

Custom Alexa voice commands enrich Echo's options

23 November 2015, by Nancy Owano



Amazon Echo is a wireless speaker and voice command device from Amazon. The device wakes up to the name "Alexa" which is Amazon's voice-controlled personal assistant. Alexa is the voice that delivers information and obeys commands. Both Echo and Alexa represent a powerful pair for households using the system.

John Callahan in *Android Central* wrote on Friday that the Amazon Echo connected [speaker](#) keeps adding new features with its weekly updates. The latest one allows it to play games with its owners.

As important, reports came in this month of Echo's functionality now with IFTTT. The latter is a customization app, said *Android Headlines*, "that allows you to set up handy shortcuts using [recipes](#) involving apps and given actions. The app, compatible with iOS and Android, is also available for use on Amazon's intelligent speaker and home companion, Echo."

IFTTT added functionality, said *Android Headlines*, means you can set up actions, tie them to certain words or phrases, called triggers, and use them as voice commands for the Amazon Echo.

Engadget was amenable, noting "it gives you a lot of options: sample recipes on IFTTT show [voice](#) controlled commands to adjust thermostats, change lighting, send text messages and even change minor settings on the user's smartphone."

Fundamentally, Alexa has new bells and whistles. Sean Buckley reported more on the new feature: If you start your command with the word "trigger" you can proceed to command Alexa to do what you want. If you say Alexa trigger find my phone, a call will be placed to your device and your phone will ring. This works every time you say "Alexa trigger" and the phrase that you have defined.

Micah Singleton in *The Verge* was impressed with Echo's developments. "Amazon has been [updating](#) Echo since it was announced last year. With weekly updates and [new features](#) consistently being added, the Echo is a much more powerful device than it was six months ago."

Daniel Fuller in *Android Headlines* wrote, "New functions and apps are being put on the little bluetooth speaker that could with each passing day, bringing it closer and closer to being the must-have centerpiece to any futuristic home."

As a person in the promotional video said, the Echo "is a tool that we use to keep our household functioning."

Find phone. Set the thermostat temperature. Add rice to shopping list. Tell us a joke. Is it likely to rain? What's traffic like?

Echo is a device designed around your voice. Along with answering questions, it can set timers and issue reminders. A person in the promotional video said it was like bringing the technology in Tony Stark's house into your own.

Rory Carroll, LA-based correspondent for *The Guardian*, described Echo's physical presence as a

"black cylinder, about the size of two Coke cans, which contains Wi-Fi, two speakers, seven [microphones](#) and connects to the cloud." It sits in your home, he added, plugged into the wall. At the sound of the word "Alexa", the cylinder top glows blue and speaks.

The Guardian said Ronald Arkin, director of the Mobile Robot Laboratory at the Georgia Institute of Technology, called the Echo a "well-engineered advance in voice recognition." Arkin also said that "What's interesting is it's another step into turning our homes into robots." He said that "You see this in sci-fi: Star Trek, Knight Rider. It's the natural progression."

CNET's Ry Crist commented earlier this month on Amazon Echo:

"Right from the start, we saw big potential for Amazon Echo to play a central role in the [connected](#) home. Sure enough, it wasn't long before Amazon opened up Alexa's software to outside developers and added support for smart-home gear like Philips Hue's color changing bulbs and Belkin's WeMo line of smart switches and plugs. Additional third-party integrations allow Alexa to arm your security system as you're walking out the door, or even locate your car."

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