

Hey Google? Is it you or Alexa?

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OK, Google, so what's it going to be? You or Alexa?

Smart speakers, and the ability to use voice to listen to music, get traffic directions, the latest weather, news updates, recipes and more are among the most popular holiday gift items, with prices starting at around \$25.

(The Amazon Echo Dot even has a Black Friday sale price of \$22.)

But if you're new to the category, know that before you buy, you have to make a basic decision—which format to sign up to. Because both speakers don't always work with each other and once you master the commands for one, you're not going to want to use a different set on another [speaker](#).

For that reason, there are often simply "Google Homes," or "Alexa manors."

(Unless you're a tech reviewer like me, and you've got the Google Assistant, Alexa and Apple's Siri chirping away at you all day.)

Amazon, which launched the Echo speaker five years ago, in November 2014, continues to dominate smart speakers, with rival Google catching up. Amazon has a 61% [market share](#) in [smart speakers](#), to Google's 24%, according to Voicebot.ai. Apple released the HomePod in 2018, but it sold poorly (with a 2% market share), and Apple hasn't updated the category. So we'll focus just on the two main players, Amazon and Google.

Amazon vs. Google: pro and cons

Amazon: The consumer priority at the e-tailer seems to be all about Alexa. Most new products released by Amazon are all about voice interaction (new earbuds, glasses, a ring and more speakers were recently introduced). It's how Amazon wants to get into our heads since they have one major drawback.

Con: Amazon missed out on the smartphone revolution, and thus has no phone platform to exploit.

Google: The biggest pro is 85% market share of worldwide smartphone usage, with the Android platform giving it more tools to work with, and more ways to extend the natural "Hey, Google" commands into our daily lives.

Con: Google is more focused on the "Assistant," than on [new products](#), unlike Amazon. And like the Seattle based e-tailer, it has privacy issues as well. See more below.

"Amazon has doubled down on its strength—the [home](#)," says Voicebot.ai editor Bret Kinsella. "Google's priorities are in other places."

He likens Google usage to tasks like search, appointment setting and making calls, while Alexa is about "fun," making the house smart, playing games and the like.

Which has more products?

Beyond the lineup of eight Echo speakers, ranging from \$22 to \$199, Amazon says Alexa is on 100 million devices (mostly Amazon speakers) and is available on over 28,000 smart home products, including the Ring video doorbell, Sonos One speaker, lights from Philips and a new Anker soundbar.

Google, which has seven speakers, from \$25 to \$249, counters that the Assistant is on over 1 billion devices, but those are primarily Android smartphones. Google says the Assistant is available on over 10,000 smart home devices, including the Android TV line (from LG and Sony) the same Sonos One and Philips products, the August home lock and Lenovo smart display.

Amazon's got skills. Does Google?

To go beyond asking for the weather and playing the latest Ariana Grande song, for Alexa you need to download a "skill," to enable the smart speaker to do something a little extra. Examples would be pairing your TV for voice navigation with an Echo device, or being able to play Jeopardy. You can't just say "Alexa, play Jeopardy," you have to go to your smartphone and add the skill via the app.

Amazon says some 100,000 skills now exist for Alexa.

Google calls it's variation "actions" and says there are over 1 million available, however, these don't have to be downloaded. Instead, they are really just voice commands. You can find them in the Google Home smartphone app for iOS or Android by clicking Explore in the Google Assistant tab. This takes you to a search page that offers suggestions like asking the weather, playing "My Daily Drive" on Spotify or "Stranger Things," on Netflix.

But FYI: You can't play Jeopardy with the Google Assistant. You can ask it, however, to play the long-running TV show on Netflix. There are, however, many games of all types available on Google as well.

Images on Echo Show and Nest Hub

A new twist to the smart speaker is the home display, which brings video to the category, with Amazon's Echo Show products, and Google's Nest Hub.

This year, Amazon introduced a smaller, 8-inch Show for \$99, down from the \$229 10-inch version, and Google brought out a larger, 10-inch Hub Max, also \$229.

The Show had a major disadvantage originally in that it couldn't play clips from Google's YouTube due to a corporate spat, but the companies

have since made up.

Beyond using your voice to command video clips, the displays make great photo viewers, and here Google has the advantage, with its widely used Photos app. Your photos appear on the screen in rotation throughout the day, which they also do on the Echo Show, but there they are via Amazon's Photos app, which isn't as robust, and harder to navigate.

Amazon vs. Google on privacy

Amazon automatically records every query you make to Alexa, whether you want it to or not. Sometimes those queries can go a little further into kitchen conversations that happen to include the Alexa wake word. You can go into your Alexa smartphone app to delete them.

Google also automatically records every query, but will only let you delete the recordings on a three-month or 18-month basis, by going into your Google account and the privacy settings. Beyond recording, Google also tracks your web history, places you visit using Google Maps or the smartphone app to sell targeted ads to marketers.

Google Home. Nope. Now it's Nest

Finally, let us clear up some confusion. When Google first entered the smart speaker market, it did so with a product called the Google Home. Earlier this year, it decided to change the name of some Home products to the Nest brand, since Google-owned Nest makes a popular home thermostat.

But just to drive consumers crazy, Google stills sells the Google Home. But the pint-sized version is now called the Nest Mini, and the larger,

video display unit is the Nest Hub Max, which last year was the Google Home Max.

All still answer to "Hey, Google," though.

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