



## Tuesday Tech Talk – July 24, 2018

### Amazon Echo/Dot aka “Alexa”

Amazon Echo and Google Home are the two most popular in-home assistant devices that connect to cloud-based voice services. We’ll review Echo using the Echo Dot (\$49.99), the least expensive option. (Google Home may be a better option for those who mostly just want answers to factual questions.)

#### **There are a variety of Echo options depending on your interests**

Choose from: The Echo/Echo Dot/Echo Show/Echo Plus/Echo Spot/Tap/Echo Look/Echo Dot Kids. More info on page 3. Check the Amazon website to learn about the various features of each.

*Tip: Perhaps start small and build from there to ensure you’ll use it.*

All devices feature Alexa as the voice responding to your requests and setup is essentially the same.

#### **How to Set up the Echo Dot**

1. If you have a Smartphone, download the Alexa app from iTunes (Iphone) or Google Play (Droid). If you don’t have a Smartphone, download the web app on your computer and work from there. You do need a wifi connected device to set it up.
2. Set up an account with Amazon if you don’t have one already.
3. Plug in the Dot and watch for the light ring to circle in orange. If it doesn’t show up, press the “Action” button (a black dot) for 5 seconds until the circling starts.
4. Connect the app to the wifi network being set up by the Dot. The name will be something like “Amazon 2Q3.” Once you connect Alexa will say “You’re connected to Echo. Go ahead and finish the setup in the Alexa app.”
5. Back in the app you’ll see a list of all the wifi networks available – pick out your home wifi. Enter the wifi password if you have one. Once the info has been sent to the device, Alexa will say “Your Echo is ready” and the orange light goes out.
6. You can then go back into the app to set up particular services like connecting to music services, set up news briefings, schedule reminders, control Smart Home devices, etc.

#### **Is Alexa spying on me?**

Alexa is always listening for her “wake word, “ which is her name, or you can change the “wake word” to Echo, Amazon or Computer if you wish. A blue circle will light up when she hears it. You can immediately ask your question/make your request – she is listening. If you don’t want her to listen for a period of time, tap the microphone button on the Dot to mute, and a red light will indicate she is not listening. A transcript of what you have asked is available to view through the Alexa app (Settings/History), so your “conversations” with



Alexa are being sent to “the cloud” and are available for you to review later if you want. Amazon insists that they are not collecting your conversations in the home that do not include Alexa.

### **Prime or No Prime**

You do not need Amazon Prime to use Echo devices. However, there are features only available to Prime members and they are:

- Prime music – a huge catalog of music available upon request. The Dot does not have a great speaker for playing music, so other Echo devices would be better for this.
- Voice shopping – you can ask Alexa to order a particular item – available only for items that are Prime-eligible. (you can secure this by setting a code that must be provided before a purchase is authorized)
- Special deals – ask Alexa for special deals for Prime members
- Show photos – if you store photos using Amazon Prime Photos, they will display on an Echo Show or Fire TV. Check into Family Vault, if you have Prime Photos but other family members do not.

### **Easily accessed features – some need to be set up via Settings/Alexa Preferences in the Alexa App**

- Get the weather report for anywhere “Alexa, what’s the weather in Paris today?”
- Set reminders – daily, weekly, monthly, doctors, events, etc.
- Create a grocery list that you can add to throughout the week and then print, if desired, or view in the Alexa app on your phone.
- Ask a question “Alexa, how old is George Clooney?”
- Get a recipe, “Alexa, find a recipe for chicken marsala”
- Call anyone by asking “Alexa, call xxx-xxx-xxxx”
- Track my Amazon order – ask “Alexa, where’s my stuff?”
- Do a workout – ask “Alexa, start 7 minute workout”
- Set up routines – ie. “Alexa, start my day” and she then provides weather and flash briefing
- Listen to TuneIn – access to radio stations from around the world, podcasts and news channels

### **Alexa Skills**

There are more than 25,000 “skills,” or little apps within the Echo/Alexa world. Just Google “Alexa Skills” to access the listing on the Amazon site, then search by category. Make sure you are logged into your Amazon account in order to download/access a skill. You can even program your own skills. Like apps, some are useful, some are not. Some are free, some are not. Some are immediately activated once you “get the skills” and others require some additional setup. But they can allow you to further customize your interactions with Alexa. These can allow you to:

- Seek assistance from your key contacts using your voice (Ask My Buddy – see final page)



- play games like The Song Game, Price Tag, Jeopardy, etc. Some have a small fee.
  - get a customized news briefing (Washington Post, WSJ, MLB)
  - connect to Smart Home devices (plugs, thermostats, etc.)
  - order from certain restaurants (Dominos, etc.)
  - provide home security by playing home-occupied sounds (Burglar Deterrent)
  - set reminders more specific than appointment reminders (Remind Me)
  - get meditation guidance (Headspace) or listen to TED Talks
  - weather information hyper-specific (Big Sky)
  - order an Uber or Lyft
- And so much more!

*Tip: Use your computer or tablet to review and download/access the available skills – it will be easier to read than on your phone.*

## **Miscellaneous**

You will receive weekly emails from Amazon with tips and news about Alexa since they are upgrading and adding “skills” every week. Worth a look!

Once you download the Alexa app to your phone you can talk to Alexa using the phone, ask her to make calls for you, etc.

Multiple devices can create an intercom system within the home.

You can buy Echo Buttons to play games against other people (Trivia).

The array of Echo choices:

**Echo** – the original. Better speaker for playing music than the Dot (\$99)

**Echo Plus** – \$149.99 - same as the Echo but has a built-in Smart Home hub for managing connected devices.

**Echo Dot** – smallest and least expensive device. (\$49) Has the capabilities of the Echo, but speaker is smaller.

**Echo Spot** – all the Echo capabilities and has a screen to watch flash briefings, see music lyrics or weather forecasts, to-do and shopping lists. (\$129)

**Echo Show** – good speakers and has a screen to watch Amazon Video content, flash briefings, security cameras, make video calls (to others with the Spot, Show or Alexa app) (\$229)

**Echo Look** – “Using just your voice, easily take full-length photos and 6-second videos of your daily look and build your own personal lookbook.” Has all the usual capabilities, but the focus is on how you look today.

**Echo Tap** – This is an Alexa-enabled portable Bluetooth speaker. Primarily for playing music outdoors – has rechargeable battery.



## Activating Ask My Buddy Skill

1. Open the Alexa app either on your tablet / phone or for Amazon at alexa.amazon.com
2. Tap on Skills or Services menu item and locate Ask My Buddy in the skills list - easiest is to type Ask My Buddy in the search area.
3. Click on Enable Skill button on this page. The Ask My Buddy Login page should display.

*If it does not open, then Tap on the button that says Link Account (will be below a button that says Disable). \*\*\* If you are using Alexa on a computer, and do not see a new page load, you may have Popup Blocker enabled. Go to [https://askmybuddy.net/help.php#h.qejfgul34bhk\\_New22](https://askmybuddy.net/help.php#h.qejfgul34bhk_New22) to Ask My Buddy Help for directions to disable Popup Blockers. You may re-enable after Linking is completed.*

4. The Ask My Buddy Login page will display. Enter your email and password you created your Ask My Buddy account with.
5. Press Login  
A screen should display saying 'Account linking successful'  
You may now exit the Alexa app.

## Add Contacts

At this point you are ready to add contacts. It is easier to use a desktop top computer to enter the contacts.

Go to <http://www.askmybuddy.net>, click on the login menu item, and use the email and password that you created when you registered. Once logged in you will be at the Settings page.

Here you can set your Time zone and other information. If you make any changes be sure and click on the Save Changes button.

Select menu item CONTACTS and fill in each field for a contact then press the Save Changes button. if there are any errors you will see them in the title bar. Once complete you are ready to use Ask My Buddy.

When asking Alexa to contact someone, say “Alexa, Ask My Buddy” and she will ask who do you want to contact? Say the first name of a particular contact or say everyone. Test it, but tell the person first!