

Apple pushes back release of HomePod speaker to 2018

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Apple's HomePod connected speaker, unveiled in June, won't be available until early 2018, according to the company

Apple said Friday it was delaying until early next year the release of its HomePod speaker set to compete with Amazon's Alexa-powered devices and Google Home as a smart home and music hub.

The delay means Apple will miss the key holiday shopping season in the

fast-growing segment of connected speakers.

"We can't wait for people to experience HomePod, Apple's breakthrough wireless speaker for the home, but we need a little more time before it's ready for our customers," Apple said in an emailed statement.

"We'll start shipping in the US, UK and Australia in early 2018."

Apple announced the device at its developer conference in June.

Powered by Apple's Siri digital assistant, HomePod is priced starting at \$349, at the high end of the market, and is designed with high-quality audio to pair with the Apple Music subscription service.

But Apple is late to a marketplace dominated by Amazon and Google, with a handful of other players entering the race.

While Amazon and Google have released no specific sales figures, a survey by Consumer Intelligence Research Partners showed Amazon Echo having an installed base of 20 million units in the United States, or 73 percent of the market, at the end of the third quarter.

Google Home had sold seven million devices, grabbing a 27 percent market share.

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