

Alexa Skill Builder's Guide

7 Tips for Building Standout Skills Your Customers Will Love



Seven Qualities of Top-Performing Alexa Skills

Browse through the [Alexa Skills Store](#), and you'll see the innovations of our developer community on display. Our public catalog features more than 25,000 skills that enable a rich variety of scenarios including hands-free smart device control, on-demand content delivery, immersive adventure games, and more. You've created natural and engaging voice experiences that are delighting customer. And you've pushed the boundaries of what's possible with voice to redefine how your customers interact with technology.

Now that you can [earn money for eligible skills](#) that drive the highest customer engagement, we know engagement is top of mind for many of you. To help you maximize the impact of your work, we analyzed our skill selection from the customers' perspective. What makes a skill engaging for customers? And what keeps customers coming back over time? To find out, we examined the skills that see the highest consistent customer engagement. And we learned that these top performers share seven common qualities:

1. The skill makes a task faster and easier with voice
2. The skill has an intuitive and memorable name
3. The skill sets clear expectations on what it can do
4. The skill minimizes friction
5. The skill surprises and delights customers
6. The skill delivers fresh content
7. The skill is consistently reliable

In this guide, we will dive deeper into each quality and provide guidance on how you can incorporate it into your skill. We will also share exemplary skills that you can explore and model after. Leverage these insights to build standout skills that your customers will love.



1

The Skill Makes a Task Faster and Easier with Voice

When designing a new skill, make sure it has a clear customer benefit. Your skill should make a task faster and easier with voice. The skill should offer a more convenient user experience than existing methods, be it a light switch or a smartphone app.

Smart home skills, especially those that control multiple smart devices, are a great example of an existing experience made better with voice. They take a known workflow that involves multiple applications and simplify the steps into a single voice command, making the tasks both faster and easier. These skills offer a clear value to the customer.

When choosing your voice project, start with the purpose, or what customers want to accomplish. Then determine the capabilities of your skill and the benefits of using the skill over other options. Make sure your skill has a clear purpose before you start building. Skills that seamlessly integrate into a customer's routine and provide value are especially popular.

Customers love [The Dog Feeder](#) skill because it helps simplify a daily task. Customers simply say, "Alexa, ask the dog if we fed her," and Alexa shares when the dog last ate, giving families an easy way to manage a shared task. The skill addresses a need in the customers' daily routine and provides value.

If you're adapting an existing experience for voice, take a voice-first approach to designing and building your skill. In other words, avoid taking a visual experience or an app-first experience and simply adding voice to it. Instead, reimagine the interaction and figure out how to make it faster and easier with voice. Unless you offer an option that is twice as easy as what's already available, customers don't have an incentive to leave the UX they already know and adopt a new habit.

Learn more: [Video: How to Choose Projects for Voice](#)

2

The Skill Has an Intuitive and Memorable Name

Once you've determined your skill's purpose, give it a great name. Your skill's name should help customers easily discover, understand, and remember your skill. If your skill name is longer and more difficult to say than a similar skill, you'll risk losing customers—even if your skill offers more functionality. Remember, customers prefer voice because it's our most natural form of interaction. So be sure to give your skill a name that's natural to say and easy to grasp.

Take, for example, [Daily Affirmation](#). The skill provides a new uplifting thought every day—just as the name suggests. For skills that deliver fresh content, specifying how often you'll update the content tells the customers when to come back for more.

Even skills with more complex customer offerings can have a simple and memorable name. [The Magic Door](#) is an interactive adventure game that takes customers through a magic door and into an enchanted forest. The name hints at many aspects of this sophisticated skill and is also easy to remember.

Once you've got an idea for your skill's name, say the invocation name out loud, just as a customer would. See if it's intuitive and easy to say. Let's take the example of the [Free Sleep Sounds skill](#).

The customer will say something like:

Alexa,	ask	Sleep Sounds	to play rain.
wake word	launch	invocation name	utterance

You can see that the invocation name speaks to the value of the skill, flows within the context, and will be easy to remember at bedtime.

Beta testers (or even friends or colleagues) can also help grade the strength of your skill's name. Ask them what they expect the skill to do based on the name alone. Use their responses to determine whether your skill name clearly articulates your skill's capabilities and value. After your skill is published, read the customer reviews to identify any gaps between the skill name and the skill experience.

Learn more: [Video: How to Interact with Alexa](#)

3

The Skill Sets Clear Expectations on What It Can Do

When customers first invoke your skill, aim to provide just the right amount of information so customers know how to move forward. Provide not enough information, and customers won't know what to do. Provide too much, and customers will get overwhelmed and leave. Finding the right balance is key to enabling your customers to seamlessly interact with your skill.

Then, when your users come back for a second visit, offer a different, abbreviated welcome. Since you've already introduced yourself, you can dive right in and pick up where you left off, just like you would with another person. When we talk to each other, our first conversation and our tenth conversation are quite different. That's because we grow more familiar with each other, and our conversations gain context from previous talks. The same should hold true for your skill's interaction with your customers.

For every interaction, keep Alexa's responses concise so that your users stay engaged and can easily follow along. Put your skill's responses to the one-breath test. Read aloud what you've written at a conversational pace. If you can say it all in one breath, the length is likely good. If you need to take a breath, consider reducing the length. For a response that includes successive ideas such as steps in a task, read each idea separately. While the entire response may require more than one breath, make sure your response requires breaths between, not during, ideas.

Once you've designed your skill, test your skill to make sure it works as you intended. Watch beta testers and customers try to use your skill and see whether you've presented the right amount of information to successfully guide them through the interaction.

Learn more: [Voice Design Guide: What Alexa Says](#)

★ **Try:** [Set Clear Expectations Using Our Code Sample](#)



4

The Skill Minimizes Friction

As you add capabilities to your skill, make sure you don't introduce unnecessary pain points or friction. Think through the entire interaction flow, and ensure your customers will know how to navigate from one step to the next. Remove any ambiguity that may hinder your customers from moving forward and getting what they're looking for.

One way to minimize friction is to only add account linking when you truly need it. Account linking provides authentication when you need to associate the identity of the Alexa user with a user in your system. It's a useful way to collect information that is very difficult to accurately recognize via voice, like email addresses (which often contain homophones like "one" and "1"). But account linking can also introduce friction for customers when they enable a skill as it prevents the process from being completed seamlessly via voice. Therefore, it should only be used when necessary, specifically when the resulting customer value offsets the risk of friction.

If your skill simply needs to persist data between sessions, account linking is not strictly required. The `userID` attribute provided with the request will identify the same user across sessions unless the customer disables and re-enables your skill.

Some information, like physical address, is now available via the [permissions framework](#). As the permissions framework grows, account-linking flows should be limited to authentication scenarios only and not personalization. If you use account linking in your skill, be sure to follow best practices to minimize friction and ensure a smooth customer experience.

Learn more: [10 Tips for Successfully Adding Account Linking to Your Alexa Skill](#)



5

The Skill Surprises and Delights Customers

In mobile and web design, it's important to provide a consistent customer experience every time. Layout, color schemes, and names always stay the same so users don't have to relearn the UI with each visit. But with voice, it's important to have variety. People may not mind scanning the same web page times over, but no one wants to have the same conversation time and again.

You can introduce variety throughout your skill to keep the interaction fresh. Think of all the different ways Alexa can welcome your customers, or the many ways Alexa can say "OK" (think: "Got it," "Thanks," "Sounds good," "Great," and so on). You can use these opportunities to inject variety, color, and humor to your skill. You can even prepare clever responses to customers' requests for features your skill doesn't yet support. By seizing these opportunities, you can make your interactions feel more natural, conversational, and even memorable.

You can also build engagement over time by remembering what your users were doing last. Storing data in [Amazon DynamoDB](#) allows you to add this memory and context to your skill. Persistence allows you to pause games or guide users through a step-by-step process like creating a recipe, tackling a DIY project, or a playing a game. For example, a game skill with memory enables customers to pause, come back, and pick up right where they left off.

★ **Try:** [Create a Welcome Message That Evolves over Time with Skill Usage](#)

Learn more: [Video: Implementing Persistence in an Alexa Skill](#)



6

The Skill Regularly Provides Fresh Content

As we've mentioned, customers expect variety in voice interactions. So it's no surprise that skills that provide fresh content drive more regular usage over time. Fresh content gives customers a reason to return to your skill over time, and when they do, they are rewarded with something new.

This is especially true of flash briefing skills, which are built around the premise of delivering fresh content. When flash briefing skills don't update as promised, customers tend to leave negative reviews.

However, the value of this quality doesn't just apply to flash briefing skills; other skills should also get regular content updates. For example, fact skills and trivia skills that don't evolve over time to offer new facts or questions don't tend to see consistent engagement. Users may love the experience you've built, but if your skill never evolves beyond a set of limited choices, they won't have reason to keep coming back.

[The Jeopardy! skill](#) is a model example of a skill that entices customers with fresh content. The skill serves up six new clues every weekday, giving fans reason to return five times a week.

When building your skill, establish a content workflow that enables you to quickly and easily add new content to your skill. One way to do this is to house your content in a database instead of hardcoding it into your skill to enable fast updates. Once you've set up a workflow, adhere to a schedule to make continued updates to your skill. Find ways to add fresh content and continue delighting your customers over time.

★ **Try:** [Keep Your Customers Engaged with Dynamic Content](#)





The Skill Is Consistently Reliable

Even the most compelling and delightful voice experience won't gain traction if it isn't available whenever customers ask. To ensure your skill is consistently reliable, configure a professional-grade backend for your skill.

Amazon Web Services offers several solutions that will help you improve the user experience and ensure dependability of your skill as it gains users and handles more intricate content. Try integrating [Amazon Cloudfront](#) to cache dynamic content and files that require heavy-lifting. This will improve your response time and provide better deliverability.

If you've built a top-notch skill, it will likely get noticed and highlighted in the Alexa Skills Store. So be sure your backend can support your skill's moment in the spotlight. Your backend should be able to scale properly to ensure high availability during high-traffic scenarios. If you're using [Amazon DynamoDB](#), set your tables' capacity for reads and writes per second to be much higher than your expected peak throughput. If your skill launches multiple AWS Lambda functions per skill invocation, check to see whether you are nearing the limits for function invocations. If you're getting close, you can request a [limit increase](#) to ensure scalability. To set alarms for unforeseen scenarios, you can use Lambda's built-in functionality to output logs to Amazon CloudWatch and trigger alarms based on the vents in those logs.

Once your skill is live, you can use [Amazon QuickSight](#) to visualize analytics you track in [Amazon Redshift](#). You can see how your skill is performing, fix user experiences that don't resonate, and double down on what works to make your skill even more impactful.

AWS Promo Credits: If you incur AWS charges related to your skill, you can apply for AWS promotional credits. Once you've published a skill, apply to receive a \$100 AWS promotional credit and an additional \$100 per month in credit. [Apply now](#)

Learn more: [5 Ways to Level Up Your Skill with AWS](#)

Build Engaging Skills Your Customers Will Love

Whether you're building a new skill or upgrading an existing skill, follow these tips to put your best skill forward. By building engaging voice experiences, you can reach and delight customers through tens of millions of devices with Alexa. And you can also enrich your skills over time to grow your expertise in voice design and evolve from a hobbyist to a professional.

It also pays to build highly engaging skills. Every month, developers can earn money for eligible skills that drive the highest customer engagement in seven eligible skill categories. [Learn more](#) and start building your next skill today.

We can't wait to see what you build next.

Alexa Skills Kit

The [Alexa Skills Kit](#) is a collection of self-service APIs, tools, documentation, and code samples that makes it fast and easy for you to add skills to Alexa. With ASK, you can leverage Amazon's knowledge and pioneering work in the field of voice design.

Additional Resources

[Voice Design Guide](#)

[Documentation](#)

[Shortcut: Start a Skill Now](#)

