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The Fun of Using Voice-Controlled Speakers

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There are some new devices out there called "voice activated speakers" and they appeal to many people. The two which seem to be the most popular right now are the "Echo Dot" and "Google Home" (pictured) but there are others. Most of them are in the price range of \$50 to \$150 (some higher) and they can be very fun to use – a great toy for people of all ages. You could think of this device as an audio (sound, music, voice) web-browser! Yes, you talk to it – you tell it what you want to hear, ask a question, or anything else you can think of. These devices listen to your verbal commands and will try to do whatever you want. This device uses your Wi-Fi connection to access the internet. Since the device is a speaker, your answers are audio, not video.

Voice recognition has been around for several years now, on my iPhone it is called "Siri" and on my Windows computer, it is called "Cortana". We recently bought an "Echo Dot" which has a voice named "Alexa" (about \$50) and have been enjoying it (her) very much. I believe the trick to enjoying a device like this is to TRY it – ask it lots of questions and learn what it can do and what it cannot. Open your mind, don't limit your thinking to just asking for music, although music is certainly a good way to begin enjoying your smart speaker.

Here are some things you can try to ask your speaker:

- What is the weather like in Chicago?
- What is 5,283 times 7?
- Tell me about Lady Gaga.
- What is on my calendar today?
- Play some Perry Como hits.
- What is the address of Gecko's in Sarasota?

Sometimes it is hard to find a good fun "toy" for someone and these smart speakers can be fun for anyone – from tots to seniors. If you are interested, why not ask someone who has one and try asking it some questions. I think you will be pleasantly surprised!