

Review: Two keyboards designed for your living room

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As smart TVs evolve with applications like Netflix, which is also available from such devices as Apple TV, Roku and Amazon Fire TV, users can really benefit from keyboard input.

LOGITECH HARMONY SMART KEYBOARD: Logitech has introduced a new product - the Harmony Smart Keyboard (\$150, logitech.com) to fill that need.

The Smart Keyboard is a [wireless keyboard](#) with trackpad that's also a fully functional Harmony universal remote control that uses the Harmony Hub.

Harmony's higher-end remotes use the Hub, which is a hockey puck-size box that "turns signals from Smart Keyboard and Harmony App into IR, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth commands that your devices understand."

According to Logitech, the Smart Keyboard can connect to or control more than 225,000 devices, including your Windows PC, Mac, Apple TV, Roku, Xbox or PS3.

The Smart Keyboard's Hub also allows control of all your home theater devices from your iOS or Android phone or tablet.

In fact, you have to have an iOS or Android running the free Harmony app to set up this keyboard.

Let me repeat: If you don't have an iOS or Android device at home, you won't be able to configure the Smart Keyboard.

You can't set it up with a computer.

I'm not thrilled with this limitation, but since I do have plenty of iOS devices, it wasn't an issue for me.

To get started, you'll need to plug the Hub into AC power and load the Harmony app on your mobile device. Open the app and let it discover the Hub. You use the app to join the Hub to your Wi-Fi network.

If you just want to use the keyboard to type on a Mac or PC, there are two tiny USB receivers included. Plug one into your computer, and the keyboard will work with no configuration.

To control your home theater components, you set up each device using the Harmony app.

There's a wizard that walks you through every item in your home theater setup, starting with the TV, then moving through set-top boxes, video game consoles and DVD/Blu-Ray players, and streaming boxes like Roku and Apple TV. You don't have to do any code searching, but you will need the manufacturer and model number of your devices.

The Hub needs to live close to your devices, so if they're hiding inside a closet or cabinet, the Hub will live in there.

If the Hub is hidden away, you'll need to use the included IR repeater, which is a wired infrared eye that sits exposed somewhere near the TV to relay signals from the keyboard to the Hub.

It might take a bit of adjusting the Hub placement to get everything working like it should.

The power of the Smart Keyboard is in the macros you can set up to control different home theater scenarios.

For instance, if you want to watch a movie on your Apple TV, you'll set up a macro to power on your TV, wake the Apple TV and change the TV's input.

All these actions are stored and accessed with one button on the Smart Keyboard.

The Smart Keyboard has just about everything you could want in a full-size keyboard that's also a robust universal remote control.

But I'm afraid it's just a bit too large for daily use.

One-handed operation really isn't possible, and most people aren't going to want to hold a keyboard just to change their TV channel.

I think it works best as a pure keyboard to enter search text on an Apple TV or with your home theater PC. The built-in trackpad is convenient.

-Pros: Can control just about everything and works well with Macs and Windows PCs.

-Cons: Needs an iOS or Android device to set it up. Expensive.

-Bottom line: I like the Smart Keyboard, but perhaps not as my only remote control.

RAPOO WIRELESS MULTIMEDIA TOUCHPAD KEYBOARD:

If you have a computer in your home theater cabinet, you're going to need a keyboard, and the new Rapoo Wireless Multimedia Touchpad Keyboard E2700 (\$60, newegg.com) is small enough to blend in with the remotes on your coffee table.

The E2700 is about the thickness of a chocolate bar and includes an 80-key keyboard and built-in trackpad for pointer control.

The keyboard uses a small USB receiver for wireless communication to your Windows PC. It's available in black or white.

I tried the E2700 on a Mac, and it did type just fine, but I couldn't get the trackpad to work.

The keyboard runs on two AAA batteries in a round plastic housing that serves to prop up the keyboard for typing. The housing also includes the power switch and holds the USB dongle when not in use.

The keyboard layout is for Windows PCs, and the keys are not all the same size (they're really small) or even arranged in a standard layout, which makes touch typing impossible.

But touch typing isn't the point here. The E2700 is for quick hunting and pecking with one hand or two.

The keyboard includes media control keys on the function key row and arrow keys for cursor movement and document navigation.

Overall, this keyboard is pretty good for occasional use, but you certainly won't be typing your next novel with it.

-Pros: Small, well built, has trackpad.

-Cons: Really hard to type with any speed. Not Mac compatible.

-Bottom line: Good to use for a quick search on your [home theater](#) PC.

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