

Amazon Has a Voice Assistant... In a Tube

Written by Marco Attard
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In a surprise announcement Amazon reveals what is surely its oddest product yet-- the Echo, a black cylindrical speaker that is actually cloud-powered, voice-controlled, always-on virtual assistant.



Essentially the Echo is a lot like Apple's Siri, but within a piece of hardware. It promises room-filling sound via 360-degree speaker, and carries 7 microphones paired with beam-forming technology and "enhanced" noise canceling to hear speakers from any direction, even while it is playing music.

As for actual functionality, an adorably awkward video shows the various uses the Echo can find, such as assistant duties (wake up alarms, shopping lists, reminders, news, weather information), the answering of queries via Wikipedia, unit conversion, music playback (from Amazon Music Library, Prime Music, TuneIn and iHeartRadio). Powering all is the Amazon cloud, to which the Echo connects via mobile device and companion Echo app.

It all sounds faintly intriguing, even if one question stands-- why would anyone even want such a device? Of course, Amazon would like nothing more than an always-on gateway to its customers wants and desires, but the thought of the online retail giant constantly spying on whatever one is saying is creepy, to put it mildly. That said, the Echo might get upgraded with further connectivity, perhaps allowing it to act as a home automation hub, making it a more useful piece of equipment. After all it was [recently rumoured Amazon's Lab126 hardware division is working on something of the sort.](#)

Either way the Echo is exclusively available on an invitation-only basis to Amazon Prime

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