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# Amazon Echo

## The smarter smart speaker

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\*At the time of publishing, the price was \$180

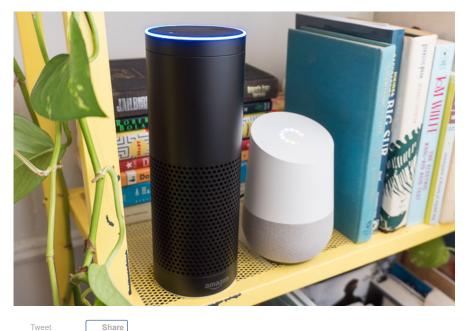
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HOMEPAGE > SMART HOME

# Amazon Echo vs. Google Home: Which Voice Controlled Speaker Is Best for You?

LAST UPDATED: SEPTEMBER 12, 2017

GRANT CLAUSER



Our pick

We spent months living with the voice-controlled speakers Amazon Echo and Google Home, listening to music, asking foolish questions, getting news reports, and begging them to turn the lights off. Both products are pretty good at playing music when you ask them to, but the Echo's two-year head start means it can do more things, especially for controlling smarthome gear. But the best smart speaker for your home can vary depending on your priorities, the stuff you already have, and the services you already subscribe to.

Last Updated: This month<sup>-</sup> We've added information on the Eufy Genie and explained Alexa support for multiroom audio. Expand Most Recent Updates

9/21/2017

#### Amazon Echo vs. Google Home: Which Voice Controlled Speaker Is Best for You? | The Wirecutter

#### The smarter smart speaker Amazon Echo

Provides voice control over music, audiobooks, a wide assortment of smart home products, and thousands of unique Skills.

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We love the things we recommend. We select each pick with the utmost care, relying on expert opinion, research, and testing.

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If you care at all about smart-home controls, or if you're a frequent user of Amazon Prime, Amazon's Alexa platform is the best option for your home. Among Alexaenabled speakers, the category-defining <u>Amazon Echo</u> is the best. We prefer it to the Google Home for its depth of capabilities, wide smart-home device support, ability to play the most popular music streaming services, and slightly superior sound quality. In addition to its built-in features, the Alexa platform includes a growing list (more than 10,000 at last count) of "Skills," akin to apps on a smartphone, that unlock capabilities such as reading recipes, ordering pizza, or calling an Uber. Not all of its Skills are useful, but the Echo still does far more than the Google Home does. The Echo is not the all-capable computer from *Star Trek*, but it is a smart digital assistant that's constantly improving as Amazon adds more abilities to it.

The <u>Google Home</u> has the advantage of Google's search and voice-control expertise (and the ability to tie in to multiple Google accounts, so you can check your calendar for the day, set and manage reminders in Keep, and report traffic conditions on your



## Good for synchronizing music Google Home

Though great for starting an inexpensive multiroom audio system and more able to interface with some Google products, the Google Home is still catching up with the Echo.

commute using Maps data). When you use it with more than one account, the Home can even differentiate users by the sound of their voice. But the "Google" portion of the Google Home isn't quite as capable as we'd like. It generally provides more detailed answers than Alexa, but in day-to-day use, it's not noticeably more capable at performing simple tasks—for example, you can check your calendar but can't add new events to it. And though it has some smart-home integrations and third-party "Actions" comparable to Alexa's Skills, it has far fewer of either than Alexa does. The one indisputable advantage of the Home is its ability to serve as a controller for a Chromecast Audio <u>multiroom audio system</u>. This means you can use voice commands to stream the same song or podcast to several synchronized speakers in different rooms simultaneously—something Alexa cannot currently do.

\$130 from Walmart

If sound quality isn't a major consideration for you, or if it is and you prefer to supply your own higher-quality speaker, the smaller and cheaper Amazon <u>Echo Dot</u> is a great



### Alexa for less Echo Dot

Perfect for audio-lite applications or connecting to an existing music system or Bluetooth speaker.

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## Your Guide



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Grant Clauser has been reporting on home technology for trade and consumer publications for more than 15 years. He has held senior editor positions at Dealerscope, Custom Retailer, E-Gear, and Electronic House and has written for many other publications including Sound & Vision, Big Picture Big Sound, CE Pro, and Consumer Digest. He's completed THX Level II, ISF, Home Acoustics Alliance, and Control4 Certification training. His non-tech writing can be found at Unlambic.

Amazon Echo vs. Google Home: Which Voice Controlled Speaker Is Best for You? | The Wirecutter

choice. It does everything

the Echo does, including

controlling a wide assortment of smart-home devices, but its built-in speaker is about audio-equivalent to a bedside clock radio. You can get better sound out of it by connecting it to a speaker or music system via Bluetooth or the unit's aux port, though if alarms, timers, and news radio are all you listen to, you won't need to bother with that. A nearly identical, but cheaper version of the Dot is the <u>Eufy Genie</u>, which sounds a bit better, plays about 4 decibels louder, but doesn't do Bluetooth. You'll need to add the Eufy app to your phone to set it up, but after that it works with Alexa the same as a Dot or Echo.

# Want a sneak peek at what we're working on?

A weekly roundup of new guides, picks, and a preview of what's to come.

Email Address

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- <u>Best speaker: Amazon Echo</u>
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# Why you should trust me

- <u>Best at answering questions: Google</u>
   <u>Home</u>
- <u>Best smart-home controller: Amazon</u>
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- What about Siri and Cortana?
- Privacy and security concerns
- <u>What to look forward to</u>

I've been reporting on and testing electronics for more than 15 years and have held top editorial positions in numerous trade and consumer magazines and websites. I've had AV training and certifications from the likes of THX, ISF, the Home Acoustics Alliance and Sencore. I've also completed Control4's home-automation programming training, programmed many home-automation devices, and reviewed hundreds of products.

# Who should get a voice-controlled speaker

Voice-controlled speakers, as we have them today, are more than just speakers. They're also smart digital assistants, device controllers, shopping tools, and more. As speakers and music-listening devices, voice-controlled speakers are most convenient for people who like to always have music around them but don't want to fuss with a smartphone to select their channels or playlists. Simply say a trigger word, tell it what you want to listen to, and it starts playing. (This does mean that it's always listening to you, but as we <u>explain below</u>, this isn't as big of a privacy risk as it appears at first blush.) Of course, these are not audiophile speakers—you can get <u>much-better-sounding</u> <u>speakers</u> for the price if that's your priority. But regular speakers don't do much for people who aren't into music or podcasts; a voice-controlled speaker can still be useful as a simple personal assistant.

A voice-controlled speaker can do basic personalassistant tasks like making shopping lists, setting alarms and timers, and answering simple search queries (e.g. "What's the capital of Kansas?" or "Convert two tablespoons into milliliters"). They also work well for controlling smart homes: Voice-controlled speakers are most convenient for people who like to always have music around them but don't want to fuss with

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Audio Baby and Kid Bags & Travel "Computer, turn on my lights!" Typically, someone buying a smart speaker will be interested in all of these functions. However, buying a smart speaker also means buying into its accompanying voice platform, which complicates things a bit. a smartphone to select their channels or playlists.

In an ideal world, you would have one voice-controlled speaker that would be able to access Google search, order things from Amazon, play music from any streaming service, and control all your smart-home devices. In reality, these competing companies have little to gain from cooperating with one another. As such, you need to prioritize what's most important for your life and get the speaker that best fits those requirements.

Task	Amazon Echo	Google Home
Streaming support for music, podcasts, etc. Speaker quality	Tie: Better for Amazon services, including Audible. Works as a Bluetooth speaker for any mobile audio source. Winner: Voices sound more natural and understandable—though it	<b>Tie:</b> Better for Google services, including YouTube. Works as a Chromecast speaker for supported apps, and has Bluetooth capability. Get instead if you prefer more bass, even if voices sound less
	lacks bass. For even better sound, get an Echo Dot and connect it to a good speaker.	clear, or if you want to use it as part of a Chromecast multiroom audio setup.
Digital assistant	<b>Winner:</b> Supports more services, can add events to a calendar, and can order off of Amazon.	Get instead if you already use Google Keep and Google Express.
Answering questions	Get instead if you're willing to fill Alexa's knowledge gaps by enabling third-party skills.	<b>Winner:</b> More detailed responses to a wider variety of questions without having to enable additional skills.
Smart- home control	<b>Winner:</b> Supports more platforms and products.	Get instead if it supports what you already have and you prefer a slightly more conversational tone.

# Best for streaming music, podcasts, etc: Amazon Echo, by a hair

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September 21, 2017

Dear Wirecutter: What Adventure Duffel Bag Should My Son Bring on His Travels? The smarter smart

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assortment of smart home

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speaker

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unique Skills.



If listening to music and podcasts is your priority, your first concern should be whether the speaker you're about to buy works with the streaming services you're already paying for. With that in mind, both the Echo and the Home work fine with Spotify, TuneIn, and Pandora. But if you're a Google Play or YouTube



Buy from Amazon (\$80 Off Through 9/4)

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$0 from Target
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\*At the time of publishing, the price was \$180.

Red subscriber, the Google Home is the way to go. If you're an Amazon Prime Music user or Audible subscriber, or if you don't already subscribe to another service, the <u>Echo</u> is the way to go—you can add an Echo-only Prime Music Unlimited subscription that gets you access to a Spotify-like selection of songs and artists for just \$4 per month.

If you're on Apple Music, Tidal, or another streaming service, you can still use the Echo if you just pair your phone with it like a normal Bluetooth speaker. You won't be able to have it play what you want by speaking, but it'll work just fine. When first released, the Google Home could only stream audio from Google Cast-enabled apps. But because <u>Bluetooth support</u> was announced at I/O 2017, music from programs like iTunes or Apple Music (which notably don't work with Google Cast) can be sent via Bluetooth from your phone to the speaker—just like with the Echo. However, having to using your phone to pick the music defeats the purpose of having a voice-controlled speaker in the first place. Besides, you can get a much-better-sounding <u>Bluetooth speaker</u> for that price.

Streaming service	Compatible with Amazon Echo	Compatible with Home
Spotify Premium	Yes	Yes
Spotify Free	No	Yes



For your adventure-travel needs, we think <u>The</u> <u>North Face's Base Camp Duffel</u> is a great, versatile option for toting your gear around the world.

## September 19, 2017

# The Best Kindle Cases



<u>Omoton's Kindle Paperwhite Case</u> offers all the protection you need, fits perfectly, is inexpensive, and looks better than the dozen contenders we tested.

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# The Best Wireless Mouse



9/21/2017

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TuneIn	Yes	Yes
Pandora	Yes	Yes
iHeartRadio	Yes	Yes
YouTube Red	No	Yes
Google Play	No	Yes
Amazon Music	Yes	No
Amazon Prime	Yes	No
Unlimited		
Audible	Yes	Yes
Apple Music	No	Yes
Tidal	No	Yes
Soundcloud	No	Yes

## Best speaker: Amazon Echo

Once you know your mostused subscriptions are supported, the second priority should be sound quality. To find out how the Home and the Echo compare in this regard, Wirecutter audio expert Brent Butterworth set up some blind-listening tests and borrowed the critical ears of our Los Angelesbased audio editors, Geoff



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$0 from Target
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\*At the time of publishing, the price was \$180.

Morrison and Lauren Dragan. We also ran some lab measurements to get a clearer idea of the devices' technical performance and to better test how well the microphone arrays and voice-recognition systems separated the user's voice from other sounds.

In order to ensure that the experience we were testing came as close as possible to how home users would actually be listening to the speakers, Brent used his voice to queue up listening material. In order to avoid revealing the speakers' identities while the commands were being issued, Geoff and Anyone who wants voice command and good sound should get an Echo Dot and connect it to a better system.

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Provides voice control over music, audiobooks, a wide

assortment of smart home

products, and thousands of

speaker

Amazon Echo

unique Skills.

Lauren listened to pink noise through <u>Direct Sound Serenity II</u> noise-isolating headphones while Brent told the speakers which tunes to play. On top of that, even though the speakers were hidden behind thin black fabric, the listeners would have been able to identify the speakers as their flashing lights shone through the material. Thus, Brent insisted that Geoff and Lauren each wear a special pair of "blind-testing glasses"—sunglasses covered with painter's tape. The listeners were so well isolated that when the music started, he had to clap loudly to signal the listeners to remove the headphones. The two speakers' coarse volume steps made it impossible to match their listening levels perfectly, but Brent was able to get the match within 0.43 dB, which is reasonably close. After testing 17 more wireless mice in 2017, <u>Logitech's Marathon Mouse M705</u> is still the best for most people—it's comfortable, reliable, and inexpensive.

# The Best First Aid Kit for Hiking and the Outdoors



After 14 hours of research and tests of 12 wilderness first aid kits, we think <u>Adventure</u> <u>Medical's Mountain Backpacker Kit</u> is best for most weekend warriors.

### September 15, 2017

## The Best Tumbler



We left 15 Slurpee-filled tumblers in a 112degree car. Handling the meltdown with ease, the <u>22-ounce Hydroflask</u> emerged as the perfect choice for most people.



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#### Amazon Echo vs. Google Home: Which Voice Controlled Speaker Is Best for You? | The Wirecutter



Lauren waits patiently with her vision and hearing temporarily impaired while Brent tells the Echo and the Home which songs to play. *Photo: Brent Butterworth* 

Geoff, Lauren, and Brent all ended up describing the sound of the two speakers much the same way. It was a Goldilocks-style dilemma: The Echo seemed to have almost no bass, so much of the drive and rhythm of the music was lost, and voices could sound harsh and sibilant. But the Home had a muffled midrange and treble, making voices harder to understand. Lauren summed up the group's unhappiness when she concluded, "I ... guess I'd prefer the sibilant one?" Overall, the Echo has the advantage, especially if you listen to a lot of talk radio programs. But anyone who wants voice command *and* good sound should get an Echo Dot and connect it to a better system.

Brent also ran some lab tests on the speakers to confirm what everyone heard. Because the Home has neither input jacks nor Bluetooth capability, which would allow it to accept test signals from an audio analyzer, Brent had to perform the tests using a pink noise track sourced from Spotify. He The Echo had much better response between 300 and 1,400 Hz, which covers most of the range of the human voice.

measured each speaker from the same eight locations in his listening room and then averaged each set of eight measurements to minimize the effects that the acoustics of his listening room had on the speakers' performance. He found, to his surprise, that the Home actually had stronger measured treble response, but that the Echo had much better response in the midrange, between 300 and 1,400 Hz, which covers most of the range of the human voice. Find an error?: Also, If you notice a guide that needs a little freshening up, or has errors, please tweet us at @wirecutter or email us at notes@thewirecutter.com and we'll fix it. Thank you.



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Averaged frequency response of Amazon Echo (blue) and Google Home (green)



The measured frequency response curves of the Echo (blue trace) and the Home (green trace). Generally speaking, the flatter a line is, the better the speaker will sound. The Echo has much stronger response between 300 and 1,400 Hz, which is where most of the sounds of human voices reside.

A few other performance characteristics are worth noting. For starters, the Echo played 4.5 dB louder than the Home in our tests. In a bedroom or kitchen, such a difference probably doesn't matter, but in a very large living room, the Home might not sound loud enough. The Echo is a true omnidirectional speaker, too, so it will more easily fill a large space with sound. In contrast, the Home has a single, front-firing speaker driver with passive radiators on the side to reinforce the bass, and the sound seems even more muffled when you move to the sides and back of the speaker.

Beyond speaker sound quality, the other major consideration is <u>multiroom audio</u> support, which lets you play synced audio across multiple speakers in different rooms. In this regard, the Google Home is the winner, but not by much. With multiple Home speakers, you can request music to play in one The Echo is a true omnidirectional speaker, so it will more easily fill a large space with sound.

location or several, and the system will synchronize them so that they play the same music at the same time. In fact, you don't even need multiple Home speakers to do this.

#### The Google Chromecast

Audio, when plugged into a powered speaker or audio receiver, can act as another audio device in a multiroom system. For instance, if you have a Home in the kitchen and a Chromecast Audio plugged into your home theater receiver in the living room, you can tell the Home to play Johnny Thunders in one room or both at the same time. Speakers and



#### A multiroom add-on for Google Home Google Chromecast Audio

Spread all Google Home's tunes around your home with this affordable accessory to create a multiroom music system.

\$0\* from Walmart

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$35 from Jet
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\*At the time of publishing, the price was \$35.

TVs with Chromecast abilities built in can also be part of the system. The only

drawback here is that if you're not in the room with the Home device, you can't control the other speakers with your voice. You can, however, open up the Home app (or whatever app you're casting from) on your smartphone to get music to play.

Using the Home and the Chromecast Audio as your whole-house music system is cheaper than using Sonos, but it can be quirky. Sometimes the Home mishears your song or artist name, and repeating yourself to it gets annoying. Additionally, you need to speak the name of the cast target perfectly, or it's likely to just ignore the request. If the track exists only on Spotify, but Google Play is your default music service, you need to specify Spotify in your command. Also, volume control via voice is not always accurate.

Amazon added multiroom music capability to Alexa. In the app you can create groups with custom names, such as upstairs, downstairs, or zone A, but you can't add an Alexa speaker to more than one zone. This means that if you have Echos in three rooms you can't create a group with speakers A and B and another with speakers B and C. Also, if you're playing Amazon music on one group of speakers, you can't play another Amazon music stream on a speaker in another room, but you can play music from another service. such as Pandora or TuneIn.

# Best digital assistant: Amazon Echo



Video: Kyle Fitzgerald

While we're still a far cry from Tony Stark's JARVIS or the computer from the USS Enterprise, both the Echo and the Home (along with Siri and Cortana) are pretty decent as digital assistants if you're willing to lower your expectations. Each can answer most basic questions, including some that are time and location dependent, such



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music, audiobooks, a wide assortment of smart home products, and thousands of unique Skills.

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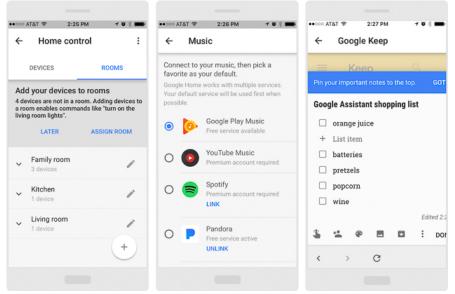
Amazon Echo

price was \$180

as questions about weather and current events. And they can manage to-do lists, calendars, and shopping lists—as well as purchase stuff online, to varying levels of success, depending on which services you already use.

Alexa will capably give you a weather forecast, read your customized news-flash briefing (you can choose from over 2,000 news and information sources), tell you jokes, help you with math problems, add events to your Google or Outlook calendar (and read them back to you on request), and handle a host of other simple requests. If you're an Amazon Prime member, you can order products from Amazon directly through Alexa (remember to activate the PIN to prevent unauthorized orders), and Amazon has exclusive daily deals for Alexa users.

Alexa's other advantage over the Home platform is its ever-expanding catalog of Skills (over 10,000), which are like apps for voice-controlled speakers. Many of these skills are developed by services you might already use, such as Todoist, Task Penguin, My Notebook, Task Master, Priority Board, and Cubic Reminder. Enabling them allows you to personalize Alexa to your needs, and they are a definite point in Amazon's favor. However, it's easy to forget the trigger words for functions you enable but rarely use.



The Home's app, like the Echo's, is mostly for setup, though you will need to access it for things like shopping lists.

The Google Home system handles the basics about as well as Alexa. You can add reminders, check your calendar or the weather, set alarms and timers, and schedule recurring alarms. You can even ask the device to translate a phrase from English to another language. You don't get access to Amazon Prime shopping, of course, but you can buy things through participating <u>Google Express</u> retailers, including Costco, PetSmart, and Bed Bath & Beyond.

A recent and welcome update to the Google Home system allows it to work with multiple user accounts, which makes it much better for families or homes where more than one person accesses it. The setup instructions in the app aren't particularly clear, but once we added a second user's Google account and did the voice training, the system could tell both people by the sound of their voice and respond to personalized requests such as "Hey Google, what's on my schedule today?" We tried tricking it by talking in a fake voice, and that failed, as it should.

This year Google added <u>Actions</u>, a feature similar to Alexa's third-party Skills. You can go to the Home app, look through the available Actions (which you can find under *Settings* then *Services*), and read the command to make the Action work. There are Actions for ordering Domino's pizza, getting psychotherapy advice (we don't recommend getting mental-health advice this way), or finding the schedule for Seattle's public pools. Currently there are fewer than 100 Actions, versus Alexa's thousands of Skills.

An update to Alexa gives all Echo speakers the ability to make and receive voice calls and send and receive short messages, but there's a catch—you can only contact people with Alexa devices or the Alexa app. To use the new feature, you'll need to update the app and then authorize the feature in the app. It will automatically populate a contacts list based on your phone's contacts, but only with people who have added the feature on their end. If you know you have Alexa users in your phone's address book, but don't see them in the Alexa contact list, that's because those people haven't added the feature themselves. Calling or sending messages is easy—just ask Alexa to call or send a message to a person. The LED ring on the recipient's Echo will glow green indicating a call or message, and that person then tells Alexa to answer the call or play the message. In our tests the sound quality was pretty good, and we like the feature, but being limited to just reaching out to other Alexa users puts a damper on its usefulness.

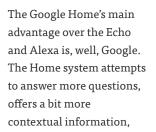
An additional update extends this functionality, not to non-Alexa users, but rather to simplify communication within an individual household. The feature basically enables you to use your connected Echos, Taps, Dots, and Shows as a home intercom system. Once you've given each of your devices a name and enabled the "drop-in" feature, you can initiate <u>walkie-talkie style chats</u> between any of your devices.

At Google I/O, the company announced the Home will soon be able to make phone calls over Google Voice. For now, it'll only support outgoing calls to phone numbers in the US or Canada—so the approach differs substantially from that of Amazon. You'll also be able to set reminders and calendar entries. Both features were notably absent from Google's device at launch.

## Best at answering questions: Google Home



Photo: Kyle Fitzgerald





# Good for synchronizing music

Google Home

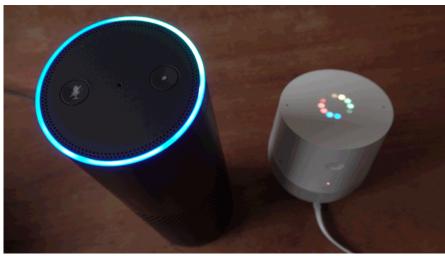
Though great for starting an inexpensive multiroom audio system and more able to interface with some Google products, the Google Home is still catching up with the Echo.

#### 9/21/2017

and usually gives a longer (though not necessarily more informative) answer.

A digital marketing firm <u>conducted a test</u> published in early March 2017 in which testers threw 5,000 questions at each device. The Google Home attempted to answer more than 60 percent of the questions, while the Echo attempted to answer only about 20 percent. Of the questions they attempted to answer, both were correct more than 80 percent of the time.

\$130 from Walmart



Both the Echo (left) and the Google Home light up when they hear you ask them a question. Video: Kyle Fitzgerald

In practice, when we asked what the smartest dog was, the Home said it was the collie, while the Echo kept silent, probably out of respect for a hound dog that happened to be in the room. When we asked what the best Bluetooth speaker was, the Home had no answer, while the Echo suggested a <u>Bose model</u> that happened to be a Wirecutter pick, then (unsurprisingly) asked if it should order that speaker from Amazon right at that moment. Both can do math, tell you the population of China, and state how many teaspoons are in a cup. Google is better if you ask how to roast a chicken or what wine goes with steak, but you can find more than 20 <u>Alexa skills</u> about cooking and another 20 for wine fans.

One of the other search-related advantages the Home offers over Amazon's smart speakers is the ability to track the context of your queries based on previous inputs. For instance, after you ask "Hey Google, when did the Sex Pistols form?" and receive your answer, you can follow up with "Hey Google, who was the lead singer?" without having to say "Sex Pistols" again. (You'll still have to say "Hey Google" every time.) However, in our time with the On simple information searches, the Home attempts to answer more questions, offers a bit more contextual information, and usually gives a longer (though not necessarily more informative) answer.

device, we didn't find much use for that feature. Amazon added contextual awareness to Alexa late in 2016, but the Home system still does it better.

It's worth noting that Alexa's ability to answer questions seems to have improved over time. A year ago, when I asked Alexa for the phone number of my favorite local pizza shop, it couldn't give me an answer, but would tell me the distance to the restaurant. Now it can give me the phone number, too. However, sometimes what it can and can't answer is baffling. It accurately told me when the next season of *Game of Thrones* would begin, but couldn't tell me how many *Game of Thrones* books there are (though it offered to order the complete collection for me from Amazon).

## Best smart-home controller: Amazon Echo



The Echo Dat lets you add Alexa control for a fraction of the cost of other voice-controlled speakers, but for music, you need to connect it to a separate speaker. It's ideal if you're mostly interested in smart-home control and digital-assistant features, or if you listen to a lot of music and already have good speakers you want to use. *Photo: Kyle Fitzgerald* 

Neither the Echo nor the Home is a smart-home system in and of itself, but their ability to act as convenient controllers for popular smart-home devices makes them central figures in a smart home. They're not hubs,



### Alexa for less Echo Dot Perfect for audio-lite

applications or connecting to an existing music system or Bluetooth speaker.

\$50 from Amazon

like <u>SmartThings or Wink</u>; rather, they're more like voice-activated universal remotes —the duct tape that binds together disparate, often competing systems that otherwise wouldn't play nicely. In this respect, Amazon's Echo is the clear winner, because it controls far more smart-home products than the Home, including <u>Nest</u>, <u>Philips Hue</u>, Samsung SmartThings, LIFX, Lutron Caseta, <u>Belkin Wemo</u>, Wink, Alarm.com, and more. Google is catching up, but it has a long way to go.

Lights/switches	Alexa (Echo)	Google Home	HomeKit/Siri
Philips Hue	Yes	Yes	Yes
LIFX	Yes	Yes	Coming
Lightify	Yes	No	No
TP-Link bulbs	Yes	Yes	No
Sengled bulbs	Yes	No	No
Lutron Caseta	Yes	Yes	Yes
Belkin Wemo	Yes	Yes	No
D-Link smart plug	Yes	No	No
Leviton switches	Yes	No	Yes

Smart hubs	Alexa (Echo)	Google Home	HomeKit/Siri
SmartThings	Yes	Yes	No
Wink	Yes	Yes	No
Logitech Harmony	Yes	Yes	No
Insteon	Yes	No	Yes
Scout	Yes	No	No
Lowe's Iris	Yes	No	No
Control4	Yes	No	No
Crestron	Yes	No	No

Smart thermostat	Alexa (Echo)	Google Home	HomeKit/Siri
Nest	Yes	Yes	No
Ecobee3	Yes	No	Yes
Honeywell Lyric	Yes	No	Yes
Sensi	Yes	No	Coming
Netatmo	Yes	No	No

Other smart devices	Alexa (Echo)	Google Home	HomeKit/Siri
Roomba	Yes	No	No
Neato	Yes	Yes	No
Garagio	Yes	No	No
Gogogate	Yes	No	No
August lock	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rachio	Yes	No	No
BAF	Yes	No	No
IFTTT	Yes	Yes	No
Yonomi	Yes	No	No
Alarm.com	Yes	No	No

Your Echo will support some smart-home devices out of the box, but for others you need to first enable a third-party Skill. For the products that don't require the use of a Skill, simply find that product in the Smart Home section of the Alexa app, then ask the app to discover your device. Once it shows up you'll be asked to name it (e.g., Living Room Nest, Kitchen Sink Light, Dining Room Sconces). You can also add it to a group (such as All Lights, All Thermostats, or Christmas Decorations). Naming and grouping are important for managing your devices. By placing several items in the same group,

#### Amazon Echo vs. Google Home: Which Voice Controlled Speaker Is Best for You? | The Wirecutter

such as a couple of Hue bulbs, a WeMo switch, and a Lutron switch, and calling the group "Living Room Lights," you can control multiple devices at once. A device can be in more than one group at a time; however, it's useful to make sure a device name and a group name are not so similar sounding that Alexa gets confused.

Smart Home	<	Sm	art Home
Your Groups Use groups to control multiple devices at a time.			Caséta
Office 2 Devices	>	Harmony	Harmoi
Office Lights 2 Devices	>	hue	Hue
Theater lights 1 Device	>	Disturts	
Living room 2 Devices	>	Ģ	LIFX <b>***</b> Disable Optimi:
Screen lights 3 Devices	>	nest	Nest ★
Fireplace 3 Devices	>	wink	Wink **** Disable

Note that we haven't tried all the products that integrate with Alexa. You can find <u>a</u> <u>complete list</u> of Alexa-compatible devices on Amazon's Alexa page.

The Google Home system does a good job controlling the smart-home devices it works with, but it doesn't work with nearly as many devices as the Echo system. However, sometimes the Home's integrations are a bit easier to use. For example, its Nest integration lets you say "Hey Google, make it warmer" in order to raise the temperature. With the Echo, you need to say "Alexa, turn living room Nest to XX degrees," and if you say it incorrectly it won't work. Still, that doesn't matter if the Home won't work at all with the smart devices you already own or are planning to buy.

# What about Siri and Cortana?

If you're more interested in smart-home controls than music control, <u>HomeKit using</u> <u>Siri</u> as the voice assistant is a good option. There are no Siri-powered speakers (though there are plenty of rumors about them), but there are lots of HomeKit-enabled smarthome devices, including Philips Hue, Lutron Caseta, Ecobee3, August Smart Lock, and many more. As a smart-home platform, HomeKit does more than Alexa or Google Assistant. You can set up scenes and combine more devices than the other platforms allow. In fact, HomeKit approaches the functionality of a <u>smart-home hub</u>.

Voice control via Siri is mostly good, though the feature usually requires more precise wording to perform a task than Alexa or Google. Also, you need to have your iPhone or iPad around if

## Not a speaker, yet

Building a Smart Home With Apple's HomeKit you want to use Siri, and even with "Hey Siri" activated, you still need the device to be plugged in, making it less handy than an always-on and always-listening speaker. Siri is a convenient way to control a HomeKit-based system, but Apple's Home app (not to be confused with the Google Home app) is still the system's primary interface, which makes it different from Alexa and Google Assistant (which rarely require you to open the app). As a voice assistant for the phone, Siri is pretty good,



Siri paired with HomeKit does much of what Echo and Home do, but there's no standalone speaker yet. Read More

and Apple has been at it longer than anyone. Asking directions, adding things to to-do lists, dictating text messages, and performing basic information searches come naturally to the system.

Microsoft's voice-assistant platform, Cortana, is built into every Windows 10 computer, can be found on the Xbox One and on Windows phones, and can be added via an app to Android and iPhones. Like the others, it can set reminders, create to-do lists, conduct Web searches, and play music requests. While Cortana works with Insteon smart-home hubs, there's no other device integration at the moment, though that kind of functionality is <u>in the works</u>. Later this year, Harman Kardon will release a Cortanapowered speaker similar to the Echo and the Home. For the time being, though, Cortana is not a serious competitor to Siri, let alone to the Google Home system or Alexa.

## Privacy and security concerns

Both the Echo and the Home feature always-on microphones, though each includes a mute button to turn off the mic if you want some privacy. As voice-controlled speakers, they need to always be alert for your commands, which means they're listening to every sound within their hearing range (which in our experience seems to generally be about the size of a 300-square-foot room, depending on how loudly you speak). When the speaker hears its wake word, it jumps into action and sends a recording of the command it heard to its cloud servers, where the command is translated into an action; then you get music, an answer, or whatever it is you asked it to do. The process, while it may vary slightly depending on your Internet connection, can be instantaneous or take up to a few seconds.

The fact that these speakers are always listening concerns some users and privacy advocates. If all you're ever asking for are playlists, weather forecasts, and help with algebra problems, this may not be an issue for you. However, the speakers' tendency to mis-hear a wake word and record things that aren't actually commands could be an issue. In fact, in 2016 police requested access to the archived recordings of an Echo to discover if it could aid in a <u>murder investigation</u>. Amazon initially declined the request; when asked about the matter, representatives told <u>WBS-TV</u> that "Amazon will not release customer information without a valid and binding legal demand properly served on us. Amazon objects to overbroad or otherwise inappropriate demands as a matter of course." A few months later, the company <u>relented</u>.

Should you be worried about all that? It's really more about your comfort level with Internet-connected things, since <u>even TVs</u> are now sending your viewing data (and voice recordings) back to their masters. All the data going up and down to Amazon's and Google's servers is encrypted, and both devices require secure passwords during the setup process, so your data is unlikely to get intercepted by anyone outside of those companies.

Both devices use their listening skills to accumulate data about you, not only for product-improvement purposes but also for marketing and advertising. Every time you ask your device to play Chopin or where the closest Ethiopian restaurant is, that data is being crunched with other data to create a profile of you (or your household, since neither device can discern individual voices yet). Google is probably collecting more data overall than Amazon, because it has more tools to do so, including its main search tool, the Chrome browser, the Maps app, Gmail, and the calendar. All of this is outlined in the company's privacy page. Both Amazon and Google let users delete all recordings, but warn users that deleting information may also affect how well the systems respond to you. In addition to helping them target marketing to you, the data collection assists the devices in <u>becoming better listeners</u> by helping them improve their respective voice-recognition abilities. You can view and manage your Google Home history <u>here</u> and your Amazon Echo <u>here</u>.

# What to look forward to

When we originally wrote this piece, only one speaker had Google's voice powers built in, but new compatible devices have been announced. Better-sounding speakers with Google Assistant would make this decision much more difficult. We also know that Google's offering is trying to catch up with Alexa in the smart-home department.

Alexa is adding more device compatibility, though more important to this guide are the new Alexa speakers becoming available. Several budget-oriented brands, including Jam, Sugr, and Fabriq, are already offering Alexa speakers without the always-on microphone. Both Lenovo and Onkyo plan to introduce Alexa-enabled speakers; one of the two Lenovo models will include a Harman Kardon speaker, which could give the original Echo some competition. Sonos has announced that it plans to launch an Alexa-integrated speaker at some point, as well, and LG has a refrigerator with Alexa built in.

Amazon and Microsoft <u>announced</u> cross-compatibility for their voice assistants, Alexa and Cortana. Alexa users can access Cortana features like setting reminders or reading emails, and Cortana users can access all of <u>Alexa's skills</u>, like getting news briefings or shopping on Amazon. We'll test these features when they go live; we expect to see them by late 2017.

Alexa now has <u>multiroom music playback</u>. To use, you have to create groups in the Alexa app with two or more of your devices—for example, you can set up a group for only the Echo devices in the downstairs area of your home, then you can tell Alexa to play music downstairs. At launch, multiroom capability works only with Amazon Music, TuneIn, iHeartRadio, and Pandora, but Spotify and SiriusXM support has been promised.

LG <u>announced</u> that Google Assistant will be available on all of its smart-home devices, allowing users to check how much time is left on a load of laundry or control their robot vacuum from their Google Home or smartphone.

Panasonic and Sony are both releasing their own smart speakers with Google Assistant. <u>Panansonic's SC-GA10</u> features a minimalist design with the capability to listen to music, ask Google questions, and control other smart-home devices like Chromecast TVs and thermostats. <u>Sony's LF-S50G</u> is a splash-proof, 360-degree speaker with touch-free controls and an optional LED clock display as well as Chromecast capabilities.

Harman <u>announced</u> its own Alexa-enabled speaker, the Kardon Allure, which offers 360 degrees of sound and responsive lighting that moves to the rhythm of music.

Harman claims that with its far-field voice recognition, the speaker will work from a distance. The Allure will be available in the winter of 2017.

Anker released its own Alexa-enabled smart speaker, the <u>Eufy Genie</u>. Similar to the Dot, but slightly larger and about \$15 cheaper, the Genie can also sync with all Eufybranded smart-home products from Anker. In our preliminary testing, it sounds about the same as a Dot, with a comparable max volume and lack of bass. We also discovered that it isn't compatible with the Alexa app and must be used with the Eufy app; this is a slight annoyance but we plan to do further testing and will update this guide accordingly.

In April, Amazon announced a \$200 Alexa-enabled selfie camera called the <u>Echo Look</u>. It's more camera than speaker, so though it is a full Alexa device, it won't challenge either the Echo or the Home as a music player. In May the company announced the \$230 <u>Echo Show</u>, which combines a 7-inch touchscreen with a camera and a two-driver speaker, powered by Alexa. It can do everything an Echo can do, plus make video calls to other Shows and allow users to stream videos and view video footage from their Ring and Arlo cameras.

Finally, we plan to review the <u>Apple HomePod</u> that was announced at <u>WWDC 2017</u> once it's available in December. We'll also check out the <u>Harman Kardon Invoke speaker</u> <u>with Cortana</u> expected to debut this fall. But from the teasers we've seen of both options and the experience we have with both assistants on phones and computers, we don't think anyone in the market for a voice-controlled speaker right now should wait for the debut of either.

Aside from the integrated speakers already noted, you can find other voice platforms. Josh is designed for professional home automation and costs thousands of dollars to install. Audrey is just getting off the ground. After Samsung acquired <u>Viv</u>, a voice-control system started by some of the original creators of Siri, it launched a voice assistant of its own called Bixby. Though Bixby is currently available only on a limited number of Samsung phones, Samsung has begun working on a <u>smart speaker</u> that uses the audio assistant, confirming a report by <u>The Wall Street Journal</u> (subscription required). We plan to test that speaker when it becomes available.

	Amazon Echo
and the second se	The smarter smart speaker
	Buy from Amazon (\$80 Off Through 9/4)
	Buy for \$0 from Target
	*At the time of publishing, the price was \$180
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did the cat on the s	er this year, Alexa forgot all of her cat jokes except one ("what smartphone say?" "can you hear me meow?"). This was pinting, as she still retains a plethora of bad dog jokes.
Brian L • 6 days ago Scout and Alarm.co it's not) ∧ ∨ • Reply • Sl	—   ► om are compatible with google home. (your review mentions the hare >
<b>Paul Phillips</b> $\cdot$ a mont Why oh why has no $1 \land   \checkmark \cdot$ Reply $\cdot$	obody mentioned you cannot setup google home with a PC!
<ul> <li>PRathod • a month ag</li> <li>i have tried a both a</li> <li>use this device.</li> <li>1 ∧   ∨ • Reply •</li> </ul>	and i will recommend Amazon echo to use. i am very pleased to
without the ability to	t the look of the home. It also irritated me that google released in to add events to you "GOOGLE" calendar. Really? I understand seems to me that would've been something easier for google to
need it to do and so much fuss. Also sir	one is better. I don't really care too much. The echo does what o long as there's not a lot of background noise it does it without nce I have dots and they were on sale when I got them I got 3 for ome. I do want to get the show though.
-	e day when it misheard me. I got a bit annoyed and said "Really aid "really, really" . That defused my irritation over whatever it
	th Google over it's new assistant. I was good with google now gat comes google assistant which for me doesn't do things near
between assistants just say google ple	Android phone, an ipad and a Windows PC so I can switch s as the mood takes me. I think google has the nicest voice (car ease give your assistant a real name?). Alexa has a nice voice ter voice inflection.
	ntly adding new features to the echo at what I feel is an I don't feel that I am missing much not having the home. Share >

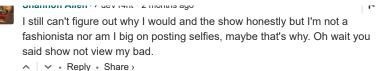


## deV14nt • 2 months ago

1

Missed the boat on the Echo Show for Prime Day / Google Home discount. Different speaker arrangement entirely, for starters.

**Shannon Allen &** de\/14nt • 2 months ago http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/amazon-echo-vs-google-home/





#### Sinclair Louis • 5 months ago

- | P

I've had the Nexus phone for a couple of months now, and I'm pretty disappointed with the voice recognition. I need to say "ok google" like 3 times until it's recognized.

1 ^ V • Reply • Share >



#### Ordeith • 5 months ago

- | P

An active microphone array from the World's Largest Data Harvesting and Advertising company in my home? Probably not the best idea.

"The tweet by Rory inspired many other Twitter users like Danny Sullivan, who also tweeted a video featuring Google Home in a Q&A, wherein Sullivan asks the Smart Home device – "Are Republicans fascists?", And the Assistant replies, "Yes. Republicans equal Nazis."

-Google Home Lambasted For Spreading Fake News And Conspiracy Theories [WCCFTECH, 03/06/2017]

"Google Home might not be the most popular voice assistant to offer convenient information in exchange for reams of personal data, but it appears to bethe first to serve ads directly into users' living rooms."

#### -Google Home Now Includes Unsolicited Ads [Gizmodo, 03/16/2017]

"This move frankly benefits no one but Google. The Assistant now only puts voiceadded items in Google Express. There's no way to change it back to Google Keep. There's no way to restore the myriad features Google users have lost. The Assistant was pitched as a hardware feature on the Google Pixel, and it's the only feature on Google Home. Unlike most of Google's freebie, ad-supported apps, these are both devices that people paid cold, hard cash for, and to gut one of their best features in order to push a tier-three Google service feels like a bait-andswitch."

-Google ruins the Assistant's shopping list, turns it into a big Google Express ad [Ars Technica, 04/11/2017]

1 • Reply • Share >

#### Tyler Elliott • 5 months ago

- - | P

While I see lots of news articles about Alexa-Roomba integration, the skill doesn't seem to exist.

Reply
 Share >



#### Vera Comment → Tyler Elliott • 5 months ago

\_

exist.... yet "The company isn't leaning too heavily on the Alexa integration at this stage, since it's still a bit of a ways off, arriving at some point in Q2. But it will certainly be a handy feature for those with both an Echo and 900 connected series Roomba already in their home. We caught a demo of the functionality on a recent trip to the company's Bedford, Massachusetts headquarters, and the whole setup was as user-friendly as one would hope, asking Alexa to tell Roomba to start cleaning and return to the docking station."

∧ V • Reply • Share >



Tyler Elliott → Vera Comment • 5 months ago — Maybe the integration matrix in the article should be updated to "Coming". It will be nice to have Alexa stop and start Roomba when we're home.

What would be really exciting is Roomba integration with IFTTT. Then I could have Roomba run every time we leave. Even turn on the lights for the mapping feature, then (fingers crossed) turn them

back off when it's done.

Reply • Share >



#### don • 5 months ago

\_

c'mon guys - Amazon didn't relent. From the article

"According to a court order, Bates consented to the disclosure, which then prompted Amazon to agree to the release of the data " 2 ^ | ~ • Reply • Share >



#### deV14nt → don • 2 months ago

- | P

Right. It seems the data is being used in the defendants' potential exoneration of the crime. We should all be so lucky. In fact, that's why I'm in the market for a dash cam.

Version Reply • Share >



#### Tim Stringer • 5 months ago

- - - •

> ...and even with "Hey Siri" activated, you still need the device to be plugged in, making it less handy than an always-on and always-listening speaker.

People who have an iPhone 6S or later can activate Siri using "Hey Siri", even if the iPhone isn't plugged in. I believe the 9.7-inch iPad Pro can also be activated with "Hey Siri", whether or not it's plugged in.

It's also worth noting that Siri can easily be activated using an Apple Watch, either by raising the watch and saying "Hey Siri" or by pressing and holding the digital crown for about a second.

1 ^ V • Reply • Share >



sympdlp → Tim Stringer • 3 months ago

- | P

"whether or not it's plugged in"... is that some kind of Apple-speak? ...plugged in to WHAT? electric power source, computer, sound system, network hub, TV or monitor...??? I suspect you are referring to a power source, but that makes no sense since I believe all the devices you are mentioning are internal battery powered and [should] operate fully on battery power. On Android, all functionality is identical whether "plugged -in" or not (except of course wired cable transfers and OS updates under low-battery conditions).

Would you care to explain what you are alluding to?

Note: Share > Reply • Share >



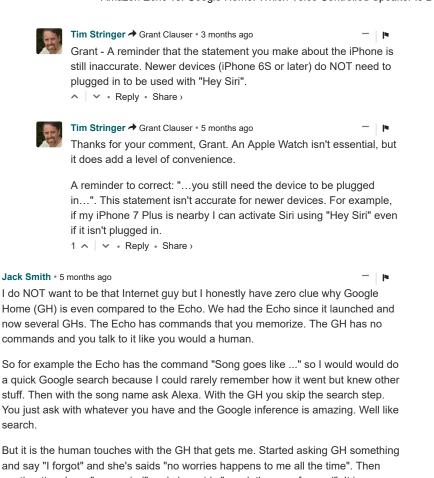
Tim Stringer → sympdlp • 3 months ago — Older iPhones can only be activated using "Hey Siri" if they're plugged into a power source. Newer iPhone (starting with the iPhone 6S) have the hardware they need to listen for the "Hey Siri" phrase while running on battery...without significantly compromising battery life.

Reply • Share >



Grant Clauser → Tim Stringer • 5 months ago I agree, Siri is considerably more convenient when you have an Apple watch.

Reply • Share >



and say "I forgot" and she's saids "no worries happens to me all the time". Then another time I say "nevermind" and she saids "yes, let's move forward". It is amazing and assume it learned how to do this by Google crawling the web all these years for their search engine.

I can give example after example of my REAL life use cases where GH achieved what was needed and the Echo can not

see more

7 ^ V · Reply · Share >



Lateef Alabi-Oki → Jack Smith • 5 months ago – I agree with you in many respects. But I wouldn't as far as to say they are not alike. They do compete in the same category.

However, a lot of reviewers get carried away by Alexa's 10,000 skills. Many of them failing to note the quality of those skills. Like you correctly alluded to, who has time to configure and memorize commands for 10,000 skills, most of which barely work if you don't use the exact command syntax.

The focus on quantity of skills as opposed to quality of skills is what frustrates me. Because in my experience for every skill the Home and Echo can perform, the Home almost always does the skill better, more intelligently, with less fuss and no configurations, and without having to memorize the syntax of commands.

It seems to me that the Google Assistant's natural language processing system is a generation or 2 ahead of Alexa's. 7 ^ | ~ • Reply • Share >



#### Lateef Alabi-Oki • 5 months ago

- | •

The Google Home is the better, smarter and more intelligent speaker. Google Assistant and Alexa are just not in the same league. Sorry.

However, the Echo's primary advantage are the numerous third party integrations with IoT devices. 99% of the 10,000 Alexa skills are useless. So, I wouldn't consider that an advantage at all.

If your IoT devices support Google Home, I recommend it instead of the Echo. It's not that the Echo is bad. It's just that the Google Assistant seems, a heck of a lot more, to know what to do with what you say to it.

Also using the Google Home to start videos on YouTube and Netflix on TV, and control playback and volume, never gets old. It is the Home's single most killer feature. It's unfortunate Google doesn't advertise this more.  $5 \land | \checkmark \circ$  Reply  $\circ$  Share >

## BierKerl → Lateef Alabi-Oki • 5 months ago

- 1

I agree with everything you say! There was an episode of Modern Family where Phil said something like "Ok Google, play a video of a gazelle" (I can't remember the exact animal or video, so could have been something else), and it started playing on their tv, and my Home also responded but I didn't have Chromecast hooked up yet. I'm sure many Homes responded, and it was a great advertisement tied right in with the show! 1 ^ V • Reply • Share >



#### Jason Dunn • 5 months ago

- | 🎮

Nice review Grant! Amazon's Alexa and Google Home are both incredible example of how rapidly this technology is improving. I've had an Alexa, Dot, and a Google Home since they respectively launched. Each has pros and cons. Much of the bottom line on which you should chose has to do with what ecosystem you are in: we use Google Play Music in my family, and Alexa not supporting it was always frustrating. I liked the way the Dot connected to a BT receiver - which I had connected to a pair of AudioEngine A5+ speakers - but it had some quirks. Alexa could handle the basic stuff, but its inability to answer basic questions was a bit irksome over time. Having to say "wikipedia" before asking it something, and often getting a somewhat useless summary was underwhelming.

I am impressed enough with my Google Home to leave it as our primary voice assistant in our kitchen area. I have it paired with a Chromecast Ultra (to my 4K TV) and a Chromecast (to my Vizio soundbar). Three main reasons why:

1) The fact that I can say "Hey Google, show me 'I knew you were trouble' by 'Walk off the Earth' on my TV" and boom - my TV turns on, switches to the Chromecast - is stunning. This is a "killer app" for voice, and Google having the two pieces of

#### see more

5 ^ V • Reply • Share >

#### BierKerl → Jason Dunn • 5 months ago

Almost the exact same experience and opinion as you! I love them both, but the Google Home has really won me over since I got it in November and Alexa has been relegated to music and weather in the bedroom. The fact that you can ask the Home pretty much anything worded in any way and get an answer so much more often than Alexa is huge for me. I've really gotten tired of Alexa saying "Hmmm, I can't help with that right now". And having to enable skills then word them a certain way on Alexa also became tiresome. Add the bartender skill then have to word it "ask the bartender skill how to make an old fashioned" while on Google Home you don't need to add skill and you simply say "how do you make an old fashioned?" I can't imagine trying to learn the "proper" way to word everything for the 10,000 skills Alexa has. I like the sound on both and don't find much of a difference, at least not at the volumes I listen to. I'm an Amazon Prime member so I can take

the volumes I listen to. I'm an Amazon Prime member so I can take advantage of Prime Music and checking order status on Alexa, but my Home has never failed to play anything I've asked for, and the only times I've checked order status was just to see how she'd respond. I can't say much about home automation features because I don't have much set up on either yet, but it's clear to see that Google Home is catching up pretty quickly to Alexa at being compatible with more and more services, and Home has IFTTT capabilities for those it's not yet gotten a deal with. And using Google Cast is awesome, and something Alexa will probably

9/21/2017	Amazon Echo vs. Google Home: Which Voice Controlled Speaker Is Best for You?   The Wirecutter never nave. It seems to be the tuture. Again, I love them both, but if I was forced to choose just one, Google Home all the way! $4 \land   \checkmark \circ \text{Reply} \circ \text{Share}$
	Pitsata Malveda → BierKerl • 4 months ago great review, thank you! i have one question: how do you play your Amazon music through Google Home? I also am a Prime member, and have all my music through there, so thought I would have to go with the Echo for that reason. Sounds like maybe I don't? Thanks! 1 ∧   × • Reply • Share >
	BierKerl → Pitsata Malveda • 4 months ago — In The only way I can think of is you can play your Prime music through your phone or tablet and cast it to your Google Home. I haven't tried it yet, but I don't see why it wouldn't work! ∧   ∨ • Reply • Share >
	Grant Clauser → Jason Dunn • 5 months ago       —       Im         Those are all fair points, and how you use it/what you want it for, does make a difference in which you prefer.       A       V • Reply • Share >
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