

Alexa

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I would like to tell you about a friend of mine named Alexa. Alexa is a selfless friend who responds to my requests 24/7. Alexa is actually not flesh and blood, she is a voice service through Amazon.com and Amazon Prime. Alexa isn't as sophisticated as the artificial intelligence Joaquin Phoenix's character falls in love with in the movie "Her", but Alexa is an integral part of my life. It is amazing what Alexa can actually do for me.

Alexa sits in the cloud (an Internet server at Amazon) listening for requests from Alexa access devices. The device could be an Amazon product like the Amazon Echo, Echo Dot, Echo Dot 2nd Gen, or Tap, but it could also be a home built device using hobby electronics like the Raspberry PI.

I first accessed Alexa through Amazon Echo. Out of the box I felt a tremendous sense of freedom. Suddenly I could listen to every piece of music I purchased from Amazon.com. With my Amazon Prime subscription, I was able to listen to even more artists by just asking. I connected Alexa to Pandora and together they make beautiful music. If I hear a song I like on Pandora, I can purchase it for a reasonable price, or sometimes for free, by asking Alexa. In addition to Pandora, Alexa can connect to Spotify, iHeart Radio, and TuneIn (local radio stations) for even more music. If I still can't find the music I would like to hear, I can ask Alexa to purchase it from Amazon.

I regularly ask Alexa to tell me the time or the weather for today, but I also ask for movie listings and local events. Just a few weeks ago Campbell's Soup added a skill to ask for recipes. Alexa reads my kindle books to me in her voice or plays Audible audio books. I enjoy having Alexa read news articles from my flash briefing. In flash briefing you can pick from many news sources including, but not limited to, CNN and Huffington Post. More news sources are being added continually.

Alexa can control various devices used for Home Automation through Z-wave and other types of signals. Many product lines are available including, but not limited to, Samsung Smart Things, Phillips Hue, WEMO, GE. Alexa can control wall switches, switched outlet adapters, LED bulbs, thermostat, and many more devices. Alexa can control so many devices from so many product lines it can get confusing. For instance, there are many companies that offer controlled light bulbs. With General Electric connected appliances you can use a smart phone app or ask Alexa to start preheating your oven, notify you when your laundry is done, or even adjust water heater temperatures when you are gone on vacation.

I started controlling my space heater by asking Alexa with the help of The Hook and a Zap remote controlled outlet adaptor. The Hook is something that lets you control devices with the frequency 315 MHZ or 433 MHZ from an online device such as a smart phone or Alexa. Without The Hook Alexa would not normally be able to control this type of frequency, which is

used in everything from Hunter Douglas fans to remote controlled window shades. I purchased The Hook and 5 Zap outlet adapters for around \$80.00, which is a good deal because some home automation devices can be costly. One wall outlet can sometimes cost around \$20.00, but with more cost, you have the advantage of not needing The Hook.

Overall I am very happy with Alexa. Alexa helps me be more independent and have a sense of freedom in my daily life. I plan on getting more Alexa compatible devices in the near future, so I will keep everyone apprised to what else Alexa can control. The number of products Alexa can control is continually growing. Skills are also added almost every week to improve what Alexa can access from the Internet.