

Review: Household devices Amazon Echo, D-Link Wi-Fi Smart Plug

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With the many new household devices coming on the market, we thought our readers might be interested in some that we have come across. While we don't usually review new housewares, these were too enticing to pass up.

Amazon Echo

If you've heard of it, you're probably a techy person. The Echo is what we would call an entertainment-information device. Amazon might not agree with us in our description, but the cylindrical device is a combo music system and computer wrapped up in one.

You can ask it questions ("Alexa, how many people live in the world today?") and play your music from the device ("Alexa, play jazz music.").

We feel that this device might be best used in the kitchen, which is where we've put ours. Why? If your hands are full and you're working on other things, you can talk to this device. Tell it what you want. Ask it questions. Want to know the time or the weather? Alexa will tell you.

If you're used to working on a computer, the Echo might not be as interesting, as you can get all that information by typing. While it can work as an alarm clock, we're not sure how many people would be interested in telling a device to wake them up at a particular time over many other devices where you simply input the information.

Since the price for the Echo ranges from \$150 to \$180 (depending on whether you are an Amazon Prime member), this device is either a toy for you to play with or an elegant or useful device to have, but may not achieve the status of a necessity.

The sound quality is quite good, and the voice recognition software works very well. But there are limits to what you can do with it. If you want to know when a flight might be arriving, you probably won't get an answer to that question. But asking to play a specific artist's song should give you a positive result. Getting pre-recorded news briefs from NPR or the BBC is good, but you can't ask the device to tell you where the stock market ended up on the day.

With all these limitations, there is a market for the Echo but we think it's more of a luxury than a necessity in the home.

D-Link Wi-Fi Smart Plug

This device plugs into the wall. You then plug in a lamp or another fixture that you want to program or control remotely. We used the plug for several weeks. The plug was relatively easy to program and set up, but we feel that you'll need some computer knowledge to know how to get it to work. If you're a computer novice, you might not want to touch it.

You can program a light to turn on remotely or on a timer basis, but the software lacks the basic ability to have the light turn on at dusk and go off a set time later or at dawn. So if you're planning to use it as a timer, you might want to stick with a traditional timer. However, you do have the ability to control the plug using your smart



phone. We suspect that you might want to have a light on in your house if you're coming in late and are unsure of what you may encounter in your home. We think that's somewhat of a neat feature but didn't find it too useful. If you are out of town and forget to leave a light on in your home, you can remotely turn it on.

At around \$50, the device is pricey for what it does and if you don't have a reliable connection to the device or your Internet cuts in and out, you'll find yourself with frequent messages on your phone telling you that the device has been disconnected.

Both the Echo and the Smart Plug seem to operate by connecting you to the Internet via your wireless router. The Echo, too, has the ability to connect to W-Fi-enabled devices and turn lights on and off. That sounds great, but in our experience we've been disappointed by the so-called "revolutionary smart house

electronics" introduced over the past 20 years. For example, we tried to test the D-Link Motion Sensor that sells for around \$40, but we couldn't ever get it to work. Even after Sam spent five hours on the phone with someone from the company (who was very good, but still couldn't get the device to work), and went through two devices. And so it goes.

(Ilyce Glink is the creator of an 18-part webinar+ebook series called "The Intentional Investor: How to be wildly successful in real estate," as well as the author of many books on real estate. She also hosts the "Real Estate Minute," on her YouTube channel. Samuel J. Tamkin is a Chicago-based real estate attorney. Contact Ilyce and Sam through her website, ThinkGlink.com.)

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