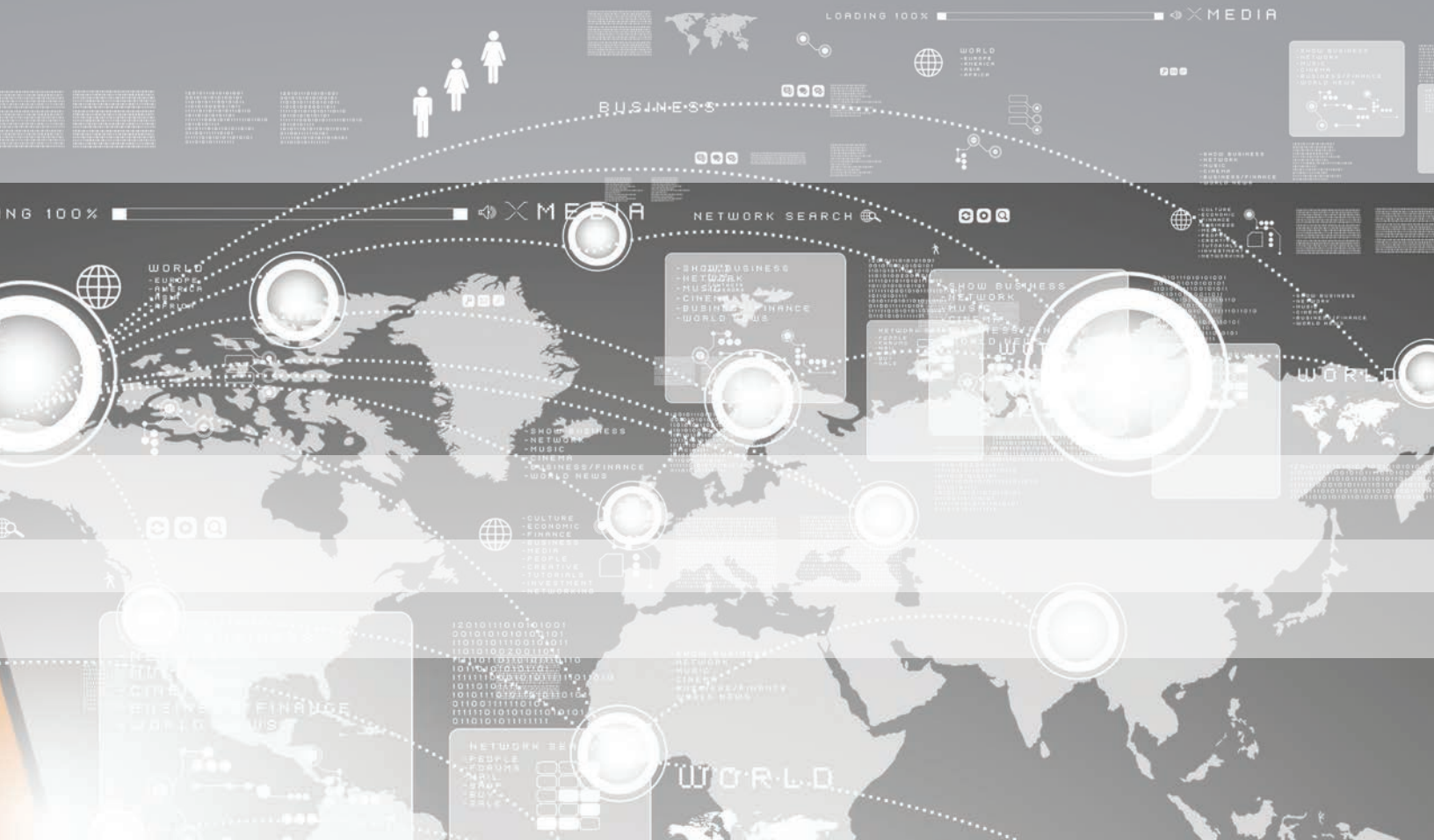# Decision Makers' Guide to Enterprise Intelligent Assistants *(2018 Edition)*

In its third installment, **Opus Research** provides a comprehensive buying guide detailing 26 solution providers for enterprise intelligent assistants.

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Decision Makers' Guide to
Enterprise Intelligent Assistants *(2018 Edition)*

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> **Enterprise-based, natural language processing (NLP)-powered self-service solutions, also known as "Intelligent Assistants" (IAs), have gained traction and proven their value over the past ten years. To support competitive differentiation and omnichannel strategies, the age of chatbots and Intelligent Assistance is being thrust upon Marketing, Customer Care and Digital Commerce executives around the world and across multiple industries. In this report, Opus Research presents a comprehensive assessment of the current Intelligent Assistant (IA) landscape with special focus on those offering "enterprise-grade" solutions and a decision-makers' buying guide detailing 26 solution providers for enterprise intelligent assistants.**

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Introduction: Current State of Enterprise Intelligent Assistants

In this report, Opus Research presents a comprehensive assessment of the current Intelligent Assistant (IA) solution provider landscape with special focus on those offering "enterprise-grade" solutions.

Enterprise-based, NLP-powered self-service solutions, also known as "Intelligent Assistants" (IAs), have gained traction and proven their value over the past ten years. To support competitive differentiation and omnichannel strategies, the age of Intelligent Assistance is being thrust upon Marketing, Customer Care and Digital Commerce executives around the world and across multiple industries; it is no longer a matter of "if" but "when."

The Urgency for Brands to Choose an Intelligent Assistance Platform

For marketing, advertising and support executives, implementing an intelligent assistance strategy has become an imperative. Tens of millions of their prospects and customers have grown accustomed to conversing with their selected brands in much the same way that they correspond with friends, acquaintances or colleagues; that is, conversationally, through mobile apps, messaging platforms, social networks or over the phone.

The proliferation of "smart speakers" and other intelligent endpoints adds to the urgency. Mid-2018 found such devices in over one-half of homes in the U.S. and, as Amazon and Google vie for "voice-first" supremacy, they are making the investment necessary both to attract, train and compensate application developers and to promote frequent and repeated use across multiple generations of users.

In response, enterprises have stepped up spending and implementation plans for Intelligent Assistants as part of their "Digital Transformation" strategies as well as investments in what is broadly called "Conversational AI." The impact of this virtuous cycle is reflected in the results of Opus Research's census of Enterprise Intelligent Assistants, as well as forecasted spending for licenses, professional services and cloud-based services that fuel their flavor of IA. Once again Opus Research has compiled information on a community of 26 solution or platform providers in order to provide enterprise decisionmakers with criteria to apply when evaluating options and choosing solution providers.

In spite of confusion created by a cacophony of competing bot technologies, the market for Enterprise Intelligent Assistants is impressively robust. Based on information provided by respondents, the number of companies offering some flavor of chatbot, virtual agent or intelligent assistant has grown to 2,100 from the 1,200 reported in our last survey, representing a 75% growth rate. At the same time, the number of claimed implementations approaches 40,000. As illustrated in Figure 1 (below), enterprise spending on IA has kept pace with spending in excess of $1.2 billion in 2017 on its way to $5.5+ billion in 2021.

Figure 1: Forecast Spending on EIA (in millions $)
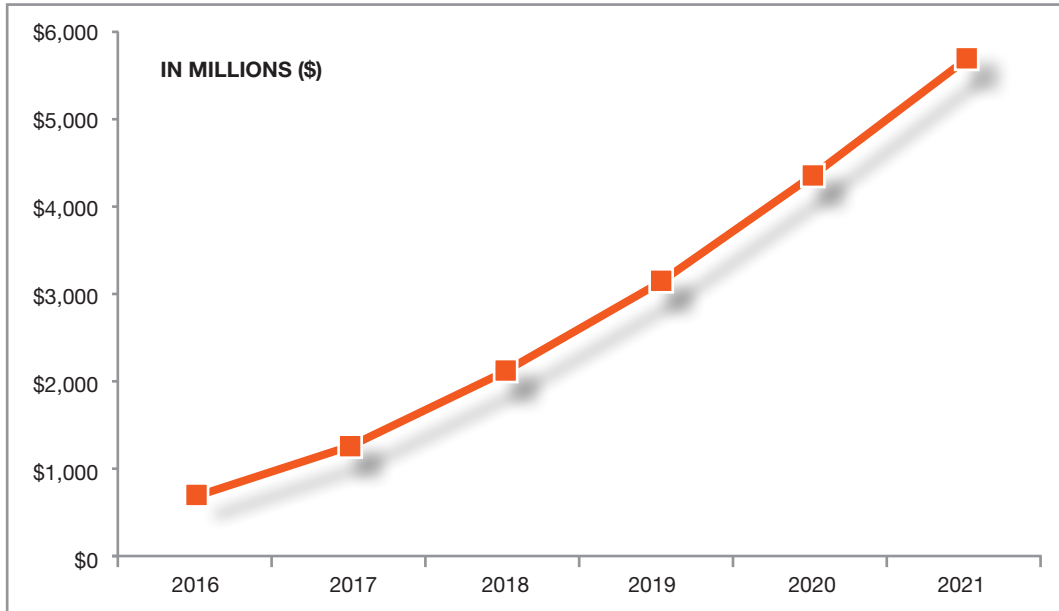
Source: Opus Research (2018)

Key Trends and Findings:

➤ **Smart speakers sparked preference for Conversational User Interfaces**: Already in tens of millions of homes, Amazon Echo devices and other "smart speakers" have precipitated a rush by recognized brands to build services or "skills" that support conversations between them and their prospects or customers.

➤ **Bot platforms are the beneficiaries**: At the same time, we've witnessed a population explosion among messaging bots, and other flavors of chatbots to provide continuous access to intelligent assistants through text-based channels.

➤ **Enterprise have long-standing experience in IA**: Enterprises may feel like the "Botsplosion" has left them behind, but many have found that their investments in speech-enabled IVRs and Web-based chatbots has created raw material that can be ingested and integrated into Intelligent Assistant platforms and services.

➤ **Twenty-six vendors generated $1.2 billion in spending in 2017**: We are well past proof-of-concepts and controlled implementations; meaning that first-order challenges surround providing correct answers or actions consistently and at large scale.

➤ **Vendors differentiate by tackling tough challenges**: The latest RFIs and RFPs for Intelligent Assistants reflect levels of sophistication that have not been seen before. Enterprises judge by "what works out of the box," "how well systems 'learn' (i.e. recognize new categories and intents), "how well it support multiple devices and channels", "what tools and roles are assigned to departmental employees," and "what standard connectors integrate with existing Contact Center, telecommunications, CRM, ERP and IT Systems.

➤ **Sympathy, empathy and emotion recognition come next**: As solutions mature, bots become less "bot-like" and another area of differentiation for core platform vendors involve the ability to recognize who an individual is and his or her emotional state to inform the dialogue.

➤ **Enterprises are Where the Action is for Intelligent Assistance**
Developer admiration for Amazon and fawning over Facebook nearly obscures the fact that leading brands and large enterprises around the world have a long history of supporting Conversational Commerce. Banks, brokerage houses, hotel chains, airlines, communications carriers and others have over a decade of experience in the field. With the help of the 26 companies described in this document, they procured and put into service platforms that support Intelligent Assistants through Web sites and voice channels has swelled from 1,200+ in 2016 to 2,000+ today. That 80% bump represents a huge vote of confidence.

Meanwhile, Opus Research forecasts that enterprise spending on the licenses and professional services that support Intelligent Assistance will exceed a projected $2 billion in 2018, heading for $5.5 billion by 2021, a 67% CAGR for the next five years.

It represents a perfect storm where technological advancements in Speech Processing, Natural Language Understanding, Machine Learning and Knowledge Management coincides with (or gives rise to) heightened comfort levels of comfort and confidence in human-to-machine communications. It has redefined self-service and customer support and is poised to redefine advertising technologies (AdTech), as well as marketing technology (MarTech) by replacing highly imprecise targeting of ads, email and online content, with user-initiated conversations.

For more information and to purchase ($1999)
Opus Research's "Decision Makers' Guide to Enterprise
Intelligent Assistants" (2018 Edition), please contact:

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About Opus Research

Opus Research is a research-based advisory firm providing critical insight and analysis of enterprise implementations of software and services that support multimodal customer care and employee mobility strategies. Opus Research calls this market "Conversational Commerce" with tailored coverage and sector analysis that includes: Self-Service & Assisted Self-Service, Voice & Call Processing, Web Services, Personal Virtual Assistance, Mobile Search and Commerce and Voice Biometrics.

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