

Smart Speakers

What are they and what can you do with them?

What is a smart speaker?

- ▶ What is a smart speaker, exactly, and what sets them apart from a simple Bluetooth® speaker?
 - ▶ In a smart speaker, Bluetooth is merely one feature among many
 - ▶ including long-lasting rechargeable batteries
 - ▶ an internal amplifier all inside one little device
- ▶ Smart speakers, however, go beyond this by adding
 - ▶ Wi-Fi® capabilities
 - ▶ built-in voice assistants that provide access to the entire online world and enable command of it, whether you're checking the weather, playing your favourite song, or getting answers to any question you have.
- ▶ A smart home speaker is a speaker that connects to the internet and can be controlled by issuing spoken commands to its voice assistant, or by using a smartphone application.

- ▶ While traditional speakers are often fixed in a specific position and require a separate amplifier to power them.
- ▶ Smart speakers are generally self-contained
 - ▶ with an internal amplifier and a powerful
 - ▶ rechargeable battery to drive performance
 - ▶ You only need to switch on your smart speaker, link your device, and hit play.
- ▶ When setting up you will be asked to install an app on your smart phone to do this.

How do smart speakers work?

- ▶ Smart speakers are powered from a plug socket and connect to the internet using wi-fi.
- ▶ This is how the speaker's voice assistant answers your questions - it performs a web search to understand what you asked, then finds the answer and says it aloud.
- ▶ Smart speakers can assist you in your everyday tasks.
- ▶ When connected to Wi-Fi, the voice command feature will learn your voice and become familiar with your use of words to efficiently assist you.
- ▶ For example, you can tell the speaker to
 - ▶ "Play my country playlist"
 - ▶ ask about the weather
 - ▶ instruct it to "Set a timer for 10 minutes."

Examples of Smart Speakers

- ▶ The first smart speaker, the Amazon Echo with its Alexa voice assistant, which arrived in 2014. Essentially a search engine controlled with your voice, Alexa can answer general knowledge questions, read out the weather forecast, play music, and much more.
- ▶ The Echo range has since grown to include several models of the Echo smart speaker, from the small Echo Dot and the latest Echo Pop to the larger, louder and more expensive Echo Studio.
- ▶ Similarly, Google has its own range of smart speakers under its Nest brand, powered by the voice-activated Google Assistant.
- ▶ Lastly, Apple has its Home-Pod smart speakers and a voice assistant called Siri.

How to activate them

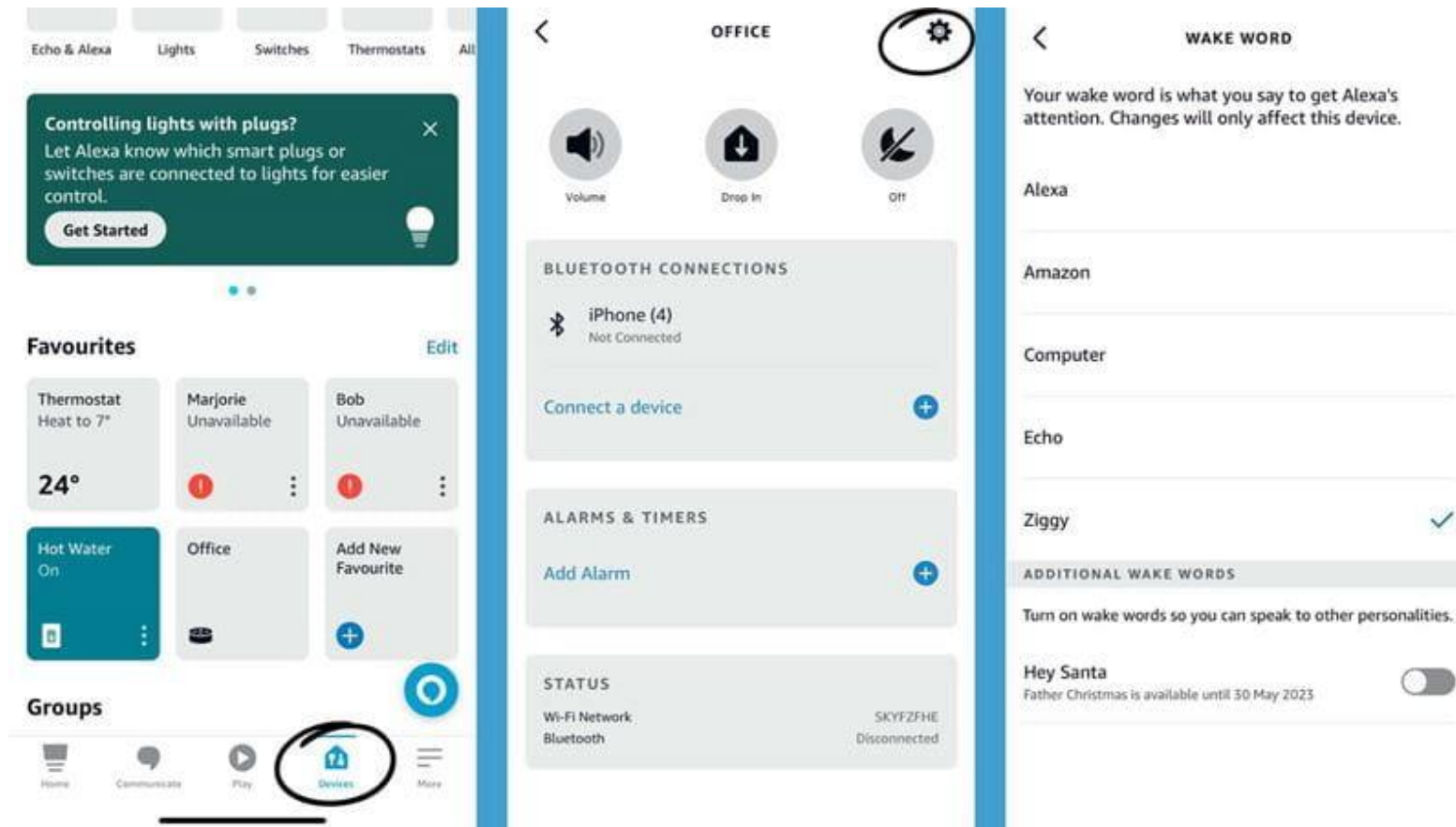
- ▶ Smart speakers are constantly listening for their “wake word”, which is the word or phrase used to get their attention.
- ▶ Only after hearing that do they react to what is being said. Depending on the make of smart speaker you have, wake words include “Alexa”, “Hey Siri” and “Okay Google”.
- ▶ Be aware that other sounds can be miss-heard by the speaker and trigger it into action!
- ▶ These “wake words” can be changed if you want on certain speakers, like Alexa.

Why change your Echo's wake word?

- ▶ Changing your Echo's wake word can make it feel more personalised and unique to you. Then again, most people change it because they have multiple Echo devices in the home.
- ▶ Changing the command word can help differentiate between devices, making it easier to control the one you want to use.
- ▶ It can also help to prevent accidental activations by other people. If you've ever been listening to the radio or watching the TV when someone says 'Alexa', you'll know what happens.
- ▶ Unfortunately, you can't choose any old name for your Echo's wake word.
- ▶ Unlike the Google Assistant though where you have no way of changing the wake word, on the Echo you're at least given the choice of five pre-chosen words: Alexa, Amazon, Computer, Echo and Ziggy - the last of these launched in 2022 as a tribute to the late David Bowie.

How to change it on the app

- The app is an easy way to change your Echo command word – here's how to do it.



- ▶ It just takes a few taps in the Alexa app to change the command word
 - ▶ Once you've opened the Alexa app, tap on 'Devices'.
 - ▶ Select 'Echo & Alexa' and then select your device.
 - ▶ From here, select 'Settings'. This is a little cog located at the top right-hand corner of the screen.
 - ▶ Scroll down to the 'General' section and select 'Wake Word'.
 - ▶ Select a wake word from the list, and then select OK from the pop-up screen. Updating your wake word may take a couple of minutes. It's a good idea to test it out after this time to make sure it worked.
- ▶ You can ask Alexa to change it but it will just direct you to the app!

What devices can I control using a smart speaker?

- ▶ There is an increasing number of smart devices you can connect to a network and - in turn - control via your smart speaker. For example, you can buy smart doorbells from companies such as [Ring](#). You can also purchase smart lightbulbs and thermostats.
- ▶ Smart light bulbs can cost around £15 each, which is pricier than a standard light bulb. Smart doorbells from established brands such as Ring and Nest cost around £180-£330. Smart thermostats and wireless security cameras often cost £100-£200.
- ▶ [TL Tech](#) specialises in creating smart homes. The company recommends "smart buttons" to create a smart home. For example, Samsung SmartThings to control individual functions.

- ▶ You can also buy [smart plugs](#). Once you pair your [Alexa](#) or [Google](#) device, you can then turn the device that you plug into a smart plug.
- ▶ A device is either "on or off". So, for example, if you have a bedside light, you could name your device "Bedside light" in the app, and then every time you said "Alexa, turn on bedside light", your light would turn on. Now obviously, if you have two bedside lights, you'd have to set them up as perhaps "Bedside light 1 and 2".
- ▶ If you want to connect other devices such as security cameras, white goods, heating, and smart door locks to Google Home or Alexa, you'll need to get access to a smart hub such as the [Hive hub](#) or [Google's Nest hub](#).
- ▶ You can also use smart technology with your TV, either by buying a [smart TV](#) or by using an [Amazon Firestick](#).