

Technological theme

Question 1

Do individuals all need mobile phones to engage with and use the Amazon Echo Show? Many of my clients only have landlines.

Answer

They will need to have a mobile telephone number to set up all of the features on the Echo Show.

Question 2

What support did people participating in the project receive in relation to setting up and learning how to use the digital devices eg Echo Show? Has there been any feedback from those individuals having difficulties with connectivity and a lack of confidence and skills in using the devices?

Answer

For the duration of the project, there has been a comprehensive online support package available from Wavemaker, to support anyone with a device (as part of the project), who has experienced technical difficulties.

Question 3

Can people join zoom meetings using Alexa?

Answer

Currently you can't use Zoom on an Amazon Echo Show in the UK. It is in the pipeline, but not out yet. Amazon had released something for the commercial market which caused confusion. This new function should be coming this year, or so we've been promised. Zoom is currently available on the Facebook Portal device, and works well.

Question 4

We are in the process of setting up an exercise at home group with people aged over 65+ who are isolated, shielding, low mood etc. We have been given a grant from the Council of £3000 to buy products for our patients that don't have access to tablets etc or wifi. We are struggling to source items that are any good, does anyone have any ideas? Being able to show the older generation how to connect will bring some challenges, I think.

Answer

We found the Amazon Echo devices are a great gateway piece of technology, allowing anyone with little to no experience with technology to use one. They also offer a different user experience and perfectly allow for digital skills and confidence to build before users move on to using a smartphone, tablet or even a laptop or desktop computer.

Amazon is currently at the forefront of the smart speaker and digital assistant technology sector, and the devices are constantly being updated and improved. Furthermore there are numerous skills (apps) that cater for people's needs. This includes a lot of mindfulness skills and entry-level exercise skills such as chair based exercises (which are great for the elderly).

Finally, as the digital assistants are controlled with voice commands, and coupled with add-ons such as smart plugs and light bulbs, they are ideal for improving the independence of people with mobility challenges.

Health theme

Question 5

Did your project include allocating personal digital assistants to people living with a diagnosis of dementia?

Answer

The project did involve people with dementia, and the devices were found to be extremely useful in that scenario, e.g. the device will happily answer the same question many times over and will not lose patience as a relative or carer may!

Question 6

How can Alexa enhance the everyday life of someone with a Learning Disability?

Answer

We did trial the use of the Alexa with a group specialising in learning disability support and they have fed back to us that the recipients have found the devices incredibly helpful.

Question 7

These are all great for practical needs but what about the need for human connection? How can we link digitally to real life interactions for isolated and lonely people?

Answer

Nothing will ever replace human interaction and human contact, but devices such as these digital assistants can keep us connected and in touch with friends and loved ones. These can help us to feel less isolated, and hopefully allow us to seamlessly continue with face to face life when we can get back to normal after the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are numerous examples of the real benefits of video calling and being able to see somebody's face in real-time. We are also in an age where more and more cultural experiences are being streamed live or pre-recorded - examples of this are of the Royal Ballet, opera and other theatre shows.

Question 8

Are there any adapted versions of Alexa etc that support the deaf community or hard of hearing? I'm thinking BSL/subtitled integrated software...

Answer

At the moment there are no specific adapted versions of the device itself; however Alexa is one of the leading devices in which accessibility is more customisable. For example, for people with hearing difficulties you can slow down the rate in which the speech is delivered back to you, include subtitles, and even use it without speech [as the device also features a touch screen].

Users who have a visual impairment may benefit from additional accessibility options such as screen magnifier, colour inversion, tap to talk, and the ability to slow down the gap from the wake word "Alexa" to the response given. This also helps if you have a speech impediment.

Financial theme

Question 9

Is there a way to get an Alexa out to patients or would they need to purchase these themselves?

Answer

As part of our programme testing our viability, we have funded the deployment of these devices and have some reserves to extend this a little further if the recipient is resident in Staffordshire, until 31st March 2021. Going forwards we'd recommend that people investigate if a personal digital assistant might be funded by a 'personal health budget' sorted by the local health and social care system.

Question 10

How much are the devices roughly?

Answer

Echo Shows range in price depending on screen size and prices do vary depending on offers etc; currently (as at 2nd March 21) the Echo Show 5 is £39.99 and the Echo Show 8 is £64.99. The user does need their own Wi-Fi for the device to work.

Question 11

The first hurdle would be getting broadband connected... so many people still aren't hooked up - are there any initiatives coming from broadband providers to beat isolation?

Answer

From what we know, on a Local Authority level, different areas are looking at answers for this. As for providers, they simply must look at a way to address this.

Question 12

I have clients who have no internet and can't get it due to finances or signal. Are there any solutions for those to get them connected (e.g. help with cheap internet deals or phone data deals or dongles or hot spotting from phones)?

Answer

We have examples of installations where we used a dongle to provide the data. That does then provide a challenge when the data allowance runs out. Some Councils have set up community link points and you would be best to contact them for more info.

Question 13

Is there any support for people who live in deprived areas in regards to funding for devices / connectivity?

Answer

There may be a relevant, local organisation that can help the patient. For example we are supporting a local Link line organisation to deploy devices to underpin their offer of ongoing support focussing on befriending in the local community.

Question 14

Poverty plays an enormous part in loneliness and isolation. Did the project provide any financial support for those wanting to participate?

Answer

Other than the equipment and technical support, we did not provide any financial assistance.

Information Governance theme

Question 15

May I ask how Alexa and such adhere to GDPR?; i.e. keeping personal details safe and secure?

Answer

The Alexa devices are made by Amazon and they adhere to GDPR and all a user's details are kept safe and secure as for the owner of any personal digital assistant device.

No clinicians took responsibility for identifying recipients in our project, or for accessing information from the patient using Alexa. Thus we concluded that a data privacy impact assessment (DPIA) was not relevant as no NHS setting or staff were actively involved. However for another parallel digital transformation project, with pulmonary rehabilitation via Virtual Reality, where clinicians are involved actively with the patient we have an agreed DPIA signed by the local NHS Caldicott Guardian.

Question 16

If you store passwords, how secure is this?

Answer

The Amazon Echo allows users to create lists. Lists can be for shopping, to do, and as mentioned in the webinar, one person has even setup a password list. In terms of security, from the perspective of Amazon and the device itself - they follow all guidance, policies and protocols and are very secure. However, a user's data is only as secure as the password used to secure it. So should a user use the Amazon Echo to store passwords, then we would always recommend using an unique complex password form the Amazon account.

Furthermore, anyone with access to the speaker itself could ask "Alexa, what's in my Password list" so there is a loophole there. But providing you trust everyone who comes into your home, and the fact that they would not likely know to ask Alexa for passwords the risks are minimal. Also, just to note, should the device be stolen and then attempted to be connected to another wifi network [in order for it to work] then the owner's Amazon password would be required.

Question 17

How does Alexa make sure that the information given is from a reliable source?

Answer

Alexa will only respond from sources that Amazon have verified to be from reliable sources. Furthermore, it will also say where the information is from (for example, NHS Choices or WikiHow). It is important to remember that these devices are still relatively new in the grand scheme of things and are continually being improved and developed.

Question 18

How can we view this webinar again?

Answer

The link for resources and to view again, once it's uploaded is:

<https://www.digihealthwell.co.uk/si-webinar>

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