

## Alibaba gives sight to its "smart" speaker

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The platform, developed by Alibaba's A.I. Labs and launched last week, is used in Alibaba's Tmall Genie, the top-selling voice-controlled speaker in China, the only market where it is currently available. Powered by AliGenie, the device can understand commands in Mandarin Chinese, the most widely used language in the world.

Alibaba's A.I. Labs is the group's in-house department dedicated to the development of innovative artificial-intelligence applications. Beyond developing AI-powered consumer products, such as the original Tmall Genie, A.I. Labs also focuses on theoretical research and product commercialization in areas such as speech recognition, natural language processing, deep learning and voice identification. Once connected to Alibaba's online marketplace, Tmall, users of Tmall Genie can order items from the platform by speaking to the device. With A.I. Labs' voiceprint-recognition technology, the device will only place orders when it is activated by the voice of authorized users. In the future, developers plan to add a facial-recognition function to boost the interactive experience.

Different from its competitors and upgraded

from its previous version, AliGenie 2.0 is also equipped with visual-recognition capability, meaning it can identify various objects that it detects. Users start by downloading the "Genie FireEye" app to their mobile phones, then attach their smartphones to a phone holder called the "XHolder," which is connected to Tmall Genie.

In collaboration with a number of Chinese publishers, A.I. Labs has enabled the device to recognize the covers of 117 sets of children's books and read them aloud. To make the function work, users must scan the book cover with the front-facing camera of their cellphone while inside the app.

The device can also recognize select flashcards, which helps Chinese-language learners read Chinese characters. Moreover, along with pronouncing the words, an animation will appear on the screen to explain the origin of the word.

Apart from making learning fun and interactive, AliGenie 2.0 is also intuitive enough to help the elderly or those with vision impairment identify over 40,000 different kinds of medicine packaging. The feature may be welcome in China, where a quarter of its 1.4 billion population will be above 60 by 2030, according to government forecasts.

Genie FireEye has a 3D touch feature that enables the device to engage with users through touch, with a suite of over 20 simulated, animated facial expressions. For

example, by tickling the forehead of the Tmall Cat, the image that appears on the activation screen, the cat will giggle and even purr.

Tmall Genie was launched in July 2017 and has sold over 2 million units in China to date. Moreover, 100 brands in sectors covering

everything from airlines, to education, hospitality, nursing homes, auto-making, home appliances, music and entertainment have already embedded the AliGenie system in their products.

Source: [Alizila](#)

