

### Marketing Pioneers: Jim Henson

Before CGI, there were cartoons, and before cartoons there were puppets.

In September 1976, just weeks before Mississippi-born Jim Henson's 40th birthday, the first episode of The Muppets Show aired in Britain. Thanks to its memorable characters and famous guest stars, it would go on to become his greatest success, and though the popularity of puppet shows has declined since then, the Muppets remain internationally famous. But while many remember Henson for his creation of The Muppets Show and his work as a producer at Sesame Street, few recognize him as the advertising pioneer he was.

Fortune favors the bold, and that was Jim Henson's attitude nearly two decades before the debut of The Muppet Show. It was the mid-1950s, and Henson, then a student at the University of Maryland, had just made his first foray into the entertainment industry through the widely popular Sam and Friends, a series of short skits created for Washington D.C. television channel WRC-TV.

Around this time, Henson was asked to create a series of television commercials for Wilkins Coffee, a coffee company based in Washington D.C. Given a mere ten second time slot, Henson cleverly leveraged the Sam and Friends skit formula, ultimately creating over 170 humorous commercials starring two puppets: Wilkins and Wontkins. In an industry which almost exclusively utilized live actors, Henson's approach was unheard of, but his emphasis on comedy over the hard sell left the infomercial-style ads of the 50s in the dust.

Henson's commercials became so popular with audiences that they were eventually reproduced hundreds more times for other companies. His advertisements proved to the marketing industry that people love great characters, stories, and personalities above all else, and it's safe to say that Jim Henson is one of the reasons modern advertising is so entertaining, dynamic, and engaging.

# The Rise of Voice Recognition

Hi!

It's Way Creative. Are you keeping up with the latest tech trends? We hope so. Here's one that's been on our minds lately, courtesy of one of our team members.

Alexa has been a member of my household for over two years now. She doesn't always understand me and she requires a constant internet connection to function, but she's generally pretty useful. You've probably already guessed that I'm referring to the Echo, Amazon's widely popular smart speaker which first released in 2014. Today, there are several major voice assistants on the market including Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa, Microsoft's Cortana, and Google Assistant. Voice technology is quickly becoming an everyday tool, and few of us could have seen it coming.

Voice recognition technology has been around since the 1950s. In fact, it's been commercially available in one form or another since at least the late 1980s but only began to make waves sometime around 2007 to 2008 when tech giants like Microsoft and Google first began to incorporate it in their products. Of course, until the debut of Apple's Siri in 2011, the whole idea of voice recognition was still pretty unpopular, not just because its applications were limited, but because it generally didn't work very well.

Today, however, voice recognition is becoming terrifyingly accurate. Just last year, [Microsoft announced that it had achieved an error rate of just 5.1%](#), a number which is supposedly on par with humans. Voice tech is growing so quickly in popularity that studies predict [30% of online searches will be voice based by 2020](#), and [55% of American households will own a smart speaker by 2022](#). These numbers may seem dubious, especially given that voice tech still isn't perfect. Indeed, a recent analysis found that Alexa and Google Assistant were [30% less likely to understand users with non-American accents](#). At the current rate of advancement, however, we can probably expect most major issues with voice tech to be ironed out within the next few years.

But what does all this mean for you? Well, it means you'll probably be using voice tech in some form regularly within the next five years or less. It also means that if you're a business owner, you won't just have to think about developing and maintaining a mobile app, but one that can utilize voice recognition too. SEO will be a factor as well, and to start thinking about how you'll optimize for voice search, take a look at [this article](#) from Search Engine Land.

Thanks for reading, and let us know what you think about the rise of voice search by commenting on our [Facebook](#).