

# Google in smartphone push with motion-sensing Pixel 4

October 15 2019, by Daniel Hoffman, With Glenn Chapman In San Francisco

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The new Pixel 4 phone is on display during a Google product launch event called Made by Google on October 15 in New York

Google stepped up its smartphone ambitions Tuesday with updated Pixel handsets, touting a move toward computing with a simple hand wave or spoken command.

Pixel 4 models boasting features including gesture and face recognition debuted at a "Made by Google" event showcasing new hardware infused with artificial intelligence to respond to motion and voice.

The Pixel 4 handset with a 5.7-inch display has a starting price of \$799 in the United States and will be available globally starting October 24. A larger 6.3-inch Pixel XL will start at \$899.

The new devices aim to ramp up Google's challenge in the premium smartphone segment dominated by Samsung and Apple, which recently unveiled an iPhone 11 starting at \$699.

Google also updated its Nest smart home cameras and speakers and announced its streaming game service Stadia would launch November 19.

While Pixel smartphones have struggled for traction in the smartphone market, they provide an opportunity to showcase the Android operating system's capabilities and the Google Assistant digital aide.

Pixel 4 features improved camera capabilities, using artificial intelligence to boost optical zoom and take better photos taken after dark, with a feature devoted to capturing images of the heavens at night.



Sabrina Ellis, Google vice president of product management, introduces the new Google Pixel 4 smartphone during a Google launch event on October 15

Motion-sensing technology that Google has been working on for some time is built into Pixel 4 and will allow for some basic controls, such as silencing alarms or skipping to the next song, by holding up or waving hands. The handsets also include a "face unlock" feature similar to those on iPhones and other devices.

Amid antitrust reviews on both sides of the Atlantic over its online dominance, Google is seeking to diversify its business by adding more devices and services.

## Stadia ready to go

The California-based internet titan will launch Stadia streaming game service on November 19, hoping to send console-quality play soaring into the cloud.

Stadia allows video game play on any internet-connected device, eliminating the need for game consoles.

Google updated products across its hardware line, from Nest smart home devices to Chromebook laptops and wireless ear buds.

A common theme was making it more natural to use Google to tap into the internet and digital assistant capabilities naturally with voice or gestures at any time.



The new Google Stadia gaming system controller is displayed during a launch event for the gaming service set to debut November 19

The notion of online services and machine smarts being all around and always ready to serve people instead of needing them to tap at smartphones or keyboards is referred to as "ambient computing."

"Our vision for ambient computing is to create a single, consistent experience anywhere you go," said Rick Osterloh, head of Google's hardware division.

Google also built digital assistant capabilities into smart home products from its Nest unit in a move that shrewdly extends its reach, according to Creative Strategies analyst Carolina Milanesi.

"I really felt the bigger message today was about ambient computing and how the different products work together to highlight Google's AI," Milanesi said.

Google spotlighted product design and user privacy at the event, hitting on themes stressed by Apple as well as Microsoft, the analyst added.

## **Building in privacy**

Google emphasized privacy enhancements in its line of products, which kept more personal data and computing functions on devices instead of sending it to datacenters in the cloud.





Rick Osterloh, vice president of devices and services at Google, discusses the new Pixel Buds ear pods during a launch event on October 15 in New York City

"Privacy is built in," Google director of product management Sabrina Ellis said while introducing Pixel 4.

"New Google Assistant can respond to day-to-day requests on-device."

Data processed on Pixel 4 handsets is "never saved or shared with other Google services," she added.

The smartphones still need to reach into the cloud for requests such as checking whether flights are delayed or commute traffic troubled.

Pixel 4 users will be able to tell their devices to delete anything said to it that day or week, according to Ellis. A chip in the handset is also designed as a secure digital vault for personal data.

"More and more of Google's story today is about on-device AI capabilities... it opens lots of possibilities for faster performance and better privacy," Technalysis Research chief analyst Bob O'Donnell said in a tweet.

Google also said it is ramping up investments in renewable energy, aiming to offset all the power required to make its hardware with green power.

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