



# Jabra-cadabra

Jon Mamonski cuts the noise with these latest headphones

Jabra are famous for creating quality sound and reducing noise in headphones and earphones.

At the US Consumer Electronics Show this year they won an award for their latest offering.

The Jabra Elite 85h (pictured above) will greatly benefit people who study in coffee shops, use public transportation, or find themselves perpetually accruing frequent-flyer kilometres. These headphones are extremely comfortable with plush ear cups that leave plenty of wiggle room for even the most outward-facing ears. They fold flat and rotate up toward the headband and you can keep everything organised in its carrying case.

Jabra's smart noise cancelling uses four of the Elite 85h's eight microphones to filter out ambient sound. When these mics



register unwanted noise, they automatically switch the Auto Noise Cancelling on and the HearThru settings use AI to let you hear loudspeaker announcements like you get at railway stations and airports.

Another nifty feature is the automatic ear detection. By removing the headphones, playback automatically pauses then placing

them back on resumes playback. This works quickly and flawlessly and the Jabra Elite 85h's battery lasts a very, very long time. Testing yields 35 hours of playback with noise cancelling on. Great value for all this at \$449.

The Elite 65e (left) has effective active noise cancellation achieved by combining ANC from four microphones with passive noise cancellation from the oval-shaped and snug-fitting Jabra ear gels.

For calls and music on the go, the Jabra Sound+ app is the perfect companion to customise your sound so

your music and calls experience always suits your surroundings. Personalise your experience by customising the way Sound+ delivers your sound and how it looks. Choose your preferred voice assistant from Amazon Alexa, Siri or Google Assistant. Street price is \$297.



## REVIEW SMART SPEAKERS

Whether you're already one of the 30 percent of Australians who own a voice-controlled smart speaker or you're still on the fence about investing in a Google Assistant device, Amazon Alexa or another brand, you might be wondering which one is right for you and just how many do you need? Our intrepid Tech Guy, Jon Mamonski has done the hard work for you.

### What is a 'smart speaker'?

Combine a speaker/amplifier designed to spread sound 360 degrees, then add microphones and that's the hardware. The software is the machine intelligence that allows you to control what it does – simply by speaking with it (not just to it). Ask about the weather, a recipe, a diary date, play music – anything you like, even ask it to tell jokes, control lighting, keep you calm or wake you up in the morning to your favourite radio station. Once you get started, you're hooked.

### How many do you need?

That will depend on the size and rooms in your home. Think about what smart speakers can do for you for example, when testing them at my place, I put the larger ones in the living areas and the smaller ones in the bedroom where they are useful for morning alarms/wake up. In living areas, you can have them play music amongst many other things but music quality is important in larger areas like a living/lounge sound experience.

In the kitchen, it's about listening/watching recipes and ordering groceries so a smaller unit preferably with a screen is most useful.

To control a smart home without having to use your phone, get at least one smart speaker for each major living area so that you're always within voice range when you need them. Consider whether the walls are thick and could block sounds, creating the need for a speaker in each area.

### Alexa or Google?

Both have speakers/play music, accept commands and generally do what you ask, but they are different.

Google Home comes with Google Assistant and the service performs its tasks like turning on your lights and accessing your music. It also does well at understanding you when you speak. Google goes out of its way to boost Assistant's appeal because it understands the many ways you may say things. In turn, that usually creates fewer instances of times when Assistant fails to understand you and says it can't answer your question.

Amazon Alexa is also powerful but doesn't always understand the different ways you may ask a question. Where Alexa shines, however, is in the many ways it can help you. In addition to turning on lights and playing music, you can order a pizza and order an Uber and ask joint questions (routines). If you're a shopper or love audiobooks, you simply can't get enough of Amazon, Alexa is for you.

## GOOGLE HOME JUST GOT MOVING

Google smart speaker owners, rejoice. Thanks to the new LOFT and JOT portable battery base for Google Home and Google Home Mini, you can unplug and enjoy the freedom to move your device around your home or office, cord free.

The LOFT (for Google Home) and JOT (for Google Home Mini) from Ninety7, are rechargeable battery bases that give your smart assistant eight hours of cordless power. Move from room to room without interrupting your podcast, audio book or favourite playlist. Enjoy it in your backyard while you soak up the sun or potter in your garden. Move it with ease back to the kitchen to help you with recipes and timers – all without having to plug it in again.

These portable batteries are simple to use. Just slide the Google Home onto the device and lock it into place. Use the charger that came with your Google Home/Mini to charge up the battery, then unplug. Four LED lights indicate how much battery life remains before another charge is needed. The Ninety7 JOT carries the 'made for Google' official endorsement by Google. LOFT for Google Home is available in Carbon, Snow and Copper – RRP \$79.95. The JOT for Google Home Mini is available in Carbon and Silver – RRP \$59.95.

## WINNERS

### Best bedside unit

Alexa Echo Spot (\$149) a permanent alarm clock replacement.

### Best music in the living room

Google Home Max – the best smart sound there is.

### Best in the kitchen

Google Home Hub (\$178) is great value with a 7-inch screen.

### Best value single unit

LG WK7 ThinQ (\$199) can live anywhere and sound great.

### Best children proof unit

JBL Link 10 – it's waterproof and \$137.

### Best eco-system

Ease of use – Google Assistant.  
Advanced users – Alexa.

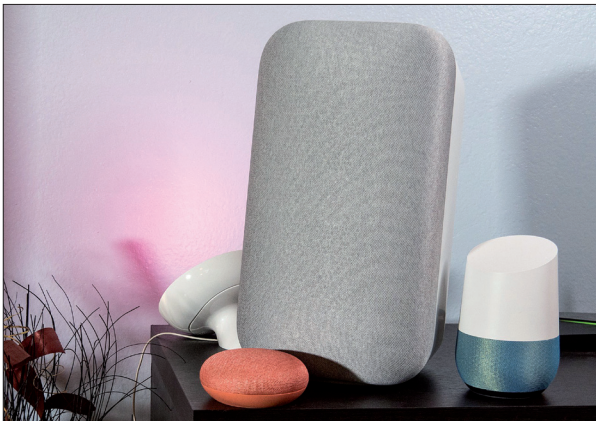


### AMAZON ALEXA RANGE

A big range here starting with the (non-screens) Echo Dot (\$44), Echo Plus Gen 1 (\$99), Echo Plus Gen 2 (\$229) and add-on Echo Sub (\$199) for music depth. With screens include the popular Echo Spot (\$149) and 10-inch screen Echo Show (\$299). Variants include the Echo Input (\$55), with no speaker that plugs into your home stereo system and Echo Link (\$299) that plugs into your stereo and your network with multiple inputs/outputs including headphones.

**Best Echo value for music** Echo Plus 1 and the Echo Sub, total cost \$298. Fills a large area with quality sound.

**Best Echo with screen** Echo Show (\$299), works well in the kitchen for recipes and ordering in.



### GOOGLE HOME RANGE

Starting with the Mimi (\$45), progressing to the Home (\$175) and then the grunty Home Max (\$449). Google has one screen unit, the Google Home Hub (\$178 around town).



### GOOGLE NEST HUB MAX

Google have just dropped a new bigger model of smart speaker with a ten-inch screen, camera and bigger sound – the Nest Hub Max. Unveiled at the company's I/O developer conference, the Hub Max's 10-inch 720p screen is a good size for a kitchen – great for recipes or keeping half an eye on *Game of Thrones* while you're preparing dinner.

Like the Home Hub, it also has sensors that detect the surrounding light and colour levels to adapt the screen's brightness and warmth. The new camera means you can make video calls and it has a generous 127-degree field of view. You may not want your caller to see your entire kitchen during your conversation so you can use the Auto Framing feature that keeps you in the centre of the screen. If there are others in the room with you, the system will include them in the frame as well.

As you move around the room, the camera follows you and keeps you in focus. This smart camera can also recognise gestures to control your media. When you're playing a video, listening to a podcast or songs, even when the Assistant is speaking, you can pause by looking at the screen and raising your hand. When you're ready, you can repeat the gesture to resume. Google calls this Quick Gestures and it's particularly helpful for times when it's too loud for the Assistant to hear you and ask it to pause, like when you're surrounded by screaming children.

The camera also enables a new feature called Face Match which recognises registered users as they walk by and displays the alerts that are relevant to them. You can add up to six members in your household to access your Hub Max. An LED next to the camera glows green when the Nest Hub Max is in use so you know what's going on. There is a physical switch at the back that turns the camera and mic off when you want privacy. The Hub Max has stereo speakers that deliver better quality music and it will be available mid-year for \$299.

### GREAT ALTERNATIVES

If you want quality sound in one unit that's not too expensive, then the LG WK7 ThinQ (left) with Google Assistant at \$199 represents excellent value that rival other more expensive brands like the Sonos and Apple HomePod. The budget range to consider comes from well known speaker company, JBL. The waterproof Google Assistant models start at \$137 for the JBL Link 10 (right).



## MOVE UP FROM PHONE PICS

When phone photos just don't cut it, Panasonic make cameras that will take the shots you deserve.

The Panasonic DC-FZ1000 II is an amazing superzoom camera with a 1" sensor and 25-400mm equivalent F2.8-4 lens. The camera has a fully articulating 3" touchscreen display and a 2.36M-dot OLED viewfinder. Around the lens is a ring which can handle zoom or focus, and the new Zoom Compose Assist will automatically zoom out so you can locate your subject and recompose. The FZ1000 II can take bursts of up to 20 shots with AF-C at 7 fps. Video can be captured at UHD 4K/30p. Connectivity options include Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, all for \$1299 street price.



## SAMSUNG VERTICAL TV OPTION

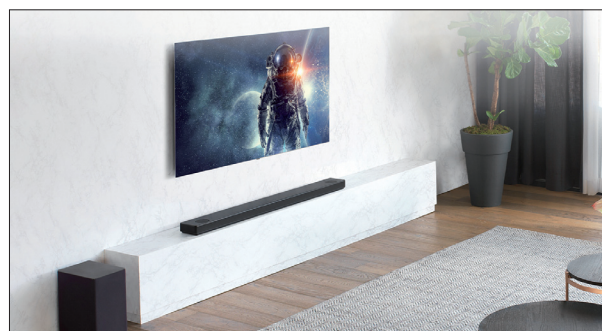
Samsung has unveiled "The Sero," a 43-inch quantum-dot 4K QLED TV with an attention-grabbing gimmick. It can be flipped around 90 degrees, letting you watch Instagram, Snap and other smartphone videos in their native vertical format. The Sero is in the same family as Samsung's artsy Serif and Frame QLED TVs. Once you flip it into vertical mode, you can sync up and mirror content on your phone by pairing it over NFC. In horizontal mode, it works as a regular TV, delivering 4.1 channel, 60-watt sound, Bixby control and more.

## GIVE YOUR TV VISION GOOD SOUND

When you have a fab 4K TV, you deserve quality sound to match the super vision. LG's new sound bar range has built-in Google Assistant and can double as full-on Google smart speakers, allowing you to request songs or ask about the weather with your voice.

The high-end model SL10YG is a collaboration with high-end speaker brand

Meridian, contributing sound-enhancing technologies including Bass & Space, Image Elevation and Meridian Upmix for converting stereo content to multichannel. On testing, this sound bar is more than capable of rocking the house as well as filling the room with pin point movie sound with Dolby Atmos either wall mounted or on the bench. Street price is \$1499.



## PROJECTS ARE NO HASSLE

Keeping track of your projects certainly can be a hassle when they involve team members or others that have a part to play. Project software has been around for years but puts most people off because its no easy to use. Welcome Hassl, yes there's no 'e' and finally a project app that's a delight to use and best of all, it's Melbourne made.

It has been a big few months for the team with cofounder Lauren Crystal being named Victorian Emerging Leader at the Telstra Women's Business awards, presenting the award, Telstra judges said Lauren and her team are likely to be the next Cloud app success story.

For starting projects, Hassl is simple and intuitive, feels familiar and easy to understand. I just love the Australian language that's used.



With zero training, you'll be able to make an account and start planning, creating and collaborating. There are no buzzwords, no bells and certainly no whistles. Hassl has everything you need, nothing that you don't. With project management, messaging and files on one platform, Hassl lets you trade in the constellation of digital tools for one platform. You get to try it for free too at [www.hssl.co](http://www.hssl.co).

## SUPERB 4K VIEWING

LG is best known for its impressive OLED TVs but they also make excellent LCD TVs. The 65-inch LG 65SM9450PTA Super UHD (street price \$4495) is more affordable than LG's premium 65-inch OLED offerings, but it still offers 4K resolution, brilliant HDR support, fantastic audio and a full array of smart features.

The Nano Cell Technology and Full Array Dimming Pro, result in incredibly vibrant colours and dramatically improved blacks. This is super-charged by the NEW Alpha 7 Gen2 Intelligent Processor to make sure

you're always in the best seat in the house. Chief among the new functions is LG's ThinQ AI, which combines voice commands, content search and Google Assistant.

With a full-array backlight and LG's intelligent local dimming, the Super UHD unit offers broad support for high dynamic range (HDR) content with Dolby Vision, the industry-leading standard, as well as the upcoming Advanced HDR by Technicolor and basic standards like HDR10 and HLG. HDR enhancement along with Dolby Atmos support.



## SPORT SMART WATCH FROM SAMSUNG

Samsung is a serious contender in the fast growing smart watch segment. The two Galaxy Watch models so far are too big for some so the Active is going to appeal. Despite coming in at around \$100 cheaper than the Galaxy Watch, Samsung doesn't scrimp on the features. From a price of

\$299, the Active packs in built-in GPS, swim tracking, heart rate monitoring, contactless payments and up to two days of battery life.

The Active also introduces a new way to monitor your fitness tracking efforts and the promise of serious health monitoring through a new blood pressure tracking feature.



## LIGHTNING-FAST ULTRABOOK

The ASUS ROG Zephyrus has ultrabook style. ASUS hasn't made this from a sheet metal that's pressed by a machine, instead it's crafted to be lightweight and robust. This ultra-book is put through military-grade durability testing to ensure it can stand up to heavy use.

At a mere 15.35mm thick, it weighs just 2.1kg. The hinges offer smooth opening and closing and the trackpad also doubles as a touchscreen number pad. A simple button press backlights this part of the keyboard and allows you to punch in numbers when you need to. The Zephyrus S GX531 is the pinnacle of the Asus ROG laptop line-up, which shows in its balance of features, specs and design aesthetics at \$2349.



## NICE THINGS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES

Samsung's latest phone entry maybe smaller than the S10 and S10+ and there's no apology for that. At 5.8 inches, it's smaller than its Pixel 3 rival but with the lack of front bezels around the display, the image is bigger than the Google competitor and it feels and looks as classy as its Galaxy siblings.

It's a pint sized powerhouse with a Qualcomm Snapdragon 855 engine matching the bigger phones in sheer power. The battery too at 3,100 mAh is any match for its rivals and it can wirelessly charge your other devices. At around \$1,000 or \$99 a month with a plan, it has the Samsung top tier performance in a comfortable size package.