Microsoft Reveals Siri-like Windows Phone Feature

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NEW YORK (AP) — Microsoft is showcasing a new virtual assistant as part of an upcoming update for Windows phones.

The assistant, named Cortana, tries to be chatty like Siri on Apple's iPhones and iPads, while anticipating information you might want, like Google Now on Android devices.

Cortana will warn you of conflicts when you add items to your calendar, and it will remind you to ask about the new dog your sister just got the next time you communicate with her, whether that's by phone, chat or email. It will offer to remind you of upcoming travel by scanning your email.

Microsoft says the feature is in a "beta" test mode as the company tries to improve its voice recognition capabilities. In fact, during Wednesday's announcement, Cortana made numerous mistakes, including offering weather in Celsius when the request was for the Kelvin temperature scale.

Cortana is among the new features coming to a Windows Phone update called 8.1. The company says it will be available on new phones in about a month and will be available as an update on existing phones a few months later.

As Microsoft opened its annual Build conference in San Francisco, the company also announced a new Action Center for the Windows Phone system as a hub for app notifications and information such as remaining battery life. Other new phone features include automatic connecting to free Wi-Fi hotspots to save on cellular data.

The company provided more details on making the Windows Phone system more useful in business settings. Companies will be able to restrict apps that can run on

phones issued to employees or prevent sensitive documents from being saved locally.

Microsoft is also updating its Windows 8.1 system for tablets, laptops and desktops. Although Microsoft has been pushing touch-screen controls, the new update is designed to make it easier for those with traditional keyboard and mouse controls. The update is available starting next Tuesday.

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