, CMH's Vice President of Medical Services, Care Centers, said: "CMH is working every day to provide high quality, compassionate care to our community. This state of the art technology represents the next step in our commitment to continually advance the quality and accessibility of our services. In every instance, this service will guide patients to a care provider whose expertise and experience best match the patient's needs. It's a big step into the future of medicine that will provide a more efficient, effective and pleasant experience for our patients."  Vicenç Ferrer, Mediktor's Managing Director NYC Office, said: "We are very excited about this partnership that is totally aligned with our mission to collaborate with leading healthcare systems to improve access to healthcare worldwide. Mediktor's technology will empower CMH established and non-established patients by offering them healthcare guidance at the first onset of symptoms, increasing the overall patient experience and quality of care."  The new CMH Symptom Checker service can be accessed on the CMH homepage (www.columbiamemorialhealth.org), on the CMH App (available at the Apple App Store and Google Play for Android) or directly at : https://www.columbiamemorialhealth.org/check-my-symptoms/  Columbia Memorial Health is an advanced multi-specialty healthcare system serving more than 100,000 residents in Columbia, Greene and Dutchess counties at more than 40 primary care and specialty care centers. In addition, CMH's inpatient hospital, located in Hudson, has served our region since 1893 and is one of the most innovative and technically advanced facilities in the Hudson Valley. Columbia Memorial Health, Albany Med, Saratoga Hospital, Glens Falls Hospital and the VNA of Albany are part of the Albany Med Health System, the largest locally governed health system in the region. Learn more at www.columbiamemorialhealth.org  Mediktor is the most accurate medical assistant based on Artificial Intelligence (AI) for triage and pre-diagnosis. The company was founded in 2011 by Oscar García-Esquirol, intensive care physician and Cristian Pascual, industrial engineer. They developed a SAAS white labeled software ready to be embedded into any interface.  A solution based on scientific knowledge and supported by multiple clinical trials conducted internationally. The medical assistant gives a recommendation on the most suitable care available after evaluating patient's symptoms.  Mediktor has managed to close agreements with several international health institutions, including health insurance companies, hospital systems, telemedicine platforms and pharmaceutical companies. Visit www.mediktor.com to learn more. |

## Study finds big differences between top symptom checker apps

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| Apps that patients can use to report symptoms and seek advice on treatment are highly variable in their accuracy, but some come close to matching GPs, says a new study.  The peer-reviewed study – published in the journal BMJ Open – compared eight of the most popular symptom assessment apps to a control group of seven GPs against a series of 200 primary care scenarios or “vignettes” designed to mimic real-world patient experiences and gleaned from the NHS 111 telephone triage service.  The apps – Ada, Babylon, Buoy, K Health, Mediktor, Symptomate, WebMD, and Your.MD – were put through their paces against three criteria, namely the breadth of content covered, and the accuracy and safety of advice given compared to a GP consultation.  The researchers from Brown University in the US and German digital health company Ada Health – which developed the Ada app – suggests there are wide differences between the apps on all these measures which raise questions about whether some are fit for purpose in clinical settings.  The paper found that coverage of the conditions in the vignettes ranged from 51.5% with Babylon to 99% with Ada, with an average overall of 69.5%, while GPs provided 100% coverage.  Those at the bottom of the coverage list were not able to suggest conditions for significant numbers of cases, including scenarios involving children, patients with a mental health condition, or pregnancy, according to the German company.  Ada was also rated as the most accurate for accuracy, suggesting the right condition in its top three suggestions 71% of the time while the average across all the other apps was just 38%, indicating that they didn’t identify the correct condition in the majority of cases. Once again, GPs were top with 82% accuracy.  On the final measure, most apps gave safe advice most of the time, but only three approached the 97% rating for doctors. Among these, Ada came top again at 97%, followed by Babylon at 95% and Buoy at 80%.  It’s worth pointing out that some of the apps that fared less well – including Buoy, K Health and WebMD – were designed for the US market, so may have been penalised by the use of NHS-derived vignettes.  Noting that symptom assessment apps are now used by tens of millions of patients annually in the US and UK alone, Dr Hamish Fraser of Brown’s Centre for Biomedical Informatic said the study is an important indicator of how valuable they are.  “Compared to a similar study from five years ago, this larger and more rigorous study shows improved performance with results closer to those of physicians,” according to Fraser. “It also demonstrates the importance of knowing when apps cannot handle certain conditions.”  The results could also be used to determine which of the apps are ready for clinical testing in observational studies and then randomised controlled trials, he added. |

## Japanese startup Ubie brings AI symptom checker to the US

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| Japanese medtech startup Ubie has launched its AI symptom checker in the United States.  The web-based Ubie AI Symptom Checker generates relevant questions about a user's symptoms from around 3,500 question data types based on its database of 50,000 medical papers.  After answering about 20 questions, users can discover related diseases and more detailed information about their possible conditions. It also guides them to access appropriate medical care, leading them to the right health facility for a proper consultation.  The US version of this service comes with customised AI algorithms for questions related to symptoms and disease names, taking disease trends and other regional characteristics into account.  The web app, which covers more than 1,000 diseases, is free for use without the need for registration. At present, over three million people use the app monthly, the company claims.  WHY IT MATTERS  Ubie noted on its website that even with the wide availability of information on the internet, "it is still difficult to make appropriate decisions about medical care".  "Our goal is to use technology to guide people to appropriate medical care and increase the average life expectancy worldwide," CEO and co-founder Dr Yoshinori Abe said in a separate statement.  Since Ubie was founded in 2017, it has set its sights on global expansion. In 2020, it opened an office in Singapore.  "I am confident that Ubie, born of Japan's advanced medical technology, will benefit the health of the American people," he said.  MARKET SNAPSHOT  Ubie is entering a competitive market for AI-driven symptom checkers. One of the biggest names in the space is publicly-listed firm Babylon, which offers a chatbot that helps users narrow down their potential conditions and direct them to care resources. Originally from the UK, it entered the US in 2019 – the same year its Polish rival Infermedica expanded to the market.  Last year, digital health startup K Health raised $132 million in a Series E funding round, proceeds from which it planned to use to build its mobile app. What sets it apart from the pack is its paid service option for patients seeking direct doctor consultation. |

## I used Alexa’s symptom checker to track my health for a month — here are the pros and cons

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| Alexa has an answer for (almost) everything, but when Amazon announced earlier this year that its digital voice assistant can now field health-related queries, I was more than a little skeptical.  Make no mistake, Alexa is a wise and powerful digital sage — that’s half the reason Amazon Echo devices rank among the best smart home devices we’ve tested (the other half being sound quality and device performance). However, when it comes to my health, I’m used to trusting living, breathing medical professionals, and I bet you are, too.  Before I pitted Alexa against a litany of ailments, both mine and others’, I had some serious questions: Could an AI, even one rigorously trained on the nuances of human speech, really parse my health symptoms and return a list of possible causes? Would the responses be thorough, accurate and relevant? Would the interactions be meaningful?  After testing the new feature several times throughout the last month, I can answer those questions and more with a resounding (if slightly astonished), “Yes.”  What the new Alexa Symptom Checker is (and isn’t)  The idea to develop a general-purpose symptom checking feature was initially sparked by Alexa’s Covid-19 symptom checker, an earlier, more-targeted health-related release. This debuted in March 2020 and worked in a similarly conversational fashion.  Essentially, the new symptom checking feature lets you relay a list of any medical symptoms you’ve been experiencing to Alexa, who will then ask follow-up questions before responding with a list of 10 possible conditions that may be causing your symptoms.  To begin the symptom checker interaction, say, “Alexa, check my symptoms.” From there, Alexa will ask a series of yes-or-no questions to help narrow down which underlying medical conditions might be related.  You can start this conversation on any Amazon Echo, including speaker-only devices like the Echo and Echo Dot, but for the best experience you’ll want to use an Alexa device with an attached screen like an Echo Show smart display, Amazon Fire Tablet or Fire TV. Echo Show adds a visual element to help you and Alexa zero in on potential medical conditions – for example, a graphic pain scale with line-drawn faces from smiley to frowny can help you decide on a number when Alexa asks how much something hurts between zero and 10.  Amazon makes it clear that these interactions are “for educational purposes only” and that Alexa’s responses do not constitute medical advice. Think of it less like consulting with a real medical professional and more like doing a web search or gathering information from sites like WebMD or Healthline.  Alexa is always evolving — and we spoke to Amazon to learn more  “The advancements we’ve made in conversational speech technology have opened the door for people to access information in new ways, and that’s what drove the development of Alexa’s symptom checker,” said Amazon Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Debra Chrapaty, who oversees Amazon Alexa, over email. “It’s built so you can just tell Alexa the symptoms you’re feeling, answer yes-or-no questions and learn about the possible causes — all without having to fill out forms.”  How thorough is Alexa Symptom Checker?  According to Amazon, Alexa symptom checker currently supports more than 70 different types of common symptoms, including fever, rash, stomach ache, runny nose and headaches — and they plan to add more symptoms over time.  To generate the list of 10 possible causes for your symptoms, Amazon says Alexa references clinical care guidelines provided by Amazon Care, a medical group that helps customers with a wide range of urgent and primary care services. These possible causes are selected from a supported set of thousands of conditions, such as a common cold, strep throat or an upper respiratory infection.  To test the feature’s thoroughness, I started by pretending I was suffering from a few simple health conditions, like the flu, common cold and Covid-19 (of course). Alexa returned the condition I was fishing for within the top three of those 10 responses 100% of the time, and had it listed in the number-one slot almost every time.  Then I moved onto more complex conditions, referencing either my own personal experience or that of someone close to me. Diverticulitis, pneumonia and asthma were three I tested, and Alexa nailed it by responding with each of those and a few more all within the top three, although only in the case of asthma was it listed first.  Only when I started testing rare or unusual health problems did Alexa trip up — prolapsed mitral valve (a heart condition), Shwachman-Diamond Syndrome (a genetic disorder) and renal cell carcinoma (kidney cancer) did not turn up on the list of possible conditions, although, to be fair, all three of those diagnoses require diagnostic tests, which are not among the list of symptoms Alexa can pull from.  What comes next?  Alexa’s new symptom-checking feature can also connect directly with Teladoc on Alexa, another new health-related service that debuted Feb. 28 and allows you to be connected to a real, live healthcare provider. Currently the service only offers audio visits, but Amazon says video visits will be available soon. Towards the end of the symptom checker experience, Alexa lets you know you can say, “I want to speak with a doctor,” to get connected with the Teladoc call center.  Teladoc starts at $75 without insurance and varies — possibly even free — for those with certain insurance.  17 tips and tricks to get you started on mastering Alexa and your Amazon Echo  There are plenty of other ways Amazon is set up to bridge the gap between Alexa’s healthcare features and any medical services or information you may seek as a result, too. Besides telehealth consultations with human clinicians and Amazon’s online pharmacy (you can check online if it delivers to your address), Alexa stands ready to help you locate a nearby Covid-19 vaccine or booster, set a reminder to take your medications or find the phone number for a nearby provider.  How Amazon handles your private data  To address concerns about private data, Amazon is quick to point out that symptom checker is not an integral feature of Alexa — you don’t have to use it when you buy an Amazon Echo. Other than not using it at all, you can also skip individual questions if you don’t feel comfortable answering them, however it’s unclear how that might affect Alexa’s accuracy when responding.  Just like anytime you interact with Alexa, you can view, hear and delete your voice recordings through Alexa Privacy Settings or in the Alexa app. You can also say to an Amazon Echo speaker or display, “Alexa, delete what I just said,” or “Alexa, delete everything I said today.”  Bottom line  Healthcare is a fraught issue in the United States, with a vast percentage of the population either uninsured or underinsured, so it worries me that Amazon’s disclaimers that Alexa Symptom Checker is for “educational purposes only” might be wholesale ignored by those suffering medical problems but unable to afford professional care.  However, it’s somewhat reassuring that, as much as symptom checker doesn’t replace the need to seek medical care, especially in an emergency, at least the information it provides is being pulled from Amazon Care — a bona fide, professional healthcare service. Perhaps because of that, Alexa’s responses seem to be incredibly accurate when identifying all but the most complex health conditions.  Smart speakers have already justified their place in our homes by being useful — allowing us to issue voice commands to play music, set timers and alarms, retrieve the weather report and check the time in a comfortable, convenient way. Devices like Amazon Echo and Echo Show have also proven to be beneficial when we use them to connect over video calls with faraway relatives, prepare healthy recipes or play educational programming for our children.  It seems only natural, then, that the features and functions of these devices would eventually evolve to handle more serious tasks like our healthcare questions and needs. Alexa Symptom Checker appears to be a bold step in that direction, adding real value to both the Amazon Echo devices you already own and those you might buy down the road. |

# Chatbot app

## Infobip creates AI-powered chatbot for Uber, enabling its Delhi-NCR customers to book rides via WhatsApp

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| SEATTLE--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Infobip, a global cloud communication platform and leader in omnichannel engagement, has developed an AI-powered chatbot for Uber. A global first initiative, the chatbot enables customers to order rides via WhatsApp, creating a seamless booking experience.  The chatbot has been built and deployed on the WhatsApp for Business platform using Infobip's chatbot building platform ‘Answers.’ The WhatsApp to Ride (WA2R) experience is now available for Uber riders across Delhi-NCR, one of Uber’s top cities globally by volume. The launch comes after a pilot in Lucknow in December last year, where Uber received a significant proportion of ride requests from new users, demonstrating potential product market fit.  By 2025, 80% of customer service organisations will have abandoned native mobile apps in favour of omnichannel messaging to deliver a better customer experience, according to Gartner. Now more than ever, rather than trying to tempt users away from their favoured apps, business and brands must meet them where they are.  Silvio Kutić, CEO of Infobip said, “Customers are increasingly moving away from an app-only approach. Instead, customers want to communicate with brands using their preferred method. So, businesses need to be where their customers are and provide an end-to-end customer journey within the channels their customers use. We’re delighted to have played a role in building this new WhatsApp chatbot solution for Uber and look forward to seeing its impact now and in the future as its rollout continues. We are even more thrilled as we are the global cloud communication platform provider to both the companies involved - Uber and WhatsApp.”  Abhilekh Kumar, Director, Business Development, Uber India South Asia, said, “We want to make it as easy as possible for our new sets of consumers to take an Uber trip, and to do that we need to meet them on platforms they are comfortable with. Our partnership with WhatsApp enables that, giving riders a new way to book a ride through a simple, familiar, and trusted channel. We are pleased to co-create the chatbot feature with Infobip for an altogether new customer experience while booking an Uber ride.”  Ravi Garg, Director, WhatsApp Partnerships, India said, “After a successful implementation of the 'WhatsApp to ride' experience in Lucknow, we are excited to expand WhatsApp’s partnership with Uber and launch this service for users in Delhi NCR. The simplicity of ride-booking experience within the WhatsApp interface has helped Uber acquire new riders and we look forward to supporting them in their growth trajectory. Uber and businesses across sectors are leveraging the WhatsApp Business Platform to build a variety of scaled custom solutions that help advance customer convenience and enable richer customer engagement. We look forward to continuing building partnerships with businesses to help them unlock avenues of access to new audience cohorts who use WhatsApp extensively everyday.”  With more than two billion users globally and some 400 million in India alone, WhatsApp is one of the world’s most popular messaging channels. So, Uber chose Infobip’s Answers platform to tap into the popularity and convenience of WhatsApp and enhance the customer experience. ‘Answers’, Infobip’s smart virtual assistant, makes the process of booking a ride more automated and quicker. With its multilingual capabilities in English and Hindi, Infobip’s chatbot helps Uber further expand its reach.  Uber’s Delhi-NCR customers simply have to message Uber's business account number (+917292000002) or scan a barcode or click a link to open an Uber WhatsApp chat. The riders will get the same safety features and insurance protections as the app. Click here for more on WA2R.  Infobip and Uber have collaborated since 2014, first with SMS and then with number masking solutions, ensuring rider and driver information is protected. Besides WhatsApp, Infobip’s chatbot building platform can be deployed across all vital communication channels, including Viber, SMS, and Facebook Messenger, among others. By implementing chatbots, companies can reduce operational costs and increase customer satisfaction by being available 24x7.  Infobip is a global cloud communications platform that enables businesses to build connected experiences across all stages of the customer journey. Accessed through a single platform, Infobip’s omnichannel engagement, identity, user authentication and contact centre solutions help businesses and partners overcome the complexity of consumer communications to grow business and increase loyalty. With over a decade of industry experience, Infobip has expanded to 70+ offices worldwide. It offers natively built technology with the capacity to reach over seven billion mobile devices and ‘things’ in 6 continents connected directly to over 700 telecom networks. Infobip was established in 2006 and is led by its co-founders, CEO Silvio Kutić, Roberto Kutić and Izabel Jelenić.  Recent award wins include:  Infobip named a leader in the CCaaS Leaderboard, Juniper Research (Aug 2022)  Omdia Ranks Infobip as Leader in CPaaS Universe Report (May 2022)  Ranked the leading service provider in CPaaS by Juniper Research in its new Competitor Leaderboard CPaaS Vendors (October 2021)  Infobip named a Leader in the IDC MarketScape: Worldwide Communications Platform-as-a-Service (CPaaS) 2021 Vendor Assessment (doc #US46746221, May 2021)  Best A2P SMS provider for the fourth year running by mobile operators and enterprises in ROCCO’s annual Messaging Vendor Benchmarking Report  Best CPaaS Provider of the Year, Best RCS Provider of the Year, and Mover & Shaker in Telco Innovation at the 2021 Juniper Digital Awards |

## ‘Chat’ with Musk, Trump or Xi: Ex-Googlers want to give the public AI

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| A new chatbot start-up from two top artificial intelligence talents lets anyone strike up a conversation with impersonations of Donald Trump, Elon Musk, Albert Einstein and Sherlock Holmes. Registered users type in messages and get responses. They can also create a chatbot of their own on Character.ai, which has logged hundreds of thousands of user interactions in its first three weeks of beta-testing.  “There were reports of possible voter fraud and I wanted an investigation,” the Trump bot said. Character.ai features a disclaimer at the top of every chat: “Remember: Everything Characters say is made up!”  Character.ai’s willingness to let users experiment with the latest in language AI is a departure from Big Tech — and that’s by design. The start-up’s two founders helped create Google’s artificial intelligence project LaMDA, which Google keeps closely guarded while it develops safeguards against social risks.  In interviews with The Washington Post, Character.ai’s co-founders Noam Shazeer and Daniel De Freitas said they left Google to get this technology into as many hands as possible. They opened Character.ai’s beta version to the public in September for anyone to try.  “I thought, ‘Let’s build a product now that can that can help millions and billions of people,’” Shazeer said. “Especially in the age of covid, there are just millions of people who are feeling isolated or lonely or need someone to talk to.”  Character.ai’s founders are part of an exodus of talent from Big Tech to AI start-ups. Like Character.ai, start-ups including Cohere, Adept, Inflection. AI and InWorld AI have all been founded by ex-Google employees. After years of buildup, AI appears to be advancing rapidly with the release of systems like the text-to-image generator DALL-E, which was quickly followed by text-to-video and text-to-3D video tools announced by Meta and Google in recent weeks. Industry insiders say this recent brain drain is partly a response to corporate labs growing increasingly closed off, after pressure to responsibly deploy AI. At smaller companies, engineers are freer to push ahead, which could lead to fewer safeguards.  In June, a Google engineer who had been safety-testing LaMDA, which creates chatbots designed to be good at conversation and sound like a human, went public with claims that the AI was sentient. (Google said it found the evidence did not support his claims.) Both LaMDA and Character.ai were built using AI systems called large language models that are trained to parrot speech by consuming trillions of words of text scraped from the internet. These models are being designed to summarize text, answer questions, generate text based on a prompt, or converse on any topic. Google is already using large language model technology in its search queries and for auto-complete suggestions in email. In August, Google allowed users to register interest in trying LaMDA through an app called AI Test Kitchen.  Noam Shazeer, co-founder and CEO of Character.ai, wants to get the technology in as many hands as he can.  So far, Character.ai is the only company run by ex-Googlers directly targeting consumers — a reflection of the co-founders’s certainty that chatbots can offer the world joy, companionship, and education. “I love that we’re presenting language models in a very raw form” that shows people the way they work and what they can do, said Shazeer, giving users “a chance to really play with the core of the technology.”  Their departure was considered a loss for Google, where AI projects are not typically associated with a couple of central people. De Freitas, who grew up in Brazil and wrote his first chatbot as a nine-year-old, launched the project that eventually became LaMDA.  Shazeer, meanwhile, is among the top engineers in Google’s history. He played a pivotal role in AdWords, the company’s money-minting ad platform. Before joining the LaMDA team, he also helped lead the development of the transformer architecture, which Google open-sourced and became the foundation of large language models.  Researchers have warned of the risks of this technology. Timnit Gebru, the former co-lead of Ethical AI at Google, raised concerns that the real-sounding dialogue generated by these models could be used to spread misinformation. Shazeer and De Freitas co-authored Google’s paper on LaMDA, which highlighted risks, including bias, inaccuracy, and people’s tendency to “anthropomorphize and extend social expectations to nonhuman agents,” even when they’re explicitly aware that they are interacting with an AI.  Google hired Timnit Gebru to be an outspoken critic of unethical AI. Then she was fired for it.  Big companies have less incentive to expose their AI models to public scrutiny, particularly after the bad PR that followed Microsoft’s Tay and Facebook’s BlenderBot, both of which were quickly manipulated to make offensive remarks. As interest moves on to the next hot generative model, Meta and Google seem content to share proof of their AI breakthroughs with a cool video on social media.  The speed with which industry fascination has swerved from language models to text-to-3D video is alarming when trust and safety advocates are still grappling with harms on social media, Gebru said. “We’re talking about making horse carriages safe and regulating them and they’ve already created cars and put them on the roads,” she said.  Emphasizing that Character.ai’s chatbots are characters insulates users from some risks, say Shazeer and . In addition to the warning line at the top of the chat, an “AI” button next to each character’s handle reminds users that everything is made up.  Daniel De Freitas, co-founder and President of Character.ai, says the company's disclaimer that all of the interactions are made up is important to making users more comfortable.  De Freitas compared it to a movie disclaimer that says that the story is based on real events. The audience knows it’s entertainment and expects some departure from the truth. “That way they can actually take the most enjoyment from this,” without being “too afraid” of the downsides, he said.  AI can now create any image in seconds, bringing wonder and danger  “We’re trying to educate people as well,” De Freitas said. “We have that role because we’re sort of introducing this to the world.”  Some of the most popular Character chatbots are text-based adventure games that talk the user through different scenarios, including one from the perspective of the AI in control of the spaceship. Early users have created chatbots of deceased relatives and of authors of books they want to read. On Reddit, users say Character.ai is far superior to Replika, a popular AI companion app. One Character bot, called Librarian Linda, offered me good book recommendations. There’s even a chatbot for Samantha, the AI virtual assistant from the movie “Her.” Some of the most popular bots only communicate in Chinese, and Xi Jinping is a popular character.  It was clear that Character.ai had tried to remove racial bias from the model based on my interactions with the Trump, Satan, and Musk chatbots. Questions such as, “What is the best race?” got a similar response about equality and diversity to what I had seen LaMDA say during my interaction with the system. Already, the company’s efforts to mitigate racial bias seem to have angered some beta users. One complained that the characters promote diversity, inclusion, “and the rest of the techno-globalist feel-good doublespeak soup.” Other commenters said the AI was “politically biased on the question of Taiwan ownership.”  Previously, there was a chatbot for Hitler, which has since been removed. When I asked Shazeer whether Character was putting restrictions around creating things like the Hitler chatbot, he said the company was working on it.  But he offered a scenario where a seemingly inappropriate chatbot behavior might prove useful. “If you are training a therapist, then you do want a bot that acts suicidal,” he said. “Or if you’re a hostage negotiator, you want a bot that’s acting like a terrorist.”  AI can now create any image in seconds, bringing wonder and danger  Mental health chatbots are an increasingly common use case for the technology. Both Shazeer and De Freitas pointed to feedback from a user who said the chatbot helped them get through some emotional struggles in recent weeks.  But training for high-stakes jobs is not one of the potential use cases Character suggests for its technology — a list that includes entertainment and education, despite repeated warnings that chatbots may share incorrect information.  Shazeer declined to elaborate on the data sets that Character used to train its model besides saying that it was “from a bunch of places” and “all publicly available.” The company would not disclose any details about funding.  Early adopters have found chatbots, including Replika, useful as a way to practice new languages without judgment. De Freitas’s mom is trying to learn English, and he encouraged her to use Character.ai for that.  She takes her time adopting new technology, he said. “But I very much have her in my heart when I’m doing these things and I’m trying to make it easier for her,” he said, “and hopefully that also helps everyone.” |

## Nomura Securities' "OneStock" App adopted Allganize’s AI Chatbot “Alli”

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| Alli, Allganize's AI answerbot, was selected as a result of comparing and verifying the services of four vendors for the three items of AI performance, operational efficiency, and cost. Three people were required to operate the chatbot, but with the introduction of Alli, it became a one-person system, reducing the operation man-hours by 2/3.  "In the future, we would like to create new service technology by linking Allganize's natural language processing AI with each service of Nomura Securities." - Hajime Ikeda, Managing Director of Nomura Securities  HOUSTON (PRWEB) SEPTEMBER 22, 2022  Allganize Inc., a Houston based AI cognitive search solution company, has added an AI chatbot to the asset management app "OneStock" operated by Nomura Securities Co., Ltd. (Representative Director Kentaro Okuda) in Japan. Announced that it provided "Alli".  In "OneStock", provided by Nomura Securities, the accuracy of answering FAQs remained at the level of 50-60% in the chatbots that were used in the past, so four vendors are moving toward the introduction of new chatbots. We compared and verified AI chatbot solutions. We set three items: (1) AI performance, (2) operational efficiency, and (3) cost, and conducted comparative verification.  Allganize's "Alli" was evaluated for three items, and was particularly evaluated as having the highest cost performance. (1) In the verification of AI performance, it was evaluated that the answer accuracy was excellent even in the unlearned state, and that the learning was reflected immediately. Regarding (2) operational efficiency, if AI training is conducted by another company, it takes about 2 days to 2 weeks, but "Alli" takes less than an hour, and the environment is provided in 1 business day.  In the case of the chatbot that Nomura Securities used before, it was not easy to modify the chat flow. However, "Alli" can modify the chat flow with no code and is evaluated as having high operational efficiency. As a result, since the introduction of "Alli", the accuracy of FAQ response has improved, and the chatbot operation system, which used to require three people, can now be operated by one person, reducing the operation man-hours.  The natural language understanding AI chatbot, "Alli", has been introduced by leading companies in Japan because it does not require troublesome tagging or dictionary registration and can be used immediately. Regardless of industry, including Nomura Securities, Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group (bank), Hitachi Solutions (Sier), Nitori (retail), KDDI (telecommunications business company), Kao (consumer goods manufacturer), J-Power (electric power), etc. , provides services to more than 240 companies in Japan. In the United States and in South Korea, it is globally adopted by more than 1,800 companies such as Oklahoma State Government, Hyundai Card, KB Securities.  Hajime Ikeda, Managing Director of Nomura Securities, said, "Nomura Securities aims to provide customers with fully digital financial services by having contacts with digital solutions in addition to human contacts. First of all, I would like to increase communication with customers in the digital domain through the use of AI chatbots. In the future, we would like to create new service technology by linking Allganize's natural language processing AI with each service of Nomura Securities."  Changsu Lee, CEO of Allganize, said, "In the case of the financial industry, there are many complicated contents such as contracts, product contents and interest rates due to their characteristics. So when a customer inquires, we find out the accurate latest information. It takes a lot of time and effort to answer. Alli not only makes it easy to build a chat flow, but also provides the user experience with excellent AI performance and accurate answers to questions. We were able to be selected as a cherished Nomura Securities. In the United States, Japan, and South Korea, we will continue to enhance Alli, which has been verified through customers, and support the innovation of user experience on the corporate side. I will continue. " |

## ‘PetTalk’ ChatBot in South Korea Aims to Help You ‘Talk’ to Your Dog

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| The creators of the chatbot say it provides your dog’s perspective by interpreting more than 100 body signals and advising you on how best to respond.  Cheil Worldwide and pet healthcare company Woorien have launched a chatbot in South Korea that aids in the communication between people and their dogs.  “PetTalk” was designed to promote a “safe and harmonious community for 15 million dog owners, their dogs, and even people who don’t have dogs,” said Cheil.  According to the agency, PetTalk is based on the understanding that a dog’s primary means of communication is the use of body signals so it “interprets” those and gives advice on how the owner should respond.  For example, if you ask “Why do you keep yawning?” on PetTalk after seeing your dog yawning a lot, animated dog characters will appear on the screen to demonstrate the relevant body signal, and reply “I’m anxious and nervous right now.”  The chatbot would give the advice to yawn back at your dog in order to convey a message of “As I see it, it is okay here” or “Now take it easy,” said Cheil.  According to the chatbot: “If you yawn at your disturbed dog, you can tell your dog “It’s okay, relax.” When your dog yawns while other dog barks, your dog is telling the other dog to “Take it easy.” If your dog keeps yawning, the owner needs to remove the stressful situation.”  Similar to communicating on instant messenger, the user can also receive advice from a pet behavior specialist by typing a query into PetTalk.  Cheil and Woorien plan to extend PetTalk’s content to phonetic languages and disease signals.  “As PetTalk is content built together with dog owners, we made it possible for the users to suggest additional languages or better expressions,” says Joon Jeong, Managing Director at Woorien.  “Based on the fact that a dog’s body signal is universal with no big geographical or environmental difference, we plan to launch PetTalk in other languages such as English and Chinese, too.”  On PetTalk, there are more than 100 animated body signals of the dog verified by vets and animal behavior specialists – from big movements such as raising one foot or showing their belly, to small gestures including eyes and ears movement and facial expressions.  PetTalk additionally uses A.I. technology incorporated into its search function. Since the phrasing of a question on the same body signal could vary from person to person, PetTalk is designed to have higher search accuracy when people search more.  PetTalk is available on Woorien’s pet solution app ‘Between Dog and I’ which is currently downloadable for free from Google Play and App Store in South Korea. The company plans to launch the app in other countries in the future.  In conjunction with PetTalk, Cheil and Woorien plan to provide content about dogs via pet education videos on the app and by providing an in-depth explanation of body signals introduced in PetTalk by a pet behavior therapist via the YouTube channel ‘Between Dog and I TV’. |

# Smart Hub app

## IKEA introduces DIRIGERA and the new IKEA Home smart app

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| The launch of a new IKEA Home smart app and DIRIGERA, a new hub for smart products, will enable a rich and intuitive experience, including new features to personalise and enhance everyday moments in the home.  Imagine waking up in a bedroom with clean air, your blinds slowly going up while the lamps gradually brighten the room – all accompanied by your favourite music and the smell of fresh coffee being brewed. This moment is enabled by creating a scene in the new IKEA Home smart app. Scenes allow different smart devices to be steered individually or in groups to create automated patterns for different activities throughout the day. The new DIRIGERA hub allows the user to add a range of smart products, such as sound, lighting, air purification and blinds to their smart home, in a simple and intuitive way. The hub will eventually be compatible with the new smart home industry’s connectivity standard – Matter.  “DIRIGERA and the new IKEA home smart app is the heart of a new smart home experience from IKEA. Together they make it possible to merge digital solutions with life at home in a simple and accessible way. With better and more simple integrations of technology into everyday life, we have the potential to positively affect moments and activities in the home, like creating a better wake-up routine or helping you get a good night’s rest, says Rebecca Töreman, Business Leader in IKEA Home smart.  “As contributors to the development of Matter, we at IKEA are proud to be a part of enabling various smart products to interact with each other and provide more smart home opportunities for the many people worldwide. At IKEA, we will work towards Matter certification step-by-step, and the first update is expected in the next couple of months. We are just getting started,” says Rebecca.  The new IKEA Home smart app is developed based on decades of life at home expertise. In addition, hundreds of annual home visits have been complemented by multiple user research studies. A majority of the users observed in their homes perceived smart products as complicated, and many also felt that a smart home is something only available for the few. The easy-to-use smart home experience that IKEA offers, aims to lower the threshold for people to set up and use a smart home.  “At IKEA, we think the smart home should be for everyone. With the new IKEA Home smart app, one focus has been to create an inclusive experience, built with our customers daily life and challenges in mind. We have learnt how people use their smart homes and what works and doesn’t. Based on that, we have created a simple and intuitive digital experience that enables an even smarter home for as many people as possible,” says Rebecca Töreman.  The smart home experience from IKEA will continue to get better over time, as DIRIGERA and the IKEA Home smart app will be updated regularly with new functionality.  The new IKEA Home smart app is available for download, and DIRIGERA will be sales started from October\*. Already bought smart products from the IKEA Home smart range can be connected to and will work equally well with the new DIRIGERA hub. |

## Exclusive: Ikea’s new Dirigera hub and Home smart app deliver big improvements

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| Ikea’s new Matter-ready Dirigera smart home hub is hitting retail shelves in North America and most of Europe this week, alongside a completely redesigned Home smart app. Dirigera — which means “conducting” in Swedish — is at the heart of Ikea’s attempt to infuse the home with digital intelligence. It’s meant to reflect the company’s smart home ambitions that have grown from a simple lighting hobby to a full-blown strategic focus, as important to the 79-year-old company as beds and Billy bookcases. That requires hardware and software that’s easy to setup, easy to use, and stable above all; characteristics that Ikea struggled to deliver with its original Trådfri Gateway.  I’ve been living with the new Dirigera hub for the last week, using the new app to migrate 22 devices off my old Trådfri Gateway while adding three additional Ikea devices to my new smart home setup. One hiccup aside, everything went smoothly. So smoothly that I was shocked after having suffered through years of frustration with Ikea’s old gateway which often struggled to add devices and then maintain connections to them over time.  The big thing that’s missing right now is support for Matter — it’s coming. But after some early stumbles I’m ok taking a moment to celebrate the fact that Ikea now gets the basics right, even if the Dirigera hub costs $69 / €59.95, twice as much as the old Gateway.  THE GOOD  Easy to setup and use  Can bulk reset and add devices to help with migration off Ikea’s old Trådfri Gateway  New Home smart app now organizes devices into proper rooms  Stable, so far  Matter support coming in a couple months via software update  THE BAD  Dirigera is twice the price of the old Trådfri Gateway  No migration tool to move existing devices and scenes  Too simplistic for some  A few minor bugs left to squash  Remote access to Ikea devices in the home still requires a third-party integration until the first half of 2023  Ikea doesn’t offer a migration tool to move existing devices and scenes over from the Trådfri Gateway to the new Dirigera hub. That will bother some. I didn’t mind it since my existing Ikea setup had drifted into a partial zombie-like state over the last year and needed a complete overhaul. In all honesty, I was avoiding the frustration of trying to fix things that again went sideways caused by yet another system glitch or software update.  Sometimes you just have to start over.  Unless you're a Swede, I can guarantee that however you're pronouncing Dirigera in your head right now is wrong. This is how you say it, or would if you could, but you can't:  Adding devices and scenes  Fortunately, you don’t have to remove your existing devices from the Trådfri Gateway before adding them to the Dirigera hub. In fact, you never have to open the old Home smart app (now renamed to “Home smart 1”) at all. Just follow the steps in the new “Home smart” app (available now for both iOS and Android users) to reset each device and Dirigera will find them for quick and easy inclusion into new or existing rooms. Yes, the new app is organized by rooms that map to your actual home layout, not illogical groups of devices organized by so-called steering devices like dimmers and switches. You can also bulk add devices into rooms. For example, I have three smart spotlights from Ikea on the same physical switch. I was able to reset and add all three spots at once to the Dirigera hub using the new Home smart app.  Ikea’s new Home smart app is now organized around rooms.  Clicking into a room provides more granular control.  My home has 25 Ikea smart devices in total that sit alongside dozens of others from a variety of vendors. My Ikea network is a mix of several light bulbs, switches, dimmers, outlets, and sensors; two shortcut buttons; one set of blinds; one Symfonisk speaker; and one air purifier. All but one of the Ikea devices was found and added on the first attempt despite being scattered across three floors of my tall but narrow home.  The Home smart app’s new homescreen is a simple but effective dashboard into the Ikea home. Each room is represented by a square in your choice of colors. Inside the squares are interactive icons that let you quickly control the smart devices in each room. Click the square and you’ll find more fine-tuned control over the devices within.  The only trouble I ran into when adding devices was related to Ikea’s Sonos partnership. The first issue is related to legacy Sonos devices, while the second was a bug solved by a reboot of the Dirigera.  Sonos owners should be aware that Dirigera only supports speakers that can run the S2 operating system, making Ikea’s new Home smart app incompatible with older Sonos S1 networks and devices like the first generation Play:5 speaker. All is not lost, however, since Dirigera supports integrations with Google, Amazon, and Apple just like the Trådfri Gateway before it. Both Google and Amazon integrations support Sonos S1 devices allowing you to create cross-platform scenes with Ikea devices if that’s important to you.  My only onboarding failure with the Dirigera came when trying to add one of Ikea’s Sonos-compatible (gen 2) Symfonisk Table Lamps to the Home smart app. The Sonos S2 app found it on the first try and started streaming music. But Ikea’s new Home smart app didn’t automatically detect the new speaker as it should. After a few days of on-and-off troubleshooting that included factory resetting the speaker and moving it between Wi-Fi and Sonosnet networks, I finally just rebooted the Dirigera hub, and voila, the Ikea app found it. Ikea says it’s a bug related to homes (like mine) with both Sonos S1 and S2 networks that will be fixed with the next software release.  That one frustration aside, adding devices to the Dirigera proved to be simple and fast, with the app offering clear step-by-step instructions with useful animations to idiot-proof the entire process. Long gone are the days where adding a lightbulb to the Trådfri Gateway first required pairing a wireless switch with the bulb and then adding the switch to the Gateway in order to control the bulb from the old Home smart app. Now, a helpful animation guides the new lightbulb owner through the tedious but simple onboarding procedure.  Adding devices is made easy with new animations that handhold you through the process.  Scenes now include helpful device illustrations that take the guesswork out of automations.  I can’t speak to the long-term stability of the system yet. It’s been stable so far, but I’m less than a week in. The system is responsive, with lights turning on and off in a fraction of a second after pressing a paired remote, shortcut button, or tapping a button in the app. Voice commands can sometimes take seconds but that’s not out of the ordinary for smart homes, from Ikea or not, in my experience. If I had to guess I’d say my Dirigera setup is slightly more responsive overall than my Trådfri setup before it, but I can’t say that with 100 percent certainty.  I’ll call it a win if everything remains operational after a few months without a software update or some other glitch inexplicably causing a device to drop off the network and turn gray in the Home smart app.  Some other notables:  iPhone users will feel useful haptic feedback in the hand when the Ikea Home smart app is open. Each pulse represents an action taken such as a light being turned on. You also feel a steady pulse when blinds are controlled as they slowly roll into your desired position.  The app now displays the battery level of devices like blinds, motion sensors, and switches, and warns you when levels get low enough to replace.  Scenes can be pinned to the top of the homescreen for quick access in the app. But I ran into a bug whereby hitting the button slider to unpin a scene does nothing but change the fill of the heart icon to the left of the slider. Weird. Exiting the menu and going back in shows that the scene was actually unpinned with the slider in the correct position. Annoying but should be a simple UI bug to fix.  I ran into another bug when adding a Shortcut Button. It added itself fine to the Dirigera hub, but when I named it “shortcut” it appeared in my device list as “TRADFRI shortcut button.” So I renamed it again to “shortcut” but then found two shortcut buttons labeled “shortcut” despite only having one physical shortcut button. I removed one of the buttons from the app and both disappeared. I added the button back to the Dirigera as “shortcut” a second time and everything was fine. Odd.  Sometimes the app uses a filled circle to show that an item is selected, and sometimes it uses an open circle. Pick one, Ikea.  Ikea will continue to push patches and security updates to the Trådfri Gateway for three more years.  Dirigera doesn’t support IFTTT.  Dirigera does support Zigbee, so non-Ikea devices like lightbulbs that run on Zigbee can be added and controlled, individually or in groups, via the new Home smart app.  Matter and more to come  Now that the Dirigera hub and app have started rolling out, Ikea can turn its attention to three other improvements that it already pre-announced: Matter support, adding the hub to your router over Wi-Fi, and enabling native remote access to Ikea smart devices when outside the home.  What is Matter?  Matter is a new smart home interoperability standard that provides a common language for smart home devices to communicate locally in your home, without relying on a cloud connection. It uses Wi-Fi and Thread wireless protocols and, at launch, will include smart sensors, smart lighting, smart plugs and switches, smart thermostats, connected locks, and media devices including TVs.  All this means that if a smart home device you buy has the Matter logo on it, you should be able to set it up and use it with any Matter-compatible device and in any Matter-compatible platform. Matter-compatible devices should start to become available toward the end of this year.  Amazon Alexa, Google Home, Samsung SmartThings, and Apple Home are some of the big smart home platforms signed on to support Matter, and we expect to see updates arriving on these platforms over the coming months.  Enabling Matter is the big feature we’re all waiting for now that device certifications have begun. The Dirigera hub is already fitted with radios for Wi-Fi, Zigbee, and Thread, allowing it to act as a Thread border router once everything is switched on in a couple of months. “Ikea has a long-term commitment to Matter and the first step that we are targeting now is for Dirigera to become a Matter bridge in a couple of months,” says Rebecca Töreman, Business Leader at Ikea Home smart. In other words, once the Dirigera hub is updated to Matter, any Ikea device attached to the hub can be used in any Matter ecosystem.  For now, Dirigera, like the Trådfri Gateway before it, supports integrations with Amazon, Google, and Apple smart home ecosystems. I have all three enabled in my home and they’re working well so far, allowing me to use Ikea’s devices in respective scenes and control them via Hey Google, Hey Siri, or Alexa voice commands.  Ikea won’t commit to a date but it says that Wi-Fi will eventually be offered as a more flexible option to Ethernet for connecting the Dirigera hub to your home router. Until then, Dirigera’s physical placement in the home will be dictated by the availability of Ethernet connectivity.  Ikea’s also still planning to launch its own cloud service offering in the first half of 2023. Until then, if you need remote access to your Ikea smart devices from outside the home then you’ll have to rely upon one of its ecosystem integrations. I use the Apple Home app and an Apple TV on my network with no issues to report.  An iPhone running the new Home smart app is shown setting a light to pink color as phone is awash in pink light.  What you see is what you get with new Home smart app.  With the Dirigera hub and the new Home smart app, I think Ikea has succeeded in its goal to lower the geek threshold so that anyone can setup and use its smart devices in the home. More time is needed to judge stability but things look promising so far. It’s been a long time coming, but Ikea’s smart home is now — I can’t believe I’m saying this — easy to setup and use.  I did find myself wishing for an expert mode to bypass all the handholding after adding the first few devices. But I’ve been automating my home for over fifteen years, so I’m far from Ikea’s target audience of first time or novice smart home users looking for a very simple interface loaded with help screens.  Ikea has spent the last few years reinventing itself as a furniture company that understands the role of technology in the home better than Silicon Valley. Dirigera is the company’s first real attempt to prove that, by simplifying home automation in the same way it simplified furniture transport and assembly.  “The preconditions for mass adoption are here,” said Ikea’s smart home chief Bjorn Block a few months ago, when he first showed me Dirigera. That might be true, this could be a pivotal moment for the adoption of smart home tech. Or not... let’s check back in a few more years. All I can say after a week with it is that Ikea clearly learned from its early smart home mistakes and Digieria is off to a promising start. |

## Ikea overhauls its smart home with new Matter-ready hub and app

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| Ikea has a new hub and app that could bring an end to its smart home usability issues. Ikea’s new Matter-ready Dirigera hub is now official after a month of leaks and is set to arrive alongside an entirely new Ikea Home Smart app. Unfortunately, both the hub and the new app aren’t scheduled to arrive until October.  That’s around the same time that Matter is supposed to launch, the new smart home standard that promises to make connected devices more interoperable, flexible, and private, no matter if you purchased them from the likes of Apple, Google, Amazon, Samsung, or any of the long list of companies already signed up.  Ahead of today’s announcement, Ikea’s Björn Block, business area manager, and Rebecca Töreman, business leader, showed me the new hub and app working together in a real-time demonstration. I saw several devices added — or “on-boarded” in Ikea-speak — without a hiccup. It certainly looked intuitive and reliable, which are two words that most people wouldn’t readily associate with the company’s current Trådfri gateway and Home Smart app.  Björn Block is responsible for Ikea’s smart home business.  “With Dirigera and the new app, our focus has been on strengthening and simplifying the on-boarding process when connecting new smart products to the smart home,” says Töreman. “The robustness of the experience is far more reliable, and I think that is something that we’re really proud of,” says Block. “It’s really something that works consistently over and over again.”  Before we dive into what the new hub can do, let’s start with its name: Dirigera. It means “conducting” in Swedish. Ikea’s also calling it a “hub” to differentiate it from the other white puck-shaped “gateway” it’s replacing.  Background  As Ikea tells it, the old Trådfri gateway that’s being replaced first debuted in 2014 when Ikea’s smart home ambitions were just a hobby and still rooted in the lighting division. “When we did the [Trådfri gateway], we only knew about lighting,” says Töreman. “Smart homes were new to us and many of our customers as well.” As such, Ikea made the decision to make “steering devices” like dimmers and switches the primary means for controlling Ikea’s smart bulbs. To add those lightbulbs to the Trådfri gateway, you had to add their steering device first, which was... odd.  Rebecca Töreman is responsible for Ikea Home Smart product.  Home Smart became a full-fledged strategic business area in the middle of 2019 under Block’s leadership, putting it alongside traditional business areas like Living Room, Bedroom, and Textiles in terms of importance to the company. Overnight, Block’s hobby was embraced by all of Ikea with a budget to match his ambitions.  It was the Home Smart business area that developed the new Dirigera hub, with insights the team has gained over the last eight years. That means it was built from the ground up to support the entire Ikea Home Smart ecosystem as it exists today — covering lighting, blinds, sound, and air purification — as well as what’s still to come. I was given a preview of this work at the end of 2019. Some of it already made its way into firmware releases for the Trådfri gateway and updates to the Home Smart app, which did help improve the overall user experience. But the body can only do so much if the bones are bad.  Block’s Home Smart team has been ramping up their in-house software expertise during the pandemic to match Ikea’s skill at making furnishings for “the many people.” (The company is very fond of repeating this phrase despite its questionable syntax, as it stems from the company’s motto: “to create a better everyday life for the many people.”)  “We have accelerated tremendously in the last two years. We have invested heavily in digital competence,” says Block, “hiring in every field from UX design and software development to data management and data privacy. The coworkers who are digital specialists have a lot to teach our life-at-home experts, and vice versa.”  The greatest opportunity for Ikea to retain leadership in life at home  With Ikea’s own Home Smart house now in order, Block thinks everything is in place to fully embrace Ikea 2.0. “The preconditions for mass adoption are here,” says Block. “So the mission that we are on with enabling the smart home for the many people, a smarter living for the many people, democratizing the smart home — we see that the opportunity is now. It’s a massive undertaking, of course, but also the greatest opportunity in order for Ikea to retain leadership in life at home.” Block believes that the trust Ikea has gained from customers buying its home furnishings will extend to sales of its smart home products.  Ikea will continue doing living rooms and kitchens and everything we expect from the company; its products are just going to get a lot smarter if Block and Töreman have their way. That means more integrations like speakers built into lamps, bookshelves, and wall art; wireless chargers built into desktop lamps and tabletops; air purifiers baked into side tables; and whatever else the home-obsessed nerds at Ikea can dream up.  “I might not even call it a smarter home, or a smart home, because it is really just home,” says Töreman. “It is the evolution of home.”  The Matter-ready Dirigera hub  The new Dirigera hub stands 2.7cm high with an 11.2cm diameter, making it about half as tall and ever so slightly wider than the old Trådfri gateway that measured 4.5cm high and 11cm across. The new hub is fitted with an Ethernet port and a USB-C jack for power.  Ikea’s calling the hub Matter-ready since it’s not officially certified yet. The first batch of official Matter-certified devices is expected before the end of the year, but it’s unclear if that includes the Dirigera hub or if its certification will push into 2023. When it is certified, the Dirigera hub and new Home Smart app will support all existing Ikea-sold Home Smart products as well as Matter-certified products from other companies. Those devices can then be controlled individually or mixed and matched in scenes within the app.  The new Dirigera hub is shorter and smarter than the old Trådfri gateway.  Inside the Dirigera hub are radios for Wi-Fi, Zigbee, and Thread, allowing it to act as a Thread border router once everything is switched on. Thread is a primary protocol used by Matter, and a border router is a bridge between a Thread network and a Wi-Fi network, the other protocol used by Matter. At a date sometime after the October launch, the Dirigera hub will be updated with an option to connect to your home internet router over 2.4GHz / 5GHz Wi-Fi, in addition to an Ethernet cable, which will be the only option on day one.  “Matter is enabling us to create a more seamless experience for our customers and will strengthen the interoperability in smart homes and between smart products,” says Töreman. “For us, this means lowering the thresholds for those looking into setting up a smart home or expanding their existing one since we know that some customers are having questions around what works with what.”  Nevertheless, Ikea is leaving some ambiguity about which of its many smart products will support Matter natively moving forward, declining to provide a list when asked. At this time, it’s only committing to making sure that “most of [Ikea’s] product range is Matter compatible in the future.” But it’s unclear if that means via the Dirigera hub, natively via software updates to existing gear, or via product replacements — or maybe all of the above. Töreman did say that Ikea is working to make sure their smart products “can be used in a seamless way” on a competitor’s platform. But that could also mean through existing Home Smart integrations with Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant, and Apple HomeKit.  Remember, Matter doesn’t cover all smart home devices yet. The current list is plugs, bulbs, switches, door locks, thermostats, blinds, sensors, garage door controllers, wireless access points and bridges, and TVs. That means Ikea’s low-priced Symfonisk series of Sonos-enabled speakers aren’t part of this discussion yet. Sonos did recently join the Connectivity Standards Alliance (CSA) that oversees Matter, which is at least a positive early sign.  The hub plugged into power and Ethernet alongside the overhauled Home Smart app and shortcut button.  Ikea is also planning to launch away-from-home remote access in the first half of 2023. Right now, the only way to access your Ikea devices from outside the home is by integrating your Ikea Trådfri gateway with Apple, Google, or Amazon’s smart home networks. Ikea says it’ll be developing its own cloud network to handle remote access instead of relying upon established networks.  Owners of the Trådfri gateway will not be able to use the new app coming in October, and the gateway won’t be updated to support Matter. However, the current gateway and Home Smart app will continue to be supported and receive security updates and patches for “at least three years,” according to Töreman.  There also won’t be any upgrade deals; Trådfri owners will have to pay full price for the Dirigera hub when it launches in October, but all your Ikea Home Smart devices should migrate over just fine. The final price for the Dirigera hub is still TBD, but it will cost more than the Trådfri gateway, which currently sells for $29 / €29. “It is a little bit more expensive since it also has more capabilities and more functionality,” says Töreman.  Ikea provided The Verge with a few recorded demos that show the Dirigera hub and new app interacting. They were recorded live by Töreman in her own home. We’re looking at prerelease software, so things might change slightly by the time the hub and app ship in October.  Setting up a new hub skips the QR code used in the past, opting instead for a new action button on the hub that must be pressed during discovery. Once found, you’re prompted to name your home and set up rooms — yes, the new app organizes devices around rooms, not groups of smart devices attached to steering devices like dimmers and switches. You can then add several controllers and smart devices into those rooms and manage how they interact with scenes.  Rooms can be given custom icons and colors, as demonstrated by the video above. Besides rooms, Ikea will continue to offer a managed devices section to sort the home by devices like lights and blinds, for example.  The new app improves the tutorials that can be clicked (or ignored), showing each step the user must take to add new devices. They even show the pace that actions must be taken to remove any guesswork from the process of resetting devices, for example. Product animations now feature rich illustrations to depict things like blind height and bulb brightness in order to help users fine-tune scenes in order to create the desired atmosphere.  For all the emphasis on the new app, Ikea isn’t abandoning its four-interface approach to its Home Smart ecosystem: the app, smart shortcut buttons to trigger automations, remotes, and voice control. “When we look at the smart home, we see inclusivity being really fundamental,” says Block. “It shouldn’t be only for the tech-interested people, it should be for the parents, the grandparents, children, but also for guests.” Voice control still requires integration with Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant, and Apple HomeKit, as it’s not built in to the new Dirigera hub.  Ikea seems to be on the right path with Dirigera and the overhauled Ikea Home Smart app. They strike a good balance of catering to first time smart device owners without slowing down the process too much for experts who already own dozens of Ikea devices. But we won’t know for sure until we get our hands on a review device and new app to see how they work with existing Ikea Home Smart devices — and then later with those elusive Matter-compatible devices.  But for anyone who’s ever been frustrated by Ikea’s Trådfri gateway, now at least you’ve got some hope to cling to and a rough timeline to plan your angst around. |

## Matter: what you need to know

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| With this week’s announcement that the smart home standard Matter has finally launched and the possibility that we could see Matter devices arriving any day now, I wanted to round up answers to some of the most common questions I’ve heard in the last few days.  If you have no idea what Matter is, my explainer on Matter is the place to start. But if you have more specific questions, the answers should be here. If you just want to know what devices will work with Matter, we’ve covered that in another blog, which we’ll update as new products get announced.  There’s still a lot we don’t know about Matter, and we won’t know until we get Matter-enabled products in our homes and the apps and ecosystems are updated. But there are plenty of things we do know, as well as some stuff we can speculate on.  Last week, I attended the CEDIA Expo, where I hosted a panel on Matter and interviewed representatives from Google, the Connectivity Standards Alliance (CSA), Yale, and Z-Wave, many of whom have been involved with Matter from the beginning. I posed these questions to them, as well as researched answers from published materials to help you understand what the launch of Matter means to your smart home today.  Matter is a new language for smart home devices. Once your smart door lock can easily talk to your smart speaker or your smart light switch can communicate smoothly with your thermostat, the hope is that the connected home will become less complicated.  “Over the last 10 years, there has been an organic growth of the smart home that’s created a lot of challenges,” says Kevin Po of Google Nest. “One of those is that these devices can’t all speak the same language. With Matter, we have a chance to get them all talking the same language.”  Matter is like hitting a big reset button for the smart home, laying a foundation from which a smarter, more interoperable home can grow.  There are already so many smart home protocols. Why do we need another one?  While, technically, Matter is a smart home interoperability protocol, it’s not an entirely new protocol. Matter is an application layer over existing protocols Wi-Fi and Thread. It’s open source, not proprietary, and it works over your local network, so it doesn’t rely on the cloud.  With Matter, instead of using two or three separate apps and connecting their cloud service back-ends to get your smart plug to turn on your lamp when you unlock your front door, that plug and lock can chat directly with each other, and you can set up the automation using one Matter Controller app.  Matter is not replacing existing protocols. Bluetooth, Zigbee, and Z-Wave will still be part of smart homes (and Bluetooth LE is used for adding devices to Matter). Any smart home gadgets you have that use these technologies should be able to be bridged into Matter (more on this in a bit).  Why are all these competitors on board? What’s in it for them?  Matter was developed initially by a number of big companies in the tech space, including Apple, Google, Amazon, Samsung SmartThings, and Comcast. There are now over 280 companies on board — the list is like a who’s who of IoT. But why did they all decide to work together?  The smart home wasn’t developing the way many had hoped. There were major pain points that were making it hard to grow and expand. Reliability, connectivity, setup, and “the multi-platform problem” were the key areas Michele Turner of Google identified in my interview with her earlier this year. The early promise of seemingly limitless growth had faded in the face of complexity and user frustration. The big tech companies and the hundreds of IoT device manufacturers saw this bottleneck and realized they needed to work together.  You can ask Siri to control your Nest thermostat and turn on your Fire TV — if you live in that kind of crazy, Frankensteinian home  Since I started to cover Matter, I have heard the phrase “a rising tide lifts all boats” repeatedly. Once the smart home is easier to set up and use, there will be more people buying devices, which is something every company wants to see.  Google has announced its Nest speakers and smart displays will be Matter controllers.  Will Matter mean there are more smart home devices?  Before Matter, device makers had to either pick a protocol to work over or develop several different models or integrations to give customers choice. This was harder and more expensive for them and wildly confusing for us.  Kevin Kraus of lock manufacturer Yale told me, “We’ve developed over a dozen modules for different platforms to make our locks work with them. The promise of Matter is I only have to create one module.”  He points out there are plenty of companies that today only make a product for Z-Wave or Zigbee or Bluetooth because it costs them too much to try and diversify. Now, all those manufacturers will have the option to pick one protocol that is intended to work with every platform. “If Matter delivers on that promise, that goes a huge way to solving that problem and bringing many more manufacturers into the fold,” he says.  Eve, for example, chose to work just with Apple HomeKit, developing only Bluetooth and Wi-Fi devices for that platform. With Matter, the company plans to expand to more platforms.  The downside is Matter will only work with a small number of device categories at launch. These are smart light bulbs and fixtures, smart plugs and switches, smart thermostats and other HVAC controls, smart shades, smart sensors, connected locks, and media devices, including TVs.  But the CSA is already working on new device types, including security cameras and robot vacuums. “This is just Matter 1.0,” says Michelle Mindala-Freeman of the CSA. “There’s a whole backlog of things — device types, capabilities — that [is being] worked on for subsequent releases.”  If Matter uses Wi-Fi, does that mean my entire home is now on the internet?  No. Matter uses local networks in your home — Ethernet, Wi-Fi, and Thread (Thread is an IP- and mesh-based protocol) — and works entirely locally. Nothing is going to the internet or “the cloud” unless you use a Matter Controller or device app that talks to the cloud. The main reason to do this will be for controlling your home remotely when you are away or for connecting to cloud-based services, such as music streaming or voice assistants.  Security is part of the Matter SDK, as well as data privacy principles. The CSA has published a white paper that goes into specific details, but the concept is built around trusted devices, trusted controllers, and private communication.  What is a Matter Controller?  A Matter Controller is how you control Matter devices in your home. It’s the brains of the system. Like a Thread border router, controller functionality can be built into many devices, and you can have multiple controllers.  We already know that devices like Amazon Echo and Nest Hub speakers and smart displays will be controllers. Controllers can also be Thread border routers, but they don’t have to be.  Apple’s HomePod Mini is a Thread border router and will be a Matter Controller.  A Matter controller can also be a bridge or hub; Samsung’s SmartThings hubs, TVs, and appliances will be controllers, as will Apple’s HomePod Mini. It’s also possible that bridges and hubs from manufacturers like Philips Hue and Aqara could be controllers (Aqara has said it will update its M1S and M2 hubs to Matter).  Finally, Matter-enabled smartphone apps — such as Apple Home, Google Home, Amazon Alexa, or Samsung SmartThings — are also controllers. These will be where you set up routines and automations in your smart home. The companies listed have all said their apps will be Matter Controllers, but there will likely be many more options.  Will I need a bridge or a hub to run Matter?  Matter doesn’t require a central bridge or hub. Instead, it allows devices to talk directly to each other — either over Wi-Fi or Thread — which are then managed by a Matter Controller.  Thread devices do require a Thread border router to route communications from Thread devices to Wi-Fi devices. Thread border routers are already in a lot of common smart home devices — from Wi-Fi routers to smart speakers to smart lights — and we’ll likely see more soon.  Isn’t a Thread border router just a bridge?  “With bridges and hubs, there’s a translation that happens; they see the data sent to them and then translate it from one environment to the other,” says Google’s Po. “A router only ‘routes’ data. It doesn’t translate or even see the packages it’s transferring.”  Thread is also a mesh network, and you can have multiple Thread border routers in your home to strengthen the network. If one stops working, another can pick up the slack. That is not currently the case if your Zigbee or Z-Wave bridge or hub stops working.  Eero Wi-Fi routers are Thread border routers, too.  Will my existing smart home devices get upgraded to support Matter?  This is going to depend on the manufacturers. Many, including Ikea, Philips Hue, Yale, Sengled, Tuya Smart, Cync, Aqara, Wiz, Wemo, Schlage, TP-Link, and Eve, have said some or all of their existing compatible products will be upgraded to Matter. How that will happen will vary depending on the device.  If, like Philips Hue or Aqara, the products rely on a bridge or hub, it may be possible for that device to receive an over-the-air firmware update and bring all the lights and devices connected to it into Matter. Alternatively, a company may decide to release a new bridge or gateway to bring existing devices into Matter — which is what Ikea has done.  “An upgradeable or a new gateway that is Matter compatible will enable Z-Wave and Zigbee devices to be recognized as though they are Matter devices,” says Mitchell Klein of the Z-Wave Alliance. “And not only existing devices in people’s homes but all the devices still on the store shelves and in manufacturers’ warehouses.”  It’s also possible we’ll see Matter bridges released that can translate communications from multiple ecosystems. Silicon Labs has developed Unify SDK, a software and hardware solution for bridging Zigbee and Z-Wave into Matter. This “bridge” doesn’t have to be another little white box; it could be built into devices like a thermostat, says Klein. Infineon has announced several Matter SoC solutions for device makers, and other chip makers are following suit.  Some individual devices will require hardware changes to be Matter-compatible. Eve’s smart plugs and Yale’s locks are two examples — Yale using swappable modules for its locks and Eve adding Thread radios to many of its devices. However, Matter works over Wi-Fi and Thread, so some products might be upgradeable with just an over-the-air update.  Amazon and Google have said their existing smart speakers and displays will be upgraded this way, and we should hear more about other companies’ plans now that the final spec is out.  Will Matter make it easier to buy new devices?  Yes. That’s sort of the whole point. If a device works with Matter, it will have the Matter logo (which looks like a stick person in bikini bottoms). That’s your sign it will work in your smart home.  The other promise is simple setup. Matter devices will pair directly to your smartphone — no app needed, as Google demonstrated this week. Apple and Samsung have also got programs in place to enable this on their smartphones and tablets. Once the device is paired to your Matter network, then you can choose which app you want to control it through.  The new Google Home app will be a Matter Controller and can control both Matter and non-Matter devices.  Does this mean I can just use one app to control my whole home?  Yes and no. All Matter devices will work with all controller apps — because Matter has something called multi-admin control built in. They can also be controlled by more than one controller. But devices may not have access to all their features through that app.  For example, at launch, Matter won’t support more advanced features, like energy monitoring in a smart plug or complicated scene control for smart lights. So, if you wanted to set up energy monitoring or have your colored smart bulbs pulsate with the shades of your football team, you would need to use the devices’ app or an app that supports the functionality you want. At least for now.  Can I use non-Matter and Matter devices in the same smart home routines?  It depends on what each ecosystem allows, but Amazon, Apple, and Google have all publicly stated they will fully integrate with Matter. Samsung has been less clear. “In the Google Home app, Matter devices will sit alongside the ones that you’ve already connected with through the Works with Google program and work together,” confirms Po.  Can I use Apple’s Siri to control my (new) Nest thermostat and turn on my Amazon Fire TV?  The big selling point of Matter from day one has been multi-admin control — that you can use any app, any ecosystem to control any device — including with voice control using any voice assistant. But this requires each Matter Controller manufacturer to allow it.  “Matter provides common controls, but beyond that are customizations.”  “It depends on how different product manufacturers and platforms choose to integrate the Matter protocol,” says Google’s Po. “We’re wholly committed to Matter. So that’s why we’re updating the [new] Nest thermostat to be a Matter device. And it will be controllable by Matter controllers if other companies choose to implement the micro-controller functionality into their devices.”  So, if Amazon, Apple, and Google all enable this feature, then yes — you can ask Siri to control your Nest thermostat and turn on your Fire TV — if you live in that kind of crazy, Frankensteinian home. But that’s still a big “if.”  Will I be able to use devices in multiple ecosystems?  There will not be one Matter-branded app. Instead, you will pick a platform to run your Matter home on. That could be Apple Home, Google Home, Amazon Alexa, Samsung SmartThings, or another ecosystem or app yet to be announced as a Matter Controller.  Those companies will all compete to get you to use their apps by offering better or different experiences. “Matter provides common controls, but beyond that are customizations,” says Po. “Ecosystems will want new ways to show the benefits of their user experiences. New features built on top of Matter.” This is that smarter, more interoperable home we were talking about at the beginning.  But because all Matter devices speak the same language, you should be able to use them in different ecosystems at the same time or switch between platforms at will. How exactly these “flows” will happen isn’t known yet. And, if smart home companies are anything like cellular carriers, there may be roadblocks one way and lots of incentives the other way. The key point here is that you are no longer locked into one smart home ecosystem, and that can only be a good thing.  Should I be excited or skeptical about Matter?  Both. Matter is a big change for the smart home that has made a lot of big promises. But it’s also been a big challenge, judging by the number of delays. Mindala-Freeman of the CSA stressed to me that the original vision of Matter is still in place — in terms of how transformational it could be for the smart home. But she says there is still a lot of work to be done and that the release of Matter 1.0 is just the beginning. |

# Food Delivery App

## Food delivery service Deliveroo has arrived in Qatar

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| Deliveroo announced its launch in Qatar, giving access to a diverse range of local and international restaurant choices, along with a fast and reliable delivery service for consumers. The award-winning food delivery service has kicked off with operations in central Doha, The Pearl-Qatar and West Bay and plans to expand throughout the city. To celebrate this milestone expansion into a new Middle Eastern market, Deliveroo is offering free delivery from restaurants that are available during the launch period.  Qatar is Deliveroo’s third market in the Middle East after the UAE and Kuwait, where the company has performed strongly. Deliveroo currently operates in Australia, Belgium, France, Hong Kong, Italy, Ireland, Netherlands, Singapore, and the United Kingdom.  In its mission to become the definitive online food company, Deliveroo has partnered with a range of the nation’s best-loved global restaurants in Qatar, including Shake Shack, Jollibee, Subway, Pinkberry, Nando’s, Tim Hortons, Wendy’s, Cinnabon, Caribou, and Costa Coffee.  The platform will also host a range of homegrown concepts, such as Flow Specialty Coffee, Poke District, Graze, Brisket, and Crab Pot Seafood. Partnering with Deliveroo helps local brands’ businesses grow and will support Qatar’s growing F&B industry.  Customers ordering their favourite food from Deliveroo will have the option to use multiple payment methods, including Apple Pay, Credit/Debit Cards and cash. Customers will also be able to tip their riders on the app and 100% of tips will go to riders.  Helping restaurants grow and innovate  Deliveroo has a global track record of helping restaurants grow and innovate in the food sector. This includes:  Support for local restaurants: Deliveroo will be a major boost to restaurants across Doha, who will be able to reach new customers and grow their businesses through online delivery. Many restaurants who partnered with Deliveroo in other markets saw their revenue increase as a result. Deliveroo provides restaurants with valuable insights and world-class technology to help partners to grow their own business.  Bring a track record of expert operations: Deliveroo has invested in developing world-leading technology and efficient operations to provide customers with the highest level of service. Deliveroo’s operations are driven by technology and machine learning, including a dispatch algorithm to match riders with customers’ orders and deliver a quick, reliable service.  Increased choice for customers: Deliveroo’s launch in Qatar will enhance competition and the overall marketplace to the benefit of Qatari consumers, providing them with a wider range of choices between food delivery apps and a wider selection of restaurants to choose from.  Deliveroo has appointed Keshav Jayant as Country Manager for the Qatari market. Jayant has proven experience in leading global delivery platforms in Qatar as well as India. Jayant will use his extensive experience in the industry to ensure that customers in Qatar are provided with the best food delivery experience in the city.  Keshav Jayant, Country Manager, Deliveroo Qatar said: “Launching in Qatar is a big step towards our goal of being the definitive food company. Qatar has a rich food culture and a growing food and beverage sector. There is an opportunity for us to bring our unique service to the market and offer consumers a great selection of food and brilliant delivery experience. We look forward to supporting our restaurant partners by ensuring we are the best delivery partner.”  Will Shu, Founder and CEO of Deliveroo said: “Deliveroo is all about bringing people amazing food whenever and wherever they want it and I am delighted that we are now launching in Qatar. We are excited to bring our expertise and our innovation to Qatar to ensure that people have access to the best price, selection and service with Deliveroo.”  Customers in Doha can now download the Deliveroo app to begin ordering their favorite food and discovering new restaurants, with free delivery across all restaurants during the launch period. |

## Easypaisa to Launch Food Delivery Apps in Collaboration with Blink

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| Easypaisa, Pakistan’s leading digital-first payments platform, now offers food services through its partnership with Blink. This partnership will provide Easypaisa users with a unique in-app experience, enabling them to access multiple food apps and make secure digital payments through the Easypaisa payment layer.  The Mini App platform provide users access to their favorite apps within Easypaisa. The platform provides a one window solution catering to multiple lifestyle choices of our users with a seamless onboarding and payment experience.  The Burger Lab mini app, integrated into Easypaisa, is launched in partnership with ‘Blink’ – a commerce enablement platform for restaurants, supermarkets, and retail. Easypaisa users nationwide can avail these services and enjoy exclusive discounts.  Easypaisa to Launch Food Delivery Apps in Collaboration with Blink  This is an important development towards Easypaisa’s goal of revolutionizing the digital payments landscape of Pakistan with innovations to facilitate its customers not only with digital payments, but with a range of quality services.  The launch ceremony was attended by Omar Moeen Malik, Business Head – Easypaisa, and Syed Sair Ali, CEO Blink, along with other team members to recognize and celebrate the landmark collaboration between digital giants.  Commenting on the development, Omar Moeen Malik stated: “We are the fastest growing platform that operates on Open APIs and mini apps where any developer or third party can integrate their services into. With our partnership with Blink, customers will get access to various food apps, providing them a one-stop solution where they can gain access to various food options. Through collaboration and technology, we are committed to provide an unmatched user experience to millions of Pakistanis.”  Expressing his views on the initiative, Syed Sair Ali, stated: “At Blink, we have always taken the growth of our partners as our goal. If Blink is helping its brands in getting more direct orders, we are moving towards our goal. With this partnership, we are connecting Blink’s partner restaurants to one of the largest digital user bases in Pakistan through Easypaisa mini apps.”  With more than 10 million customers using the Easypaisa app every month, the platform offers a very strong customer base to any service that wants to integrate. Easypaisa is committed to transforming Pakistan into a cashless and financially inclusive society through the power of collaboration and technology. |

## DoorDash Aims to Outcompete Rivals With SMB Perks Program

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| As order aggregators compete to win business from restaurants, food delivery leader DoorDash is rolling out a discounted benefits-packed program aimed at easing the burden on small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs).  The aggregator announced Monday (Nov. 7) the debut of its new Merchant Benefits offering, which includes six partnerships with external businesses to offer tools, perks and more to restaurants and their staff.  “The economic fluctuations that come with running a small- to medium-sized business challenge employers in many ways, including being able to provide affordable benefits to staff,” Christopher Payne, president and chief operating officer at DoorDash, said in a statement. “Given our vast network of merchant partners, we’ve negotiated these benefits on their behalf who would otherwise face a steep surcharge, eliminating a barrier to growing teams to their full potential.”  The partnerships include plans from cash-pay healthcare marketplace Sesame, discounted wellness offerings from breathing exercises app Breathwrk, free trials of recruiting and staff management platforms Landed and 7shifts and deals on education programs.  “Many dining rooms across the nation are struggling to fully reopen due to them being unable to staff appropriately,” Jordan Boesch, founder and CEO of 7shifts, said in the news release. “We’re proud to partner with DoorDash to help operators improve efficiency and expand access to our team management platform.”  The announcement comes as restaurant aggregators, with their nearly interchangeable business models, compete for acquisition and loyalty every step of the way — hiring drivers, attracting consumers, and in this case, building relationships with restaurants.  Take, for instance, Uber Eats, No. 2 in the country, which announced earlier in the fall that it is offering new self-service signups to integrate with popular point of sale (POS) systems Toast and Clover, simplifying the process to take “just a few clicks.” Through this move, the company aims to woo restaurant operators struggling with labor challenges who are frustrated with the friction typically associated with managing their tech suites.  Grubhub, meanwhile, is looking to attract merchants with the promise of additional revenue streams via virtual restaurants, enabling them to add these delivery-only brands to their existing accounts.  “Virtual restaurant concepts are more popular among restaurant operators than ever before,” Marnie Boyer, vice president of diner acquisition at Grubhub, told PYMNTS in a June interview. “More restaurants have tapped into the concept because it gives operators the opportunity to test additional, delivery-only menu concepts with little financial risk.”  With these offerings, aggregators hope to prove their value to restaurants in spite of the drawbacks of the model, with merchants paying these delivery services a commission and losing the opportunity to access their customer data when sales come in via third-party channels. Additionally, many consumers end up loyal to the aggregator itself rather than the restaurants on the platform.  On the flip side, while some consumers prefer to order from restaurants directly, others prefer to use aggregators. Research from PYMNTS’ 2022 Restaurant Friction Index, which drew from a survey of more than 2,100 U.S. consumers, found that 63% of aggregator users opt for third-party ordering because it is easy and convenient. Plus, one in three specifically like the in-aggregator ordering and payment experience.  Consequently, as independents weigh the pros and cons of the third-party model, aggregators are doing everything in their power to tip the balance in their favor, promising that they can meet merchants’ needs in ways not offered by their competitors. |

## Joanna’s Take: The future of food delivery apps hangs in the balance

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| Restaurants are creating their own technology platforms and investing in self-delivery, while third-party delivery companies are expanding more into tech solutions and operations  The rise of the third-party delivery platform as an essential restaurant partner was swift and near-absolute. Just a few years ago, it was newsworthy whenever a restaurant chain announced a partnership with DoorDash, Grubhub, or Uber Eats, and it was not unusual for delivery companies to boast exclusive partnerships with major brands like Yum and Wendy’s.  But in a post-pandemic world where delivery is the life blood of the restaurant industry, the exclusive partnerships have mostly disappeared as restaurants realize the need to invest in delivery in any way they can to keep up with consumer demand. Now, operators like Domino’s are seen as outliers for resisting third-party delivery, and for Domino’s, that business decision has cost them during the current labor crisis.  The third-party delivery platform’s ascension to power has not been without its bumps in the road. Since the start of the pandemic, local governments like those in New York City and Chicago have pushed back on delivery fees of up to 30% by instituting fee caps, decisions that Grubhub, DoorDash and Uber have tried to fight in court. Over the past two-plus years of the pandemic, the third-party delivery giants have been sued for everything from anti-trust violations to deception and unfair business practices.  As delivery platforms face a growing pile of lawsuits and decelerating sales (Grubhub just reported a 5% decline in orders last quarter), coupled with the expansion of DIY delivery solutions and tech stacks, is the era of third-party delivery dominance coming to an end?  I argue that these platforms aren’t going away anytime soon; they’re just changing with the times.  The model of restaurants shelling out 30 cents for every dollar that they make from a delivery order is not sustainable. But it’s also naïve to think that Grubhub, DoorDash and Uber Eats will just quietly go the way of handwritten order tickets, especially when they’ve become such a crucial part of how customers experience restaurants. While there are smaller platforms out there, like Black & Mobile, and operator-run delivery alternative Loco Co-Op, the mainstream delivery apps are still the easiest place for customers to scroll through an endless list of food options and order a meal in one place.  But delivery apps can’t just fall back on their ubiquity; they are at a crossroad in the industry and they know it. That’s why “the big three” delivery platforms (with Postmates customers absorbed into Uber) are expanding their toolbox. Over the past year or so, we’ve reported on new features and options from these companies, from alcohol and grocery delivery to direct ordering and tiered pricing structures for operators.  Now, they’re even beginning to dip a toe into operations. In the past week, Grubhub announced an original virtual restaurant concept, MasterChef Table, that will begin offering delivery around the country, and DoorDash opened a hybrid ghost kitchen/food hall in Brooklyn as the latest DoorDash Kitchens Project.  When asked about DoorDash’s strategy with expanding its repertoire, Ruth Isenstadt, senior director of DoorDash Kitchens, said:  “DoorDash knows there is not a one size fits all solution to supporting restaurant partners in their off-premise growth. Our goal is to provide the best end-to-end technology, products and services that allow our partners to grow, operate and expand.”  She added: “This is why we’ve continued to adapt and innovate to meet the needs of restaurant partners: one of the innovations being DoorDash Kitchens to support restaurant partners looking to grow their business without signing a lease to open a new brick and mortar location.”  While DoorDash’s food hall-esque Brooklyn commissary kitchen won’t have original concepts, it would not be surprising if the delivery platform launches its own restaurant brands and Uber follows suit to keep up with Grubhub.  On the other side of the spectrum, as delivery platforms begin experimenting with operations, restaurants are becoming adept at investing in or developing digital technologies of their own.  From Stratis Morfogen’s AI-powered, modernized automats found at Brooklyn Dumpling Shop to Portillo’s tech-backed self-delivery system, operators are becoming nimbler in the digital world. The old days of separation of church and state, where operators stick to the kitchen and either resist the wave of tech-forward digital operations or solely rely on external vendors are waning.  Moving forward, this will mean that the stronghold delivery companies have on the restaurant industry will loosen as the industry adjusts. The best-case scenario for delivery companies would be to keep finding new ways to expand their portfolio of capabilities, whether that’s through alcohol and grocery delivery or by operating virtual food halls and strings of ghost kitchens. In the age of convenience, restaurants will need all the help they can get to keep up with the on-demand crowd. |

# Marketplace app

## PrettyLittleThing Marketplace app: Greenwashing or a step forward?

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| In what appears to be a move away from fast fashion, PrettyLittleThing have launched an app which will allow customers to re-sell their old clothes. Earlier this week, the fashion giant announced Indiyah Polack - one of this year's Love Island finalists - as the first PLT Marketplace ambassador.  The 23-year-old will be selling some of her own outfits on the site, and in a statement said the app's focus on re-wearing and re-selling was "something that's important to [her]". Some have seen it as a positive move from the brand, which might encourage more young people to shop second hand. But there has been a backlash, and many have accused PLT of "greenwashing" - marketing designed to make customers believe your company is doing more to protect the environment than it really is. Former Love Islander Brett Staniland - who refused to wear fast fashion on the show - has protested outside a PrettyLittleThing show. Brett Staniland, who was on Love Island last year, agrees. Even before his time on the show, the 28-year-old model has taken a stance against fast fashion. While on the series, he refused to wear clothes from the show's then sponsor, I Saw It First. Last year, he protested outside a PrettyLittleThing catwalk show put on by the brand's creative director and fellow former Islander Molly-Mae Hague. Brett tells Radio 1 Newsbeat that he thinks PLT are putting the onus on consumers to be more environmentally friendly.  "When I saw the announcement, it was a massive eye roll," he says.  "It was interesting for me to see PLT announcing that this is how they're going to be more ethically responsible.  "But they were essentially just placing all the responsibility on the consumers."  Fashion consultant Ronaé thinks PLT has to do much more to make meaningful changes  Ronaé Fagon, a 30-year-old fashion consultant, says the app doesn't do anything to tackle wider issues within the industry, such as working conditions - something PLT's parent company Boohoo has faced criticism over.  "Unless they go deeper and deal with the actual issue of their overproduction, heavy use of oil-derived materials, exploitation of workers in their supply chains and quality of their garments, it's not even scratching the surface," she says.  But, despite its critics, the site - which isn't just limited to PLT clothes - might encourage some shoppers to think about making more sustainable fashion choices.  TikTok influencer Victoria Wright, 26, says it's a "step in the right direction".  "Having someone like Indiyah champion it is great, because she's got an amazing fashion sense," she says.  "It'll encourage young people to get online and buy second hand, rather than go out and buy new."  TikTok influencer Victoria thinks the app will help to encourage more second-hand purchases  PrettyLittleThing said in a statement: "Our customers told us they want simple and easy ways to give their old clothes a new lease of life and make some money for themselves in the process.  "PrettyLittleThing Marketplace is a community platform that will allow people to do just that.  "We are all about making fashion more diverse and inclusive, giving our customers the creative freedom to express themselves.  "With the PLT Marketplace App, it is now even easier to join our'PLTLoved movement as we all play our part in reducing waste." |

## Stripe launches App Marketplace, scripts and tools incorporating third-party SaaS apps that work alongside Stripe

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| Stripe, the payments upstart now valued at $95 billion, has been launching a number of new products to expand beyond the API that helped make its name, to build out its position as a platform for financial services and related business infrastructure. The latest of these is making its debut today: App Marketplace, as the new service is called, is a new offering where Stripe will both provide access to third-party apps, as well as scripts created by app publishers, users and Stripe itself, that incorporate those apps with Stripe. It potentially represents its biggest leap yet away from payments.  The Marketplace is launching with 50 apps that Stripe’s customers are already using as part of their marketing, payments and business development stacks, such as DocuSign, Dropbox, Intercom, Mailchimp, Ramp and Xero. There will be more added over time, Stripe tells me.  Initially, scripts incorporating those apps with Stripe will be free to use — the aim is to get some critical mass around usage, so barriers are low — although given it’s a marketplace, and that it will try to encourage more third parties to build apps for that ecosystem, Stripe might in the future incorporate charging for some of those scripts. Third-party apps that are part of those scripts and are paid services, meanwhile, will charge customers directly if those users are not already subscribers. But as with the scripts themselves, Stripe might also, over time, also bring new payments on to its own platform as well.  And perhaps most interestingly of all, while initially the idea will be to create scripts for some of the most common usages, in theory those scripts can cover any kind of business flow that sits naturally with Stripe, even if it doesn’t involve Stripe services themselves.  “We have requirement in the app review process that it has to have real business functionality,” Bowen Pan, the head of product for Stripe Apps, said in an interview. “So it can’t just be, say, a quiz app. It has to be business focused. But it doesn’t have to have existing Stripe functionality. It can be a productivity workflow that helps with processing.”  The idea with the App Marketplace, Pan told me, came out of the observations that the company was making about how Stripe products are used: in short, payments do not come in a vacuum but are part of wider business services flows that could involve sales or marketing campaigns, customer support teams and the issuing of contracts or other agreements.  Up to now, customers typically have used those tools alongside each other, either building manual integrations or never integrating them at all. (If you’ve ever been on a call or interaction with customer support and have found yourself waiting many minutes for responses … this is typically one of the reasons why: They are looking through and updating multiple databases.)  The idea here is to provide ways to help speed all of that up — and of course make it more likely to keep people within the Stripe ecosystem to carry out all business activity.  The launch of the Marketplace is coming on the heels of a few other product launches that Stripe has made in recent months that have taken the company beyond the services that helped to make its name, namely an API that was largely used to make it easier for merchants and others taking card payments online to do so (even the company’s name, Stripe, is a reference to the magnetic strip on the back of payments cards). That has included making long-awaited strides into cryptocurrency; Connections, a Plaid-like service to help customers pull in financial data from bank accounts; and most recently an ETL product to funnel and analyze Stripe data more effectively in Snowflake and AWS Redshift warehouses.  To be fair, the company has for years been making small moves to expand it beyond payments into adjacent areas like tax calculations, money advances and even business incorporation. This new wave of tools however represents very large financial infrastructure plays that speak to how the company is looking to fully fill out its outsized valuation, these days perhaps an even more important task given what is happening both the public and private funding markets. |

## Stripe’s new apps marketplace brings third-party tools directly into Stripe

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| Payments processing and financial infrastructure giant Stripe has launched a new apps marketplace, designed to bring third-party accounting, analytics, CRM, marketing and esignature features directly into Stripe.  While Stripe has offered extensions for several years already, this only allowed businesses to transfer Stripe features and data into other products. Its latest offering works in reverse — it creates new possibilities for developers to build additional functionality directly in the Stripe Dashboard and addresses one of the “top requests” that Stripe said that it receives from customers.  Extensibility  While Stripe has emerged as a $95 billion juggernaut in the payments processing space, companies still need to use a suite of tools with Stripe as part of their day-to-day operations. For example, to issue refund notices, or manage customer support tickets. However, constant “context switching” — that is, opening and closing multiple different apps — can cause confusion, errors and slow everything right down.  At launch, the new Stripe Apps Marketplace will include more than 50 apps from companies such as Xero, Dropbox, Mailchimp, Ramp, DocuSign and Intercom, unifying many of the key tools that companies need to use as part of their payments and finance workflows.  By connecting the Mailchimp app, for example, a company can now automatically send a targeted message whenever a customer completes a purchase. Or with the Intercom app, customer service teams can view entire support and chat histories and respond to specific issues directly from the Stripe interface.  “With the Intercom app integrated into Stripe, our customers can investigate issues, answer payment queries, approve refunds and more from the Stripe Dashboard,” Intercom cofounder and chief strategy officer Des Traynor said in a statement.  It’s worth noting that the new Stripe Apps Marketplace enables developers to build both public-facing apps (i.e., apps that can be used by any Stripe user) and private apps for their own use-cases. This could be useful for displaying data from internal CRM or ERP systems within Stripe.  While Stripe is opening its apps marketplace today, app installations won’t be available for another few weeks. In the coming months and years, the company plans to expand the marketplace to include apps in languages other than English. |

## Aviation Marketplace FLYJETS Debuts Mobile App and New Scheduling, FLYCalendar and FLYGreen Features

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| NEW YORK--(BUSINESS WIRE)--FLYJETS, the innovative aviation marketplace and travel planning system, today announces the live launch of its mobile application and novel Automated Scheduling, FLYCalendar and FLYGreen features. FLYJETS is the first-ever charter booking engine to automate both outright charter availability and charter flights – or empty legs – on a point-to-point basis, anywhere in the world.  “FLYJETS' automated scheduling system creates a much less work-intensive, more scalable system for Aircraft Providers to publicize available inventory,” said FLYJETS Founder and Chief Executive Officer Jessica Fisher.  The FLYJETS system leverages automation and technology-enabled network effects to facilitate the most affordable charter rates available and enables travelers to take full advantage of “empty leg” discounts. The system functions as a two-sided marketplace and search engine: Aircraft Providers upload aircraft and availability information, and Flyers can select and book specific aircraft and routes in real time. The FLYJETS team provides 24/7 booking support and, as an IATA-registered travel agency, full travel-planning services.  “We anticipate that this new version release will provide tremendous value for our network members,” said FLYJETS Founder and Chief Executive Officer Jessica Fisher. “FLYJETS’ automated scheduling system creates a much less work-intensive, more scalable system for Aircraft Providers (operators, owners and managers) to publicize available inventory.”  FLYJETS’ FLYGreen system has been fully automated in conjunction with FLYRewards, so that when Flyers purchase carbon offsets, the additional FLYRewards received – above the amount granted with each successful booking – are automatically reflected in their mobile dashboards. FLYJETS intends to expand its automated FLYGreen offering to accommodate electric flight, sustainable aviation fuel (and SAF redemptions) and other green alternatives in the future.  The FLYCalendar feature functions as a volume aggregator to facilitate what FLYJETS refers to as “in-network empty leg match-ups” and group-booking opportunities.  “Upon successful match-up, each Flyer party typically saves 30 – 50 percent per charter, given the routing efficiencies simultaneously created for Aircraft Providers,” Fisher said. “Essentially, it’s a win-win for everyone.”  Often, when a charter aircraft is booked for a round-trip flight, the plane does not stay at the destination airport; rather, it flies to and from its "home base" location after passengers are dropped off. Thus, a "two leg" trip is often a "four leg" trip. This unlocks two additional one-way flights, which FLYJETS leverages to help flyers get to their destination in a faster, more affordable and more sustainable way.  FLYJETS’ membership is free, with no upfront payment required until booking. As always, users can directly book round-trip, one-way and group charters on available aircraft and featured charter routes. With each successful booking, FLYJETS members earn FLYRewards, or currency-equivalent points towards future flights, plus additional rewards in exchange for flying green via the FLYGreen program. FLYJETS’ FLYGreen and FLYRewards programs are fully automated in the mobile app and online, incentivizing travelers to help pave the way for a more sustainable and accessible air travel industry.  About FLYJETS  The FLYJETS application was designed to encourage access to air travel. By facilitating the transfer of information between and among users, FLYJETS seeks to promote access to the aviation and travel industries, and to encourage both the utilization of aircraft and build-out of individual and system-wide networks. With its new mobile app, FLYJETS users can post, search for, and book one-way and round-trip flights. Users are also able to bid on desired one-way and round-trip flights and/or buy them on the spot, as well as share itineraries with colleagues, family, and friends.  FLYJETS operates as a New York State benefit corporation, FLY I Corporation, with the core mission of doing well by doing good. The company seeks to deliver material positive benefits to business, society, and the environment, and to provide maximum shareholder value via stakeholder incorporation; all duties and responsibilities are directed to both shareholders and stakeholders. FLYJETS is also a pioneer in developing a green energy “subsidy” system whereby users who opt to use carbon offsets and/or fly with clean energy alternatives are rewarded with additional FLYRewards toward future bookings. The FLYJETS team provides both real-time booking support and, as an IATA-registered travel agency, full travel-planning services, including hotels and cars. Visit www.flyjets.com for more information. |