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Apple's Siri: The Truth Is, She's No Bandwidth Hog

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Guest post by Gary Morgenthaler

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America has a new sweetheart. Everyone is falling in love with Apple's Siri voice recognition software, including [Rajesh Koothrappalli](#) of *The Big Bang Theory* TV show. A record 37 million iPhones were sold in Apple's December quarter, including 25 million iPhone 4Ss. Multiple analysts, including **Forbes'** own [Nigram Arora](#), ascribe Apple's blow-out quarter mostly to America's love affair with Siri. But wait...there's a problem.



Gary Morgenthaler: Don't blame Siri.

The Washington Post now reports that data from Siri is so overloading mobile carrier networks such that, soon, you will no longer be able to call grandma. Is Siri no longer our New Age savior, here to free us from the drudgery of thumb-typing and mobile page downloads?

The truth is that Siri is NOT a data hog and should not be made a scapegoat. Here's why.

The Math Doesn't Add Up

This brouhaha started when a small British consulting firm called [Arieso](#) published [a report](#), following the launch of the iPhone 4S, saying that data traffic on mobile carrier networks offering Apple's new smartphone suddenly doubled. Their report was cited by *the Washington Post* and numerous media outlets. Incrementally, a doubling of data usage would add 355 MB to 512 MB of monthly traffic (according to the Validas, Nielsen and Cisco analyses). But as you'll see, Siri alone cannot be responsible for that massive increase.

That's because Siri's average data consumed per query is less than 63

kilobytes, [according to Ars Technica](#); and it's a number I can confirm, having served as a Siri board member for years. (63 kilobytes by the way, relative to [iCloud](#), [YouTube](#), [Pandora](#) and others, is de minimus.) Assuming, on the high side, that iPhone users invoke Siri an average of 15 times per day, that will generate 28 Mbytes of data traffic per month. Siri's 28 Mbytes would be between 5% to 8% monthly net addition, depending upon which study you choose. That leaves 92% to 95% of the incremental traffic unexplained.

Let's play with some numbers: What if Siri were to generate 25% of the incremental monthly traffic, how many queries would users need to issue per day? The answer is that Siri users would need to issue approximately 50 to 75 queries *every day*. That is a substantial, and unlikely, change in user behavior.

Arieso presents no data to support their claim that Siri causes the increase in iPhone 4S data usage. Most likely, Arieso committed a logical fallacy which, in grammar school, was called "*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*" — that is, "after the fact, therefore, because of the fact." In other words, Siri is new and associated with the iPhone 4S; therefore, it must be the cause of this increased traffic. It's an appealing argument, but it doesn't hold water.

Recently, I spoke with the CTO of a major European mobile telecommunications carrier who confirmed to me that, based on detailed analysis of mobile data traffic on their network, Siri's contribution to the increase was "negligible."

Hidden in Plain Sight

Well, if not Siri, then something else must be causing the increase in mobile network data traffic following the launch of the iPhone 4S. What is it? The answer could be hiding in plain sight.

Apple CEO Tim Cook announced this week that the company signed up an astonishing 85 million users for its new iCloud service since it launched in October. iCloud offers automatic synchronization and backup of photos, videos, music, mail, calendar, contacts, notes and more for Apple users. Photos, music and videos transmit vastly more data than simple Siri queries.

Moreover, users need do nothing more than turn on the service to start the flow of all this new data to Apple's vaunted data center in North Carolina.

Mobile data usage IS increasing. [Cisco](#) forecasts that mobile data usage will increase by a factor of 12 between 2010 and 2015. Some of that increase will come from seamless synchronization services like iCloud. Some of that increase will come from increased video streaming onto new and more capable smartphones like the iPhone 4S. And some, truth be told, will come from using new tools like Siri that make it easier for a mobile user to query the Web.

Why Debunking the Data-Hog Myth Matters

Why burden you with this analysis? Because I don't want users to think Siri will increase their bills or to lose out on the magic of Siri's artificial intelligence. And I don't want developers to be discouraged if and when Apple opens its API.

America's love affair with Siri can continue — and, indeed, spread throughout

the world – without endangering our networks or ability to call grandma.

This article is available online at:
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/ciocentral/2012/01/30/apples-siri-the-truth-is-shes-no-bandwidth-hog/>