

Session Booklet – Amazon Echo & Google Home

‘Alexa, how long will it take me to get to work?’ ‘Hey Google, tell me a joke!’ These commands are often thrown at smart speakers by their owners but what is a smart speaker?

Amazon Alexa & Google Home

1 According to Wikipedia, a smart speaker is a type of wireless speaker and voice command device with an integrated virtual assistant that offers interactive actions and handsfree activation with the help of one “hot word”. But what does that actually mean?

A smart speaker, like the Amazon Echo or Google Home, is a wireless speaker meaning it can work with multiple devices without being connected to it. It is a voice command device that turns on when it hears a particular word. The integrated virtual assistant, Alexa or Google Assistant, can then complete actions based on the commands you give it.



Knowledge check – What’s the difference between a virtual assistant and a smart speaker?

2 Firstly, we are going to look at the Amazon Echo speaker. The Amazon Echo speaker, as of June 2018, comes in 6 variants but we are going to be looking at the Amazon Echo Dot.



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The Amazon Echo Dot is roughly about the size of a hockey puck and comes in both black and white. Utilising hands – free, voice demand technology, the Amazon Echo Dot can play music, control smart home devices, read the news, set alarms and more. With 7 microphones, it can be used from across a room and is always getting smarter as it is updated automatically through the cloud, adding new features and skills.



Knowledge Check – What are the 6 variants of Amazon Echo?

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We are now going to look at some of the best features of having an Amazon Echo Dot.

Ask Alexa ‘What are your deals?’ and find a series of exclusive deals from Amazon available to Prime and Alexa – enabled devices!

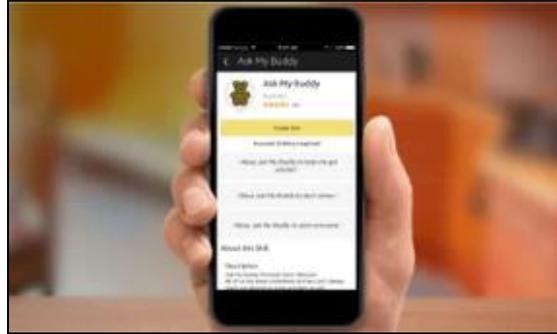
For those using Android smartphones, you can use Alexa to verbally send text messages.

Eating a fancy steak and wonder what wine would pair well with it. Ask Alexa to open Wine finder, tell it what you are eating, and it will recommend a wine to pair with whatever your food of choice is!



Trying to get in shape for a holiday? Ask Alexa to 'Start 7-minute workout' and it will launch into a 7-minute exercise program aimed at increasing your metabolism, improving your energy and removing fat.

You can use Alexa to notify a loved one should you ever be in an emergency and unable to get to the phone. Use the 'Ask My Buddy' skill and Alexa will send a text and/or call your designated contact.



Knowledge Check – What are 'Skills' when using an Amazon Echo Dot?

5 We are now going to look at the Google equivalent to the Amazon Echo Dot, the Google Home Mini.



Knowledge Check – How many variants of the Google smart speaker are there?

<p>6</p>	<p>Google Home Mini allows you to speak commands to interact with a raft of Google services, as well as 3rd party services, using Google Assistant to do so.</p> <p>This means you can use Spotify to listen to music, launch TV shows using Netflix and ask Google Maps how long it will take you to get to work this morning. At 10 cm in diameter and coming in chalk, charcoal and coral, it is easy to see why the Google Home Mini is comparable to the Amazon Echo Dot.</p>	
<p>7</p>	<p>We are now going to look at some of the best features of a Google Home Mini.</p> <p>Cooking a new recipe? You can use Google Assistant to find your recipes and then read them out loud, step – by – step, only moving on to the next upon your command.</p> <p>Not sure by how many goals Liverpool lost at the weekend? Simply ask your Google Home Mini and it will give you live score updates as well as next games dates, locations and times.</p> <p>You can use Voice Match so that family and friends can all use the same device, with Google Home Mini able to differentiate between them and give answers depending on preset voices.</p>	
<p>Knowledge Check – Which device is cheaper? Echo Dot or Home Mini?</p>		

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We've spoken about the pros of using a smart speaker. It frees up time as you add things, verbally to a shopping list that can then be sent to your mobile phone and they have fantastic features such as meditation and breathing exercises to help you destress.

We are now going to have a look at some of the negatives.

Physical limitations. You can use the smart speakers to set a reminder to make a cup of tea. You can use your smart speaker to control a smart plug to boil your kettle. However, it still can't make you a cup of tea.

Connectivity. Smart speakers work the best when you have multiple of the same speaker and have a variety of smart enabled devices which can be controlled through your smart speaker.

New technology. As with all new advances in technology, there are some gaps and some issues. The speakers have to listen all the time or how would they hear you activate them with a voice command. When you don't need it, and it is listening, what does it do with what you are saying? Does it use your conversation to better tailor adverts towards your discussions when using search engines? Can it collect and sell any information you say?



<p>9</p>	<p>One of the last questions we are going to look at is – Which is the best out of the 2?</p> <p>If you use Amazon Prime and are a regular shopper on Amazon.co.uk, then an Echo Dot might be best for you.</p> <p>If you are a user of all of Google’s services such as Maps, Drive, YouTube then a Google Home Mini might be the best choice for you.</p> <p>Most agree that if you want the best smart speaker for use with other devices e.g. smart light bulbs, then the Echo Dot is the best buy. If you want one that answers questions and is the most intuitive, then the Home Mini is the purchase of choice as the power of Google means it finds answers for all kinds of question.</p>	
<p>10</p>	<p>The last thing we are going to do is have a bit of fun using a smart speaker by completing a trivia quiz. You can do this by simply asking either Alexa or Google to ‘Play a trivia quiz’. The device becomes a quiz master and you can play multiple rounds of a trivia quiz with your friends and family!</p>	