Crossing the Digital Divide Volume 20
"Open Sesame"
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for the Observer

Siri, how hot was it today? Google, what time does Gravier's close? Echo, order an Uber.

If you have an iPhone or an Android powered smartphone, you probably got an answer to the first two questions above. If you follow the trends, Kleiner Perkins partner Mary Meeker, sometimes called the "Queen of the Internet," sees a future in products and services like Amazon's Echo Home.

Speech recognition, the ability to interact with a computing device without the need for a keyboard, mouse, or screen, is the fundamental core of tomorrow's devices. The advances in machine learning, and "big data" have been key factors in the growth and usability of speech recognition. Google, Microsoft, IBM, Nuance, Amazon and other global players, envision a future of "Things", all tied together by way of the Internet. Your voice will become your ID.

Think about that, your voice becomes your ID. You'll be able to "talk" to you bank without risk of identity theft. You'll order shoes, or clothes, or food and get simple questions like: "delivery to home or office? Charge your Visa or debit your checking?" This isn't all that far away.

Voice should be the most efficient form of computing input:

1) Voice is fast, on average 150 words per minute vs 40 words per minute typing
2) Easy – no equipment required to speak
3) Personalized/content driven, keyboard free
4) Random access, no menus to drill down through
5) Low cost, small footprint. A speaker and microphone for input/output
6) Requires natural language recognition and processing

How smart are these machines, and how soon will they be truly useful? Consider how quickly Amazon's Echo has developed: Echo had 14 "skills" last September, and as of last month, Echo is capable of processing more then 950 commands. Amazon has already partnered with Ford Motor Company to integrate Echo with their Sync platform. Who knows, your next car might be capable of auto-pilot: "Beam me home, Scotty."