

# COMPUTER GURU

By Don Benjamin

## My HomePods

For the last few months, I've been using two Apple HomePods in our living and family rooms to play music<sup>1</sup>, but they can do much more, as I'll explain.

You can think of a HomePod as a squat round computer with a microphone and speaker, but no screen or keypad. It connects to the Internet via your wi-fi network, and you tell the device what to do using Siri, which is Apple's personal assistant. (The Echo uses Alexa.)

For example, if I want to hear songs by Acoustic Alchemy from my Apple music collection, I say, "Hey Siri, play Acoustic Alchemy," and she (or he, depending on the gender you assign Siri) will play songs from my favorite smooth jazz band. I can tell Siri to increase or decrease the volume ("Hey Siri, turn up the music"), but I can also adjust the loudness from my iPad, iPhone, or Mac laptop because the HomePods integrate with my other Apple devices.

My two HomePods aren't connected to each other; rather, they're separate devices with access to the internet via our wi-fi network. I can play the Rolling Stones on my family room HomePod and Beethoven in the living room.

I can ask my HomePod to "Play WNYC" to hear New York's NPR station via their streaming services. Or "Play Car Talk" to listen to Click and Clack help folks diagnose the strange sound coming from the engine compartment of their 1992 Yugo.<sup>2</sup>

"Hey Siri, Call PSRC" turns my HomePod into a speaker phone that calls the senior center, which is stored in my contacts list. I can call our son in Washington from my iPhone and transfer the call to my HomePod so my wife can talk as well. Same for text messages: "Hey Siri, send a message: Tell [insert your spouse's name here] that I'm on



*Our living room HomePod (the round doo-dad on the shelf)*

my way home."

Finally, I can use my HomePod to turn on various "smart" lights in the house. I only have a couple of these, but they are pretty neat. "Hey Siri, turn on the deck lights."

Now, I can do all these things from my iPad or iPhone. (You would use Alexa on an Android device.) But the HomePod has a fantastic speaker. I'm just amazed that such a small device (about the size of a #10-size can of cling peaches<sup>3</sup>) sounds so good!

But maybe more important are the accessibility features of the HomePod (or Echo) for those of us who need help using the phone or sending a text. Siri understands a plethora of commands, and I've never heard her complain that I was a pain in the *tuchis*. At least not to my face.

If you need help selecting a "smart" speaker or want to try Siri or Alexa, just stop by the Technology Lab on Tuesdays or Wednesdays from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. or Fridays from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

1 The HomePod is similar to the Amazon Echo, but I'm writing about the HomePod because that's what I have.

2 It's the engine.

3 Or stewed tomatoes. Roughly 7" tall and 6" wide.