

News

New Partnership Brings Black History to Life Through Google Assistant

By Airik Myers, *The Seattle Medium*

‘Hey, Google, what happened on this day in Black History?’ is a term that might become a daily ritual for many people across the country. Thanks to a new partnership between Google and Dr. Carl Mack, Publisher of the Black Heritage Day Calendar – a comprehensive flip calendar that highlights 366 notable African Americans and African American accomplishments, more than 500 million people can get a daily dose of Black History utilizing Google Assistant.

Just prior to June-teenth, the Google Assistant team unveiled the new feature that allows users to receive information on Black History by date. By saying 'Hey Google, what happened on this day in Black History?', you are met with a unique verbal response, which is powered by the information contained in Dr. Mack's calendar, that will provide you with a brief narrative of Black History that occurred on that day.

There are two ways that you can utilize the feature. The first option is by asking what happen today, and the second is by asking what happen on a specific date in Black History. For example, asking what happened on October 8th in Black History will solicit a response about Powhatan Beaty, who was born into slavery on this day

in 1837, but later gained his freedom and moved to Ohio, where he proved his talent as an actor.

The feature is accessible on more than 1 billion Google Assistant-enabled devices, including smart speakers, phones, TVs from LG and Samsung, Chromecast, watches and many popular soundbars.

According to Mack, the inspiration for the calendar stemmed from a conversation that he had with a White co-worker back in the 80s, who was asking Mack about a historic Black figure that he never heard of.

“One day [my co-worker] came to work and he was talking to me about this guy, Henry Blippar, who was the first Black to graduate from the West

that he made gave Mack an enhanced sense of self-pride and fueled his passion to teach, learn and serve others. After some years of doing research, Mack decided to share his knowledge more broadly, so he produced the original version of the Black Heritage calendar in 1992.

Fast forward to today and people are still fascinated with the information contained in the calendar, which is now in its fourth edition. Some of the information like Martin Luther King's Birthday is commonly known, but there are other lesser-known entries that have a common connection to our everyday lives like Elijah McCoy, an African American inventor, whose high-quality

“tell me this,
how would I
ever know it
existed?”

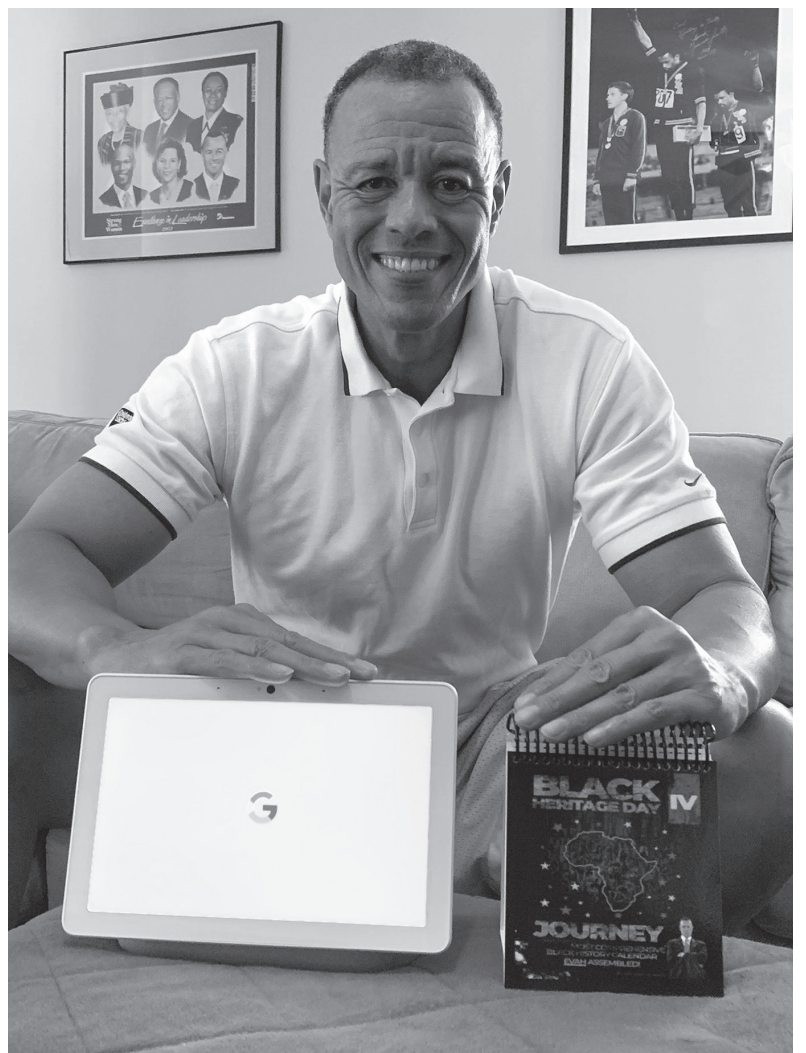
While Mack's initial intent was to share his information with the world, he had no idea that he literally would be sharing it on a platform that reaches hundreds of millions of people on a daily basis.

“Did I think that 30 years later, the research that I did on Black history would now be on the Google

assistant, and that 500 million people around the world could access it?" says Mack in awe of the achievement. "That is just where God says big, God means BIG."

The connection with Google came from one of Mack's mentees, Justin Steele, who works for Google. Mack sent a copy of his calendar to Steele looking for feedback. Unbeknownst to Mack at the time, Google was in the process of looking for content that they could feature every day that was in line with their efforts towards diversity and inclusion.

According to Beth Tsai, Policy Director for Google Search and Assistant,



As it relates to the “Today in Black History” initiative, this is Google’s first partnership that was “specifically designed to educate and raise awareness about equity and inclusion on the Google Assistant.”

Mack's calendar was a perfect fit for what they were trying to do.

"We felt like it was very important to raise awareness about the Black community and about important figures in the Black community that often don't get attention," said Tsai.

“The beautiful thing about Dr. Mack’s calendar is it looks at the parts of the story that like most people aren’t aware of, it tells us about important moments in Black culture and Black history,” added Tsai. “It tells us about contributors who are not your big names. [It] helps people understand that bigger picture. And for us, that was the compelling moment here. Here’s a chance for your average Google user who doesn’t know anything about these things to really jump in, learn more and learn in depth.”

For Mack, who previously served as president of the Seattle King County NAACP and was the former executive director of the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), the opportunity for people to learn about and appreciate Black History is a tremendous step towards self-knowledge and pride for African Americans, and a chance for others to see and understand African Americans in a way that is not readily found in traditional American history books.

"I mean, you look at Google. Google is arguably one of the greatest search engines on this planet. The fact that they have the content from

the calendar and every day, all you have to say is, ‘Hey, Google, what happened on this day in Black History?’ And just like that, with just your voice, you could be exposed to 366 days of African-American History with just your voice,” says Mack about the ease that people can access the information through Google Assistant. “You just learn something beautiful about our history and you know, the reason why it’s important to me, [is] because I know what knowledge of self-did for me.”

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Tsai says that the Google Assistant, from the beginning, has been about inclusivity, and being an assistant for everyone to connect to.

“Everyone, regardless of who you are, regardless of your race, regardless of your gender, regardless of your ethnicity, your religion, we wanted the system to recognize you,” says Tsai.

"I hope our Black users... listen to our calendar, and I hope that they feel like the Google Assistant is theirs," she continued. "I hope that they see themselves in the Google system. [I hope it feels] like the Google assistant recognizes them and sees them as an ally. Because that, fundamentally, is the most important thing for us."

A black and white photograph of a large crowd of people at a church service, with many hands raised in the air. The image is used as a background for the text overlay.

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