

# Review: Triby gets Amazon's Alexa to help you in the kitchen

June 30 2016, by Jim Rossman, The Dallas Morning News

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You may have heard of the Amazon Echo, a stand-alone speaker with the Alexa voice service built in.

I've been using an Echo for several months around my house to set alarms and timers, add items to my shopping list, play [music](#) and control

my home automation system.

Amazon said it would open the Alexa voice service for inclusion in third-party devices, and I'm reviewing the first one - the Tribby connected speaker for the kitchen by Invoxia.

To put the Tribby in perspective, I need to briefly discuss Amazon's three Echo devices.

The original Echo is shaped like a Pringles can with a decent-sounding speaker at the bottom and a ring of microphones around the top. It's always listening for the trigger word (Alexa) and responds instantly. The Echo needs to be powered by electricity and connected to your home's Wi-Fi.

The Echo Dot looks like someone lopped off the top 2 inches of the Echo. It's shaped like a hockey puck and houses the same ring of microphones and a small speaker that's designed for Alexa feedback, not for listening to music.

The USB-powered Dot is designed to be connected to external speakers through Bluetooth or an aux out jack.

The Echo Tap is a battery-powered speaker designed to be carried where you need it (but within Wi-Fi range). To conserve power, the microphones are not always listening; Alexa is activated by pushing a button.

Since Amazon has a pretty full Echo lineup, where does the Tribby fit?

Third-party devices with Alexa need to differentiate themselves with features not found on Amazon's offerings.

The Tribby aims to be your Alexa device for the kitchen, complete with strong magnets on the back so you can attach it to your refrigerator.

So what does Tribby offer that would entice an Echo shopper?

Let's start with music.

The Tribby is a Bluetooth speaker that can stream any music you can play on your phone or other compatible device. Pairing with my iPhone was easy, and the music sounded pretty good. The Tribby uses Vivo Acoustic technology with two tiny speakers and a passive radiator. That's a lot of words to say it's a decent kitchen radio.

You aren't going to mistake the Tribby for a larger system, but I could see using it to stream music while you shave or sit by the pool.

There are three preset buttons for music. Buttons 1 and 2 can be programmed to stream from more than 27,000 available online radio stations as well as playlists from Spotify Connect.

The third music preset button is used to bring up saved music stations 3 through 6. Stop pressing the button when you reach the station you want to stream and the music will start.

You set the streaming presets with the Tribby app, which is available for iOS or Android. The app also facilitates setting up Wi-Fi and giving Tribby a name.

Alexa can also play music from Amazon Prime Music, iHeartRadio or TuneIn.

Tribby can't use Alexa to play Pandora or Spotify songs like the Amazon Echo devices.

## CALLING

Triby can connect to your smartphone and act as a speakerphone so you can take calls hands-free, but since it has a range of about 15 feet, my iPhone's built-in speakerphone sounded just as good to me.

Where Triby gets interesting is with internet calls.

Voice over internet protocol is the technology behind Vonage, Ooma or any number of internet telephone services.

Triby can make or receive calls but only to people you identify in the app as being in your family group.

Each group member who would like to call your Triby needs to have the app installed on their phone.

This is an interesting feature - Triby can be set up as an emergency phone for kids or seniors.

Like the music buttons, there are two buttons for one-touch speed dialing and a third button that can scroll through additional contacts.

When someone wants to call you from Triby, they press the button corresponding to your contact and your phone will ring. The call quality was exceptionally clear.

This feature would have been handy in my house earlier this year when my wife left her cellphone at work one day and didn't have a way to reach me.

Triby calls can also work as an intercom. It's easy to call your kids' iPad to tell them dinner is ready.

## MESSAGING

The center of Triby's face is dominated by a 2.9" e-paper screen. If you've used a Kindle, you are familiar with e-paper screens - they are easy to read and use little power. They display only black or white.

During normal use, Triby shows a clock, the date, temperature and humidity (from onboard sensors), and the last message received.

Anyone who has the Triby app and is a member of your group can use it to send Triby a message.

Messages can be typed or doodled using your finger or a stylus. You can also incorporate a number of Triby emojis.

Messages are sent immediately, and a small yellow flag will appear on Triby's left side to show you have a new message.

Pushing the yellow flag back in sends a read receipt to the sender. You can also use a button below the flag to cycle through some emojis to send as a response.

It's high-tech and low-tech at the same time. Triby calls it the modern-day sticky note.

## SPECS

The Triby unit is a 6-inch square with a built-in handle on top. Volume and play/pause buttons are under the handle and a bit awkwardly placed.

There are four microphones behind the speaker grille for phone calls and to interact with Alexa.

Two large magnets on the back will hold Tribby on any metal surface. The internal lithium ion battery will last for up to two weeks of use, but using Alexa in its "always listening" mode will cut the battery life down to two days.

You can save battery by turning off Alexa's listening with a button on the right side. An icon on the display will let you know whether Alexa is listening.

Tribby is charged with an included microUSB cable, and the case is protected by a rubber bumper in your choice of red, green, blue or gray.

If you buy from Invoxia, Tribby costs \$199 for gray and \$209 for the other colors.

You can find it for \$169 from Amazon in any color, so check prices before you buy.

There are no ongoing costs or subscription fees.

## CONCLUSIONS

I like the Tribby - especially as a first swipe of a non-Amazon gadget with Alexa. It has most of Alexa's functionality and a few features not found on any of the Echos.

It costs less than the Echo, which sells for \$180, but more than the \$130 battery-powered Echo Tap.

The phone calling capability is a compelling feature and seems much more useful than the doodles and messages. The doodling will keep kids entertained, though.

So this first third-party Alexa device is worthy of your consideration, both as a first interaction with Alexa or if you already have an Echo.

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Pros: Alexa [voice service](#), VoIP calls, streaming music

Cons: Can't play Pandora or Spotify through Alexa, microphones not as sensitive as Amazon's Echo

Bottom line: It would be a good fit for your kitchen or bathroom.

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Citation: Review: Tribu gets Amazon's Alexa to help you in the kitchen (2016, June 30) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-06-tribu-amazon-alexa-kitchen.html>

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