

Review: Sonos Play:1 packs big sound in small unit

October 14 2013, by Ryan Nakashima



In this Oct. 4, 2013 photo, Sonos Inc. CEO John MacFarlane touches a button on the Play:1 in West Hollywood, Calif. The little brother to the wireless speaker company's Play:3 and Play:5 speakers packs a big sound in a small package. And thanks to its smaller price tag and a new promotion that lasts through the end of the year, you can now hook up a room in stereo sound for just under \$400. (AP Photo/Ryan Nakashima)

I've been looking around for a while for a way to wire up my home for sound, without all the wires. I hadn't been satisfied with the options, partly because of the high prices. Then I met Sonos' Play:1.

The little brother to the wireless speaker company's Play:3 and Play:5 speakers packs a big [sound](#) in a small package. And thanks to its littler price tag and a new promotion that lasts through the end of the year, you can now hook up a room in [stereo sound](#) for just under \$400.

Sonos is ranked third behind Bose and Jawbone in the U.S. wireless speaker market, which represents about 8 percent of the \$8.4 billion annual market for audio equipment including headphones, according to research firm NPD Group. But Sonos offers a sound system that other manufacturers such as Samsung and Bose are only starting to imitate.

Sonos streams music over the Internet, or from your computer, using your home's Wi-Fi network. After plugging in its Bridge adapter to your router, you can then plug in as many speakers as you want to power outlets throughout your home, and they are all linked wirelessly. Pairing two speakers in one room creates a stereo effect and you can listen to different things in different rooms. Each speaker is both a Wi-Fi receiver and transmitter, creating a mesh network that allows even owners of large homes to place speakers into every nook and cranny far from the central hub. All of this is controllable from an app on your mobile phone, tablet or computer.

The Play:1, which launches Monday, has heft like a big pickle jar and weighs 4.08 pounds. That's about a pound and a half lighter than the Play:3, which is more bread-loaf size; and 5 pounds lighter than the Play:5, which is about as big as a bread box. The Play:1's compact body fits snugly on top of a counter or bookshelf and gives off a very large and well-defined sound with plenty of bass and crisp-sounding high notes.

The Play:1 costs \$199, the Play:3 costs \$299 and the Play:5 costs \$399. The company is throwing in the \$49 Bridge for free during its promotional push, so the entry-level price of outfitting a room with two speakers in stereo sound has fallen to \$400 from what would have been \$650. To me, that's a big deal.

NPD analyst Ben Arnold says the price cut is smart because it brings Sonos' entry-level product closer to the price of fast-selling Bluetooth-enabled portable wireless speakers, such as No. 2 maker Jawbone's Mini Jambox, which retails for \$180. Other wireless speakers that connect to mobile devices using Bluetooth like the HDMX Jam sell for as little as \$32.

"The premium end of the market is still growing but people are just buying these speakers up like crazy. Why not tap into this very active part of the market and pull more people in?" he said.

I found that it was super easy to install two Play:1 devices and the Bridge. I didn't need the manual. After downloading the free app, I was walked through the process, pushing a button on each device as I was prompted, and letting the software figure it out. Each speaker has only two buttons—one for play/pause and a volume toggle—so it's hard to screw up.

I played music from Pandora and Rdio, both streaming music services that interact well with the Sonos app. Even at half the possible volume, I reached what I consider louder-than-party-level in a roughly 700-square-foot space.

Santa Barbara, California-based Sonos Inc. has its speakers installed in more than a million homes and has approximately doubled its revenue in the last year, according to CEO John MacFarlane. The latest device is "designed to be a no-regrets, first-try entry," he said.

I'd say the company resoundingly succeeded with a [speaker](#) that far outpunches its size.

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