

Amazon gives new power to personal assistant, 'Alexa'

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The device introduced last year as Amazon Echo, which responds to voice commands and answers questions, can now turn compatible lights

on and off, control fans, heaters and other devices.

A customer can activate the assistant by saying "Amazon" or "Alexa."

So a customer can say, "Alexa, turn on the hallway light" or "Alexa, dim the living room lights to 20 percent," according to examples provided by Amazon.

The US online giant has added other features since introducing the device in November, including integrating with Pandora's online radio service, getting information on traffic or sports scores and setting schedule reminders.

These features could for example allow consumers to use [voice commands](#) to launch a music playlist, or ask Alexa to "add gelato to my shopping list," in another example cited by the company.

Amazon said its agreements with electronics makers Philips and Belkin will allow the speaker to integrate with products from those firms including smart lightbulbs, electric blankets and coffee makers.

Echo became available last year on an invitation-only basis at a price of \$199, or \$99 for those who pay for the Seattle-based company's Prime subscription service.

"Echo's brain is in the cloud, running on Amazon Web Services so it continually learns and adds more functionality over time," Amazon says on a Web page for the service.

"The more you use Echo, the more it adapts to your speech patterns, vocabulary, and personal preferences."

A demonstration video online revealed a female voice responding to

questions or commands preceded by the trigger word "Alexa."

A ring of microphones built into can-shaped Echo speakers enable the devices to identify voices even when music is playing, according to Amazon.

Echo accesses news, weather, streaming music and more using wireless Internet connections.

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