



## REVIEWS:

### Alexa: Play the News *Review of Amazon Alexa News Flash*

*Reviewed by Catherine Strong*

A plethora of research projects indicate more than half the population in Western countries don't follow the news. On the other side of the coin, however, are the estimated 25% who self identify as **News Junkies**.

These are our people. Another common finding of various polls is that the majority of news consumers turn to audio, because they don't have the time nor concentration to sit still to read or view the news.

Many of us are still under the bed covers when shouting to our voice-activated speaker to *play the news* while we are still just-thinking of getting up, the most popular one being Amazon Alexa.

Alexa can be programmed to play a series of five-minute news bulletins from dozens of reputable news outlets from around the globe, which sets you off in the day knowing all the important events. Of course, you can also program it to give you jokes, recipes, or religious messages; but for this article let's stick to news.

This review of Alexa's news feeds is formatted like effective feedback for students – first the negative feedback, followed by the positive feedback.

An annoying thing with news via Alexa is the news sites that simply use AI to read out some of their news stories. There is nothing more confronting than hearing a stilted, deadpan, bot voice reporting on “the mother's battered body...” or worse when it is all in a chirpy upbeat monotone. Human presenters are objective, but they do give some reverence in their voice when delivering sensitive news.

Another annoying thing is trying to find roundups of real news. Alexa lists well-known newspapers, but

often it is linked to their podcast, not a news bulletin. News junkies want a diet of the latest hard news, not a 15-minute discussion on the how to prepare for retirement. It seems some digital coordinators don't know the difference between “news” and “current affairs.”

It's also necessary to update your selection every so often as some news outlets change their style, or even stop providing anything.

The positive feedback, however, is that Alexa allows news junkies to be up to date with news quickly and from the news media companies they trust, or at least want to monitor.

Radio outlets are the best because they already produce audio news headlines which are automatically uploaded regularly. Obviously great are genuine multi-media news sources, the ones that always produce news in text, audio, visual, online.

Many news media websites now have a page dedicated to explaining step-by-step how to get their news on your Amazon Alexa system.

The best thing about the Alexa news flash routine is that the news junkie can customize what news they get, and in what order. For instance, I do mine geographically so the first few news bulletins are from the USA, the next is from Europe, then comes the Middle East, followed by one Asian and two New Zealand news outlet. I top it off with the local weather report.

*Dr. Catherine Strong is an independent news media educator, now based in New Zealand, who openly admits to being a life-long news junkie.*