

Webinar: #6131 Wired Wednesday

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>> Martha Rust: Welcome to everyone who is with us. We're excited you're here with us today. We'll get started in about 4 minutes.

>> Tori Holder-Hughes: Hello everyone and welcome to our Wired Wednesday with Tools for Life and WATAP. We're going to get started here at 2:30. We're glad that you are here.

>> Tori Holder-Hughes: It is 2:30. We still have a couple of folks still joining. We'll wait 1 more minute and then get started.

>> Martha Rust: Thank you, Tori. Hello everyone. We're excited that you could join us today for our Wired Wednesday: AT bits and bytes with Tools for Life and WATAP. For those of you this is your first time joining, we want to welcome you. This is something that Tools for Life joined with WATAP the assistive technology program of Washington state at the start of the pandemic letting people we're around to demo AT for everyone. If you have questions, feel free to write them in the chat box. I'll be monitoring them throughout this session. We'll answer questions. At the end we'll have a survey

that we ask for you guys to fill out. We do take your feedback seriously. A lot of our Wired Wednesday have come from feedback of those who have attended. Again, this is a partnership with WATAP. If you would like any information about what you see here or any other assistive technology devices that you have questions about or want a more one on one demonstration. Give us a call. [[Reading from PowerPoint]].

We know we have several people joining us who are not in the state of Georgia or Washington. So if you want to you can reach out to either of us and we'll be happy to direct you to the assistive technology program in your state. We'll put this survey up at the end. I will ask Tori to stop sharing our screen. Today we have Naomi from WATAP. Naomi, take it away.

>> Naomi Namekata: Thank you. Let me go ahead and share the screen here. All right. So thank you for joining us today. My name is Naomi Namekata I'm an assistive technology specialist with the Washington Assistive Technology Act Program here in Seattle. Today we're going to talk about smart speakers. I'm going to compare the Amazon Echo speaker and the Google nest speakers so you can see the similarities and differences. I will high light some of the well-used features. We only have a half hour today and I could probably talk about this for 3 hours. I condensed it so I will get started and hopefully get through all the content here. What exactly is the smart speaker? A smart speaker is a voice activated speaker with an integrated virtual assistant that helps people with everyday tasks.

So right now about 1 out of 4 U.S. adults use smart

speakers. So I bet several of you have one of the Echo devices or a Google with device. Most of the people use devices to ask questions, listen to music, check the weather. I use a timer a lot for cooking and for my 5-year-old son. Listen to the radio and things like that.

Some of the features that are especially useful for individuals with disabilities you can do hands-free calling, you can control smart home devices. You can access calendars and buy things using your voice. The great things about these speakers for the most part they are accessible out of the box.

Individuals who are not able to hear the speaker or voice commands to the speaker will have more problems using it. There are some accommodations for that.

Okay, so let's talk about the difference between the virtual assistant and the hardware because sometimes they can be confusing. For the Amazon devices the echo is the device you plug in. Alexa is the virtual assistant that resides on that device. Google went through and renamed all their speakers. Now they are called Google nest speakers. So the Google nest mini and the Google nest audio and that's to fit in with their line of nest products like the thermostat and security cameras and smoke alarms and so on. The virtual assistant on the Google devices is the Google assistant.

I put this in here but I'm not going to talk about the Apple devices today, but the Apple home pod is currently the only hardware -- smart speaker running Siri but there are rumors that they will release a mini version of the home pod that's similar to

the nest mini. Siri is the voice assistant installed on Apple devices. Sonos speakers are out there. They both have Alexa and Google assistant. Some of those interactions are more limited on those devices. You have hardware that are low cost around \$40 all the way up to 200+. Especially if you have a device with a screen on it as well.

So in order to operate these devices you must have WIFI. You also have to install the Alexa or Google Home apps on a smart phone or tablet.

Then for Google devices you have to have a Google account linked to that app and for Alexa it requires an Amazon account.

In order to issue commands to the devices, you use wake words. For the Amazon Echo devices you can choice from Alexa, Echo, Amazon or computer.

For the Google devices you can say hey Google or okay Google which are both interchangeable.

One difference between the two devices that I want to talk about first off is the voices. If you have used an Echo device you have heard the Alexa voice. You can't really make a lot of changes to the voice. You can change the accent so it's a British or Australian accent. If you don't speak with a British or Australian accent and you set it to that, Alexa may have a hard time understanding you.

One thing that Amazon has done is give you the ability to change the speech rate of Alexa and ask her to speak more slowly. I'm going to try to play this recording here. Hopefully you can let

me know if you cannot hear it.

>> Echo what time is it?

>> 1:13 p.m.

>> Echo -- speak slower.

>> Okay. I will speak at this speed from now on.

>> Echo speak slower.

>> Okay. I will speak at this speed from now on.

>> Echo, what time is it?

>> The time is 1:14 p.m.

>> Echo, what time is it?

>> Naomi Namekata: So, with the Google devices, you can actually choice from 8 different voices and they have a range of tones. So you have a higher pitched more female voice down to lower pitched voices. You can choose from British and Australian accents. Let me play a sample here.

>> Hay Google what time is it?

>> 9:43.

>> Hey Google, what time is it?

>> 9:43.

>> Hey Google, what time is it?

>> 9:43.

>> Hey Google, what time is it?

>> It's 9:43.

>> Naomi Namekata: So in my experience individuals who have hearing loss have a really difficult time understanding Alexa.

You can change the rate of speech and that does help but with the Google speaker because you have so many different voices available, it's much easier to find one that is more easily understood for the hard of hearing population.

So questions? A lot of people like to ask these devices random questions. You're never going to fight about whose right or wrong because you can just ask the speaker. As you can imagine, Google has a search engine and Google tends to be better at answering random questions accurately. Let me play you a sample.

>> Hey Google, what is the Washington assistive technology act program?

>> On the website WATAP.org they say the mission of Washington assistive technology act program is to provide a comprehensive continuum of services and resources to help Washingtonians --

>> Naomi Namekata: Now we'll go to the Echo.

>> Echo, what is the Washington Assistive Technology Act Program?

>> Here's something I found on Wikipedia. Assistive technology act provides federal funding from the U.S. Department of Education to each state and territory.

>> Naomi Namekata: So clearly the Google device did a better job because they went directly to our WATAP website. Alexa found something similar but the national AT act programs but that's not quite what we were asking. Another thing to answer is that the

search results of your questions may depend on the device you're asking. If we're looking at product information Amazon will pull that information from their Amazon store. Google will find other websites to answer your question.

>> Hey Google, what is the best shampoo?

>> I found a list on the website reviews.com. The best 5 shampoos.

>> Echo, what is the best sparkling water?

>> One moment. Showing top results for sparkling water. A top-rated choice for sparkling water on Amazon is --

>> Naomi Namekata: So reminders. Reminders are great. You can set a reminder to take your medication, start your virtual class if you're a student right now or maybe set a warning that you need to leave your house in 5 minutes. I know I'm always struggling to leave the house on time to drop my son off at pre-K. Both devices allow for reoccurring reminders. You can do that on a daily, weekly, monthly, annual basis.

>> Echo, set a reminder.

>> What's the reminder for?

>> Pick up Ren at 4 p.m.

>> When should I remind you?

>> At 4.

>> When should I remind you?

>> At 4 o'clock.

>> Okay. I will remind you at 4 p.m.

>> Echo, what's my reminder?
>> Here is your reminder: Pick up Ren at 4 p.m.
>> Hey Google, set a reminder.
>> What's the reminder?
>> Pick up ren at 4 p.m.
>> Sure I'll remind you at 4 p.m.
>> Hey Google, do I have any reminders?
>> You have one reminder today at 4 p.m. pick up.
>> Naomi Namekata: Neither of them got it perfectly.

In my experience Alexa tends to be a little more inflexible when it comes to the wording of your commands. If someone has difficulty remembering the specific commands that need to be issued to get her to act on what you're asking, you might think about the Google device because there's more flexibility there.

So calendaring, in the past Google was only able to create calendar appointments but I just found that you can create modify or delete calendar events on both devices. The nice thing about Google if you have a smart phone and you have your Gmail calendar on your phone, any appointments that you make on the Google nest or smart speaker devices will show up on your phone as well.

I'll play a sample of how you have Alexa create a calendar appointment.

>> Echo, add event to my calendar for Friday.
>> Sure. For what time?
>> 11 a.m.

>> And what's the name of the event?

>> Technology presentation.

>> That's technology presentation on Friday October 25th at 11 a.m., right?

>> Yes.

>> Okay. I have added that.

>> Naomi Namekata: So one nice thing about calendaring on these devices every morning you can ask your device what appointments you have on your calendar. You can create a routine or something that triggers at a certain time or when you say good morning Alexa. You can actually hear all of your -- you can set it to hear all of your calendar events at that point.

>> Hands free calling both Echo and Google speakers can call contacts that are associated with your account or dial a phone number that you voice. Echo devices or Amazon Alexa devices both have calling. You can call other people who have an Alexa device. You can leave messages for the individual if they don't answer the phone.

If you have the app installed on your phone, your phone will ring as if you're receiving a phone call. The ringer is a little bit different so you can tell the difference between a call you're receiving from Alexa verses your standard phone. This is a free service. It just uses WIFI to make the calls.

Amazon has partnered with AT&T. If you have AT&T service, you can do AT&T calling with Alexa. You can make and receive

phone calls on Alexa devices such as the Echo speakers using your AT&T mobile phone plan.

Google can use your mobile phone number that you have linked to the account or use a Google voice number to make calls on the Google home devices or Google nest devices.

Google duo is a service that they have for free for voice and video calls. So you can create or do Google duo to duo calling where you can initiate and receive phone or video calls worldwide for free of charge. Both of these services -- both Google and Alexa state that they will be compatible with zoom by the end of the year. So if you have a device like the Echo show or the Google nest hub that have screens, you can join Zoom conferences through those devices by the end of the year.

Neither of these devices will allow you to make emergency calls, however.

Emails and messages. Only the Alexa devices -- so the Echo speakers will allow you to send and receive emails or messages. The messages aren't text messages. They are messages sent through the Alexa app. If you receive a message, your smart speaker will announce you have received a message. The ring on top will light up in a yellow color to let you know that there is a message waiting for you to be heard.

Emergency contacts on an Alexa device you can designate one of your contacts for an emergency contact. So if you say call for help it will call and message that individual. Google doesn't

have anything that's similar to that, but they do have a subscription base service called nest aware that will allow you to call 911. The purpose of that subscription is really about security and safety in your home. So it does also do the security monitoring and the video recording of any of the cameras. Kind of similar to a Ring subscription if you're familiar with the Ring door bell. The lowest plan I saw for this service is \$6 per month.

Shopping, with both devices you can add items to your shopping cart. Alexa uses the Amazon app. Google using Google shopping. Alexa allows you to make purchases from the speaker. But with the Google assistant you have to confirm or verify that purchase from your mobile phone.

So for security, I do think Google probably has better security in terms of access to certain features of your account. Google has Voice Match. So once you set up your voice, it will only allow you to access the Google account that's currently active on the device. [Coughing].

So, I have an example here where my coworker Scot tries to make an appointment on my Google account.

>> Okay Google add a doctor's appointment to my calendar on October 31.

>> I can't verify your voice. Verify your voice match settings.

>> Naomi Namekata: Alexa has Alexa voice profiles. So you can set it that only recognized voices can make purchases. It

doesn't lock down your account like your contacts or your calendars in the same way that Google does.

So privacy. I think Google just made an announcement of some new privacy features. So, they are actively trying to do things to help improve privacy for their devices. Recently they added a feature so that the Google assistant will communicate your privacy status. You can say are you saving my audio data and it says yes you can change it. You can also say hey Google that wasn't for you so it will stop listening. You can go to their my activity website and delete any activity. All of your activity is recorded on this website. You can go to one place to manage all of your settings for those services.

Alexa has privacy settings in the app. You can review voice history and manage smart home history. Really if you are concerned about privacy, these speakers might not be the right choice for you because I think a lot of people have concerns that there are recordings being made. Sometimes my husband and I will talk about a product and then it will show up on his Facebook feed. I happened to see a chat question pop up. Yes you can associate multiple accounts to a Google device so that different people can access their own accounts from one Google speaker.

Okay, so some of the unique features available. Echo has Alexa guard which you can turn on. You have to initially set up in the settings and it will listen for sounds like breaking glass or some of your smoke alarms and things so it will notify you if

you're away from home. Show and tell is a feature that uses the camera on an Echo show to identify a product. I'm not going to go through all of the voice recordings or examples for this because I'm running out of time here.

Google has something cool which is called interpreter mode. You can tell Google to turn it on and designate two languages so you can have a conversation with someone. Say it if someone is Spanish speaker, whatever you say will be translated into Spanish and the speaker will announce it. The Spanish speaker says something that will translate into English.

So, Amazon has worked a lot on the Echo Show Accessibility features especially for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. So they now have Alexa captioning. So, some of the information that Alexa will voice also shows up as a caption on the Echo show devices.

>> Martha Rust: Naomi, we do have a question. It is from James. He says sorry, I sent this to the speaker and not the group. You said neither will let you make emergency calls. What if I set my emergency contact Alexa I need help to dial a nonemergency line or other law enforcement or medical number?

>> Naomi Namekata: You know, I don't know. I don't know what will happen if you set it to call 911. Certainly you could try that. I think if it was any other phone number and was a contact, it will dial that number.

Okay. So tap to Alexa is a new feature for users who

can't use voice commands. Once you turn it on in the accessibility settings you can have the screen show you short-cuts to popular features that you might want to access. So it says in this image that I have bedroom off. You can control smart lighting, you can set a timer, you can check the traffic to your destination. It also has the ability to type to Alexa as well. So you can actually issue commands through the onscreen keyboard. If you Google this you can find YouTube videos about how this is used.

Another feature that they have is real-time texting. So that's live real-time chatting during Alexa calls and drop ins that are made from the Echo Show devices. When the real-time texting is on, keyboard will pop up and you can do a live text chat between whoever you have on the video call.

So one thing to note Alexa has what are called skills and the Google assistant have what are called actions. They're basically like apps in order to be used on the virtual assistant. So some of the smart home devices for example require that you install a skill for it on your Alexa account in order to issue voice commands through your smart speaker to control that device. They are way more skills -- Alexa skills than Google actions. With the skills you actually have to choice to install the skills but the actions will already be installed if you set up a certain device to work with that speaker.

There are a lot of skills that don't work very well, especially for the Alexa skills.

There will be trial and error to see what works for you.

This is my last slide. Very quickly I'm not talking a lot about smart home today even though that is a really popular thing to use these speakers for, but you don't need a smart speaker to have a smart home. A lot of the smart home devices have apps that you can access through a touch screen device. The smart speaker gives you the ability to use voice activation to control your smart home. So with the Alexa devices there's 60,000 smart home devices. 30,000 smart home products for Google Home and much less for the Apple Home kit.

So something to consider if you want to implement a smart home: What devices you already have. The ring products are owned by Amazon. So they're probably going to work better with the Echo devices. Same with nest. Nest is owned by Google. Now that they rebranded their speakers they want you to live in the nest Echo system.

Other thing is how good is your WIFI network. If you have devices that rely on WIFI and your WIFI goes down, it's not going to work in the way you would normally access that device.

So consider your coverage in your home, router capacity, the bandwidth, do you need a mesh network in order to cover a larger area without degrading your bandwidth and signal.

And then also consider the security. Is someone going to hack into your router and take control of your devices? Hopefully not. Also consider what would you like to automate? Lighting,

thermostat, cameras. Finally, who will troubleshoot it. I have quite a few smart home devices myself. I'm the designated troubleshooter. I feel like I'm constantly trying to figure out why my ceiling fan won't work. So some thoughts to consider.

I apologize I went a few minutes over. Does anyone for any questions?

>> Tori Holder-Hughes: No new questions have come in. We are happy to hang out if you would like or you can get in touch with us and let us know if you have any other questions. Up on the screen is the link for our post demo survey. I put it in the chat for a direct link. We do value your feedback. We would like to know what else you would like to see and learn about. Again, if you would like to get in touch with us directly here is the contact page for Tools for Life. We have our phone number and our website, as well as our e-mail address. So you're welcome to get us feedback that way.

>> Naomi Namekata: If you're in Washington State, WATAP does have quite a few of these devices in their lending library. So you can contact us if you want to try smart speaker or another smart device.