



SMART SPEAKERS COMPARED

Consumer Reports Ratings, Buying Guide

Kent McDonald 29 August 2018

CR BUYING GUIDE

- Consider a Smart Speaker to be the Hub of Your Ecosystem
- All Smart Speakers use Cloud-Based AI to control Other Smart Devices in your Home, and your Music Streaming
- Amazon and Google are Actively Encouraging Other Manufacturers (JBL, Sonos) to Incorporate Their AI Platforms (Alexa on Sonos, Pioneer; Google on JBL, Sony)
- CR Recommends That You Choose a Smart Speaker Which Will Integrate Easily With Your Existing/Planned Ecosystem

AMAZON ALEXA AI PLATFORM

- Alexa was the Earliest Assistant, not Counting Cortana Which Has Only Been Available In Windows PCs Until 2017
- Being First Mover, Alexa has a Robust Selection of More Than 40,000 “Skills”
- Alexa Integrates with the Widest Array of Smart Devices Including Sonos-One Smart Speakers
- Alexa Can Control Amazon Prime, Amazon Music and Shopping Online at Amazon

GOOGLE ASSISTANT AI PLATFORM

- Provides the Most Intelligent Search Capability
- More Third-Party “Actions” Added Recently, Plus HiFi Audio
- Integrates With Google’s Chromecast TV Streaming Device
- Built Into JBL Smart Speakers

APPLE SIRI AI PLATFORM

- Best for Controlling Your Other Devices in the Apple Ecosystem
- However, Siri is Demonstrably Weaker in the HomePod Than in Other Apple IOS Devices

TYPICAL COMMANDS, SKILLS, ACTIONS

- Search The Internet for Information
- Play Music or Read Audiobook Out Loud
- Get Weather for Desired Day and Location
- Set (Multiple) Timers and Alarms
- Make Phone Calls
- Set Reminders
- Set Lighting Levels, Room temperatures
- Have a conversation With the AI Assistant

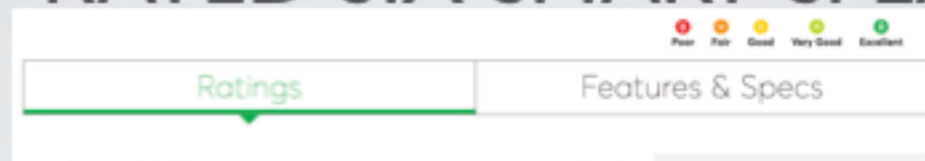
IS HI-FI AUDIO A PRIORITY?





- Most Recently, Smart Speaker Models With Better Audio Quality Are Available From Several Companies
- CR Rates as **Very Good**: Apple HomePod, Sonos One, Google Home Max
- CR Rates as **Good**: Amazon Echo Show, JBL Link 300, JBL Link 20, Pioneer Elite, Harmon Kardon Invoke
- You can Pair a \$50 Smart Speaker With a Non-smart Great-Sounding Wireless Speaker from Sonos or Denon

SHORTCOMINGS OF SIRI

- Voice Non-Recognition: Getting the Wrong Dictated Words
- Defaulting to “Here’s What I’ve Found on the Web for That”
- General-Knowledge Repository Lags Behind Google’s
- Unable to Control Non-Apple Music Services
- Setting an Alarm Correctly on the First Try is Rare
- HomePod’s CR Rating for “Versatility” Suffers Due to Siri’s Shortcomings
- Apple promises Siri Improvements in iOS 12 Release!

CR TOP-RATED SIX SMART SPEAKERS



		Test results			
Overall Score	Brand & Model / Price	Sound quality	Versatility	Ease of use	Supported digital assistant
OVERALL SCORE 74 Google Home Max Recommended Price: \$400 Shop Add to Compare					Google
OVERALL SCORE 63 Sonos One Best Buy Price: \$200 Shop Add to Compare					Alexa
OVERALL SCORE 61 Amazon Echo Show Best Buy Price: \$230 Shop Add to Compare					Alexa
OVERALL SCORE 61 JBL Link 300 Best Buy Price: \$166 Shop Add to Compare					Google
OVERALL SCORE 58 JBL Link 20 Recommended Price: \$160 Shop Add to Compare					Google
OVERALL SCORE 58 Apple HomePod Recommended Price: \$350 Shop Add to Compare					Siri

Top Three of Six Smart Speakers

 Poor
  Fair
  Good
  Very Good
  Excellent

Ratings

Features & Specs

6 of 19 Models Shown

Sort by: Overall score






















		Test results			
Overall Score	Brand & Model / Price	Sound quality	Versatility	Ease of use	Supported digital assistant
OVERALL SCORE 74 <small>+ Add to Compare</small>	Google Home Max <small>🏆 Recommended</small> Price: \$400 Shop				Google
OVERALL SCORE 63 <small>+ Add to Compare</small>	Sonos One <small>🏆 Best Buy</small> Price: \$200 Shop				Alexa
OVERALL SCORE 61 <small>+ Add to Compare</small>	Amazon Echo Show <small>🏆 Best Buy</small> Price: \$230 Shop				Alexa

Lower Three of Six Smart Speakers

Poor Fair Good Very Good Excellent

Ratings

Features & Specs

		Test results			
Overall Score	Brand & Model / Price	Sound quality	Versatility	Ease of use	Supported digital assistant
OVERALL SCORE  61  Add to Compare	JBL Link 300  Best Buy Price: \$186				 Google
OVERALL SCORE  58  Add to Compare	JBL Link 20  Recommended Price: \$160				 Google
OVERALL SCORE  58  Add to Compare	Apple HomePod  Recommended Price: \$350				 Siri