

VIRTUAL ASSISTANT ALEXA BOASTS 1,000 'SKILLS': AMAZON

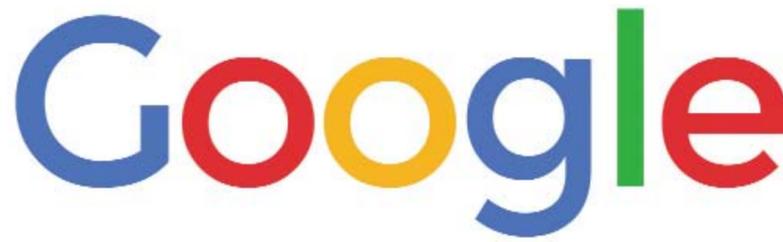
SAN FRANCISCO: Amazon on yesterday boasted that its virtual assistant Alexa is capable of 1,000 "skills," as the online retail giant bolsters defenses against rivals such as Google and Apple.

The Seattle-based company said in a blog post that the programs were developed specifically for the voice-commanded Alexa software used in Amazon devices such as Echo and Fire TV.

Amazon released voice-enabled wireless speaker Echo in late 2014, infusing it with virtual assistant smarts that enable it to answer questions or control linked devices upon command.

A kit lets outside software developers create "experiences," similar in concept to apps, for Alexa. Alexa director Rob Pulcini said tens of thousands of developers are learning about and crafting programs that introduce users "to the magic and simplicity of hands-free, voice-driven interactions."

Amazon is out to put Echo and Alexa at the heart of the connected home. Alexa's skills include selecting music, appointment reminders, checking bank balances, ordering food, summoning Uber



rides and more. Amazon has not disclosed sales figures for Echo, but the device appears to be having success in the market due, in part, to beating rivals out of the starting gate.

Google Home coming

Google last month unveiled a virtual home assistant device that will challenge Amazon Echo as the Internet giant laid out a future rich with arti-

cial intelligence. Google Home, about the size of a stout vase, will hit the market later this year, vice president of product management Mario Queiroz said at the opening of the Internet giant's annual developers conference.

Home devices will incorporate new Google virtual assistant software introduced by chief executive Sundar Pichai. "Our ability to do conversational understanding is far ahead of what other virtual

assistants can do," Pichai told a packed audience at the conference.

"We are an order of magnitude ahead of everyone else." Home devices combine machine learning, online search, voice recognition and more to allow people to get answers to questions, manage tasks, or control devices by speaking naturally, demonstrations showed.

Home will sync with Chromecast devices that allow remote control of televisions or stereo systems, and with "smart" devices made by Google-owned Nest and other companies. Google did not disclose pricing on Home devices. "Google Home could be a major force and could also dramatically decrease the sales potential of Amazon Echo," said analyst Patrick Moorhead of Moor Insights and Strategy.

Apple is expected to enter the market with a home assistant device of its own, perhaps unveiled at its annual developers conference taking place later this month in San Francisco, according to rumors swirling ahead of the event. — AFP

NEST CO-FOUNDER FADELL FLIES THE COOP

SAN FRANCISCO: Nest co-founder Tony Fadell said yesterday he was stepping out as head of the Alphabet-owned company to become an advisor to chief executive Larry Page.

Former Apple engineers Fadell and Matt Rogers founded Nest six years ago, launching with a thermostat that syncs to the Internet and learns from use patterns. Google acquired Nest in early 2014 in a deal valued at \$3.2 billion, and it later became a unit of a freshly-formed parent company called Alphabet.

Nest offerings have expanded to include smart home security cameras along with smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Nest has also become part of Alphabet's strategy to be a platform for devices to be connected and controlled in smart homes.

"Under Tony's leadership, Nest has catapulted the connected home into the main-

stream, secured leadership positions for each of its products, and grown its revenue in excess of 50 percent year-over-year since they began shipping products," Alphabet chief Page said in a statement.

Page hailed Fadell as a "visionary." The new boss of Nest will be Marwan Fawaz, an industry veteran who has done stints as an executive at Motorola Mobility and Charter Communications.

Fadell said that discussions about him stepping down as Nest chief began last year, and that he felt the company was being put into strong hands with Fawaz at the helm. "I have decided that the time is right to 'leave the Nest,'" Fadell said in an online post. He added that his new role as an Alphabet advisor should provide "more time and flexibility to pursue new opportunities to create and disrupt other industries." — AFP



LISTENING TO CUSTOMERS' REQUESTS, FANTASY WORLD UNVEILS 'THE EDGE' DEPARTMENT IN ITS AL RAI STORE

Kuwait: Fantasy World announced the launch of The Edge Department at its Al Rai store. The Edge stands for Eclectic Designer Gifting Excitements, it is the hub for the most innovative and unique gifting items targeted for adults. Fantasy World is known to be a trendsetter and market leader due to the international product range it offers.

Fakhri Al Balki, Fantasy World's Retail Manager, commented, "We have observed that as children run around looking for their favorite toys and trying out new ones, while parents and their adult siblings wait for the kid of their family. Initially they are excited to enter the store but it starts draining them down as time passes by. The Edge was developed to maintain the excitement of these adult siblings and parents by giving them an experience of the most unique gifting ideas, and offering them product ranges hand-picked from around the world which is not easily accessible in the local market. Initially, The Edge was only available at The Avenues. After customers' constant requests, Fantasy World now opened the division in its Al Rai store. This verifies our continuous efforts to listen and cater to our customers' wants."

The Al Rai store has a sentimental value to many customers, upon entering the store customers will experience a feeling of nostalgia, through the past 20 years the children that had been shopping as kids for their favorite toys, can come now to the very same store and shop as adults in Fantasy World's The Edge department and still experiencing the same excitement while shopping around for the most unique gifting ideas available at The Edge department.

Yousif Anabtawi, Fantasy World's Social Media Specialist, commented, "Products offered in this division are very unique, some are design-

er-made products, some technological-wonders, and some state of the art, they allow the gift giver to be remembered by the uniqueness of the product they have chosen as a gift. The Edge products are hand-picked from around the world keeping in mind the tastes of Kuwait."

Talking about products The Edge has some distinctive products like the CTX Virtual Keyboard and the FoneBud. CTX Virtual Keyboard is one of the most innovative products available. It projects a laser beam keyboard on any flat surface to transform it into an instant work station for your mobile. The laser keyboard can be easily connected to any smartphone, enabling the user to text at a faster rate on

WhatsApp, blogs, email and social media channels. The FoneBud is a Bluetooth device that aims to prevent individuals from placing their phones directly against their head. This product has a multi-functional purpose as it incorporates a power bank, remote for the mobile device camera, LED-light and an audible range detector in case an individual loses his/her phone.

Customers are invited to visit Fantasy World's Al Rai store to know more about new product releases featured in The Edge Department. Customers may also visit any of Fantasy World's social media platforms, Facebook (fantasyworld-toyskuwait), Instagram (fantasyworldtoys) and YouTube (fantasyworldkuwait).



KEY PLAYER IN SILK ROAD SUCCESSOR SITE GETS 8 YEARS IN US PRISON

SEATTLE: A Washington state man was sentenced Friday to eight years in prison for his role in helping the management of the successor website to Silk Road, an online black market where illegal drugs and other goods were sold.

Brian Farrell, who prosecutors say was a staff member for Silk Road 2.0, was sentenced by US District Judge Richard Jones in Seattle after pleading guilty in March to a charge of conspiracy to distribute heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine.

Farrell, 27, was arrested in January 2015 as trial was under way in the case of Ross Ulbricht, the creator of the original Silk Road, which authorities say Ulbricht ran under the alias "Dread Pirate Roberts." Ulbricht, 32, was sentenced in May 2015 to life in prison after a federal jury in Manhattan found him guilty on charges including distributing narcotics. Silk Road 2.0 was launched late in 2013, weeks after

authorities had shuttered the original Silk Road website and arrested Ulbricht.

Like the original website, Silk Road 2.0 allowed users to anonymously buy and sell drugs, computer hacking tools and other illicit items, using the digital currency bitcoin, authorities said. In November 2014, federal authorities in Manhattan announced they had shut down Silk Road 2.0 and arrested its alleged operator, Blake Benthall, who prosecutors say operated the website under the name "Defcon."

Prosecutors say Farrell was a key assistant to Benthall and was part of a small staff of online administrators and forum moderators, using the moniker "DoctorClu." In court papers, prosecutors said that during a search of his residence in Bellevue, Washington, in January 2015, Farrell said he worked as Defcon's righthand man. — Reuters

ANTI-ISRAEL BOYCOTT MOVEMENT SUFFERS A SLEW OF CYBERATTACKS

JERUSALEM: The international movement calling for a boycott against Israel on Thursday said its website was repeatedly attacked earlier this year and raised suspicions that Israel was behind the attacks.

The BDS movement released a report Thursday showing that its main website suffered six attacks in February and March. The denial of service attacks, which work by flooding a target website with bogus traffic, knocked out the BDS website for several hours at a time.

The report, compiled by nonprofit online security service eQualit.ie, said the attacks had a level of "sophistication and commitment" it normally does not see. It also noted that an unidentified Israeli human rights group had been attacked at the same time, indicating there was a "common adversary."

Assigning responsibility for cyberattacks is notoriously difficult and the report didn't

speculate on who might be behind the rogue traffic. In a statement, the BDS movement said the "advanced technology used in the attacks and the size of the botnets involved may show that Israel was directly involved" but it offered no hard evidence. Israeli cybersecurity expert Gilad Yoshi said such attacks do not cause serious damage, adding it was unlikely a government was behind them. "These are not high-level attacks," said Yoshi, an expert at the electronic defense training company CyberGym.

BDS calls for boycotts, sanctions and divestment from Israel in what it calls a nonviolent struggle against occupation. Israel says BDS' goal is to destroy the country, and it has identified the movement as a serious threat.

The Israeli government has earmarked funds for Israeli tech companies for digital initiatives aimed at gathering intelligence on activist groups and countering their efforts. — AP

GROUNDBREAKING TELESURGERY HOSTED BY GREAT ORMOND STREET HOSPITAL FOR CHILDREN

KUWAIT: Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children (GOSH) in London, one of the world's leading paediatric hospitals, recently hosted groundbreaking telesurgery performed by Mr Chien Wong.

When the Armenian EyeCare Project, a Californian NGO that has transformed ophthalmic care in Armenia since 1992, recently contacted Mr Wong about an urgent case of retinal detachment in a premature baby, Mr Wong was faced with a dilemma. "There was a baby that had a rapidly progressive retinal detachment and I couldn't fly out on such short notice. If the child had waited for me to go to Armenia, the opportunity to salvage vision would have been missed and the baby would have had irreversible blindness," Mr Wong explained. Instead, working with the ICT team at GOSH, Mr Wong was able to supervise the surgeons in Armenia using telesurgery.

"It is really quite remarkable that we are able to support a program like that from afar." Mr Wong commented on the telesurgery where he supervised surgery in real-time taking place over 3,500km away in Armenia. As part of the Armenian EyeCare Project, Mr Chien Wong, in collaboration with his colleague Dr Thomas Lee from the Children's Hospital in Los Angeles, has been training two highly experienced Armenian retina specialist consultants to perform complex vitreoretinal surgery on babies with retinopathy

of prematurity (ROP) and other potentially blinding retinal diseases. Since the launch of this national ophthalmic treatment centre in Armenia in 2014, Mr Wong has led and been training the surgical team on-the-ground, travelling to Armenia every three months.

Through the teleconference system at GOSH, Mr Wong was able to remotely supervise the surgeons via telesurgery. Mr Wong was given a

bird's eye view of the operating theatre, as well as seeing a live instantaneous video feed that mirrored the Armenian surgeons' view of the operation. At the same time, the surgeons in Armenia were able to see a live image of Mr Wong and talk to him as they went through the surgery. The surgery took three hours and Mr Wong was able to oversee the entire surgery in actual time. "It went very well indeed. It was a

highly complex operation, which has given the child the possibility of regaining useful sight, whereas without surgery visual loss was certain," Mr Wong explained.

The telesurgery was a ground-breaking moment for the EyeCare Project, as the Armenian surgeons had never performed surgery without an expert assisting them on-site. "It was a critical landmark moment in the history of the project and it was paramount for the child that they were able to receive essentially first-world cutting-edge surgical treatment for a rare condition in Armenia." The telesurgery was also a first for GOSH and was made possible by both hospital's ICT teams and the state-of-the-art technology available. Mr Wong praised the hard work of the ICT team for helping to set up the telesurgical link-up. "The set up worked very well with zero time lag and high definition resolution. ICT were fantastic at helping coordinate the entire set up within a very narrow time frame. A world class UK hospital truly at its best."

Mr Wong is a consultant at Great Ormond Street Hospital, Moorfields Eye Hospital and the Royal Free Hospital and is a world expert in paediatric vitreoretinal surgery, endoscopic vitrectomy in babies and young children, and paediatric retinovascular diseases. He also manages adults with vitreoretinal diseases. He is one of only two surgeons in the world with significant expertise in a new surgical technique for the treatment of

ROP, called endoscopic vitrectomy, and introduced this technique to GOSH in 2014, making GOSH one of only two hospitals in the world that can perform this sight-saving technique.

GOSH was the first hospital in the UK to establish paediatric ophthalmology as a subspecialty, recognizing that disorders affecting children's eyes are frequently very different to those affecting adults. The ophthalmology department at GOSH treats a wide range of ophthalmic problems including glaucoma, cataracts and neuro-ophthalmic problems and is one of the only hospitals in the country that can perform corneal graft surgery.

Great Ormond Street Hospital in London is recognized as one of the few truly world-class hospitals for children. As a global leader, GOSH has top clinical and research experts working every day to find new and better ways to treat children. While breakthroughs and medical expertise are essential to the treatment of patients, GOSH also places great emphasis on the support and care provided for children by nurturing an open and supportive atmosphere, ensuring that parents and patients are well informed and closely involved in the treatment process. Children receive the highest standards of care and attention from the expert team of medical and support staff during their stay at GOSH, and are always treated with respect, trust, concern and openness.



Mr Chien Wong.