


# Substantial Disruption



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## Seriously, Siri?

By Mike Tully

Kris and I don't knock ourselves out for the holidays anymore. That was especially the case this year when the kids and grandkid traveled to the east coast to spend them with Joey's other grandparents. We had a pre-Christmas gifting before they left town, then settled in for a quiet week. We put up some outdoor lights because they're festive. No tree, though. We haven't done a tree in years. Christmas dinner featured "ugly steaks" from [Dickman's Deli](#). We're both hard to buy for because we don't need all that much, so we decided to gift each other a new iPhone.

We were due. We were still using iPhone 8 Pluses, which are virtually Jurassic in the light-speed evolution of modern digital devices. We upgraded to iPhone 14s. They come with 5G capability. I have no idea what that means, but I know the 5G rollout required a sprinkling of ugly, stubby towers throughout town. Is 5G worth polluting the landscape? Hope so. I have no idea what it does.

The new phone is larger, heavier and more durable than its ancestors. I got a gold one with a clear case, an iPhone with bling. While the camera on my old phone took adequate photos, the newest generation is a major upgrade. I'm still learning what it can do. My favorite improvement is the battery environment. Not only does the battery last substantially longer than my previous phone, but the charging process is surprisingly faster.

But then, about Siri.

Siri, on my previous phone, had a [Sally-Fields-as-Gidget](#) kind of perkiness that I found charming. Whether she was cueing up something from Apple Music or turning a device on or off, she was always bright and upbeat. "The deck lights are on!" she'd declare proudly, as though she had just won an award for it. Siri was so sweet.

But the new Siri is ... different.

She sounds older. She sounds jaded. She sounds like my previous Siri after five years of gin and cigarettes. What happened to Siri between generations 8 and 14? Did she suffer an ugly breakup? Did she fall in with the wrong crowd? Is she trying to sound more like Alexa?

Perhaps an aging Siri echoes the iPhone's maturing process. Maybe, as model 8 becomes X, as X becomes 11, 12, 13, Siri ages with each generation. At this rate, the Siri in iPhone model 20 will sound like a cross between [Selma Diamond](#) and the older, [post "I Love Lucy" Lucy](#).

I had to change the way Siri sounded. I thought her more mature delivery would make sense if seasoned with an English accent. I imagined a Siri with the media-friendly, urbane lilt of the

BBC's [Katty Kay](#). Or maybe the crisp, yet sexy authority of [Diana Rigg](#) from her "Mrs. Peel" days on TV's "The Avengers." A long-shot would have been a deeper, darker voice, like that of [Charlotte Rampling](#).

Nope. Didn't get Katty, Diana or Charlotte. The English-accented Siri has the delivery of a flight attendant. ("The deck lights are on! You may now move freely about the cabin.") But it's still an upgrade, so I stayed with the Brit.

Siri is not limited to American and English accents. There are also Australian, Indian, Irish and South African, but they sound pretty much alike. I expected a [Crocodile Dundee](#) sound from the Australian. No such luck. The Aussie accent is pretty watered down. My son-in-law's father, an American who is originally from Australia, has the kind of voice Aussie Siri dreams of. And does the South African voice sound like, say, [Trevor Noah](#)? Nope. It barely has any accent at all. The Indian voices are not exactly Bollywood quality. They're Gunga without the Din.

Why not an Italian accent? Or Irish? Or Scottish? All are more lyrical than the current choices.

Here's another idea for the Siri voice options: regional accents. Why not have Southern Siris with a honey-dripping drawl? Or Bostonian Siris? How about Siri with an attitude? A Valley Girl Siri? A punk Siri? A rapper Siri? Okay, maybe not.

Or perhaps we should abandon any attempt to make Siri sound more human and relatable. Maybe the most honest approach to a robotic voice is to emulate [HAL from the movie 2001](#). Pair HAL with a [Cheech and Chong](#) persona and Siri could simply talk to itself and not interact with us at all.

"Playing Moody Blues on Apple Music, Dave."

"Dave ain't here!"