Apr 2018
Vol. XXIX, No 4

KEYSTONE MacCentral

printout

Keystone MacCentral Macintosh Users Group ❖ http://www.keystonemac.com

KeyMac Auction

Keystone MacCentral is having its annual auction on Tuesday April 17th. The auction is open to both members and non-members so bring a friend. Sign in before the auction begins.

Bids will be taken in minimum of $1 increments only. Payment must be made in cash. Checks will be only accepted from Keystone MacCentral members.

BTW We have a list of items on our web site. Check 'em out ahead of time

Meet us at

Bethany Village Retirement Center

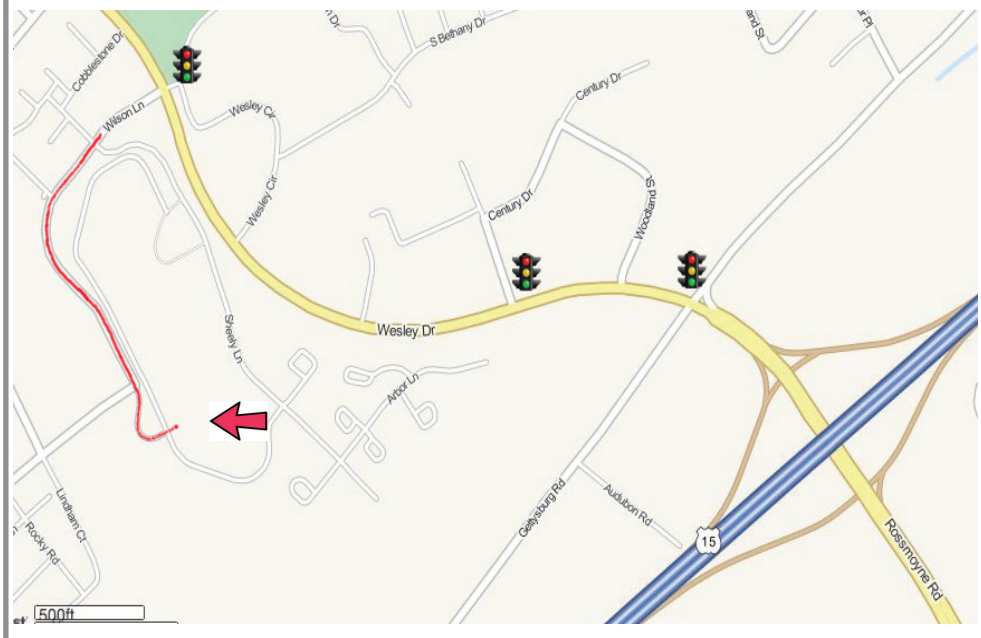
Education Room

5225 Wilson Lane, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

Tuesday, April 17th 2018 6:30 p.m.

Attendance is free and open to all interested persons.

Contents



Keystone MacCentral Essentials

Meeting Place
Bethany Village West
Maplewood Assisted Living (Bld 21)
5225 Wilson Lane
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

Web Site
http://www.keystonemac.com

Mailing Address
310 Somerset Drive
Shiresmanstown, PA 17011

by Geoff Duncan

Can U.S. States Hang on to Net Neutrality?

As anticipated, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission voted late last year to scrap net neutrality regulations that required ISPs and telecommunications companies to treat all traffic equally (see "FCC to End Net Neutrality," 28 November 2017), however, the battle for net neutrality is still raging in the United States, with many individual states both suing the federal government over the new regulatory framework and moving ahead with their own state-specific net neutrality legislation. Washington State — home to high-tech giants like Amazon and Microsoft — is the first out the door with new net neutrality laws.

Do these strategies stand a chance? Don't federal regulations pre-empt state authority? Or are these lawsuits and state regulations essentially stall tactics, hoping to muddy the waters long enough for a possible shift in the balance of Congress or perhaps even a new presidential administration?

The Lawsuit Strategy — The first major suit against the FCC over the new net neutrality framework was filed 16 January 2018 in the form of a protective petition for review from 21 states and the District of Columbia, which essentially is a fancy notification that a lawsuit is on the way. The states moved fast because federal law allows only a 10-day window for filing suits over new regulations as part of a multi-district lottery that determines which court handles a case when there are multiple challenges. The states (and I believe all other would-be plaintiffs) are aiming at the U.S. Appeals Court for the District of Columbia, which has heard previous net neutrality suits.

But — funny story — nobody really knows when that 10-day window starts. Is it when the new FCC regulations are adopted (which happened 4 January 2018) or when they're published in the Federal Register (which didn't happen until 22 February 2018)? So, everybody wanting in filed protective petitions for review around both those dates to make sure they had a foot in the door. Other petitions were filed by Mozilla and advocacy groups like New America's Open Technology Institute and Public Knowledge. Other organizations like The Internet Association — basically Silicon Valley's biggest lobbying group — aren't suing directly but plan to participate as intervening parties.

The states' lawsuit will probably make three arguments:

- The FCC's rollback of net neutrality is illegal because the FCC is prevented from making "arbitrary and capricious" changes to policy. The move is "arbitrary and capricious" because it fails to adequately justify breaking with the FCC's previous decade-and-a-half of trying to defend net neutrality and (probably) because the FCC's significantly flawed comment system meant that the rule-making process was subverted.
- The FCC doesn't have the authority to make sweeping pre-emption of state and local laws.
- The FCC's move to reclassify broadband Internet as a lightly regulated Title I "information service" rather than a Title II "communications service" subject to common carrier regulation is based on an incorrect and unreasonable reading of the Telecommunications Act.

That all makes sense on paper, but the effort is a bit of a Hail Mary pass. Broadband Internet was a Title I service up until a few years ago (see "FCC Goes All-In on Net Neutrality," 7 February 2015), and courts have found the FCC has the authority to classify broadband Internet as it sees fit.

As for overriding state and local law, generally all the federal government has to do to make its policies preempt any state regulation is say "this policy preempts any state or local laws on this matter." The FCC's net neutrality rollback does exactly that (on page 194), and on several previous occasions, the FCC has exercised preemptive powers successfully to implement its policies. (The FCC's preemptive power isn't unlimited: it did get reversed on a municipal broadband case in 2016 but the legal basis was different. In that case, the FCC was essentially giving muni broadband providers powers the states did not grant.) So, the states have to successfully argue the rule change meets the legal standard of "arbitrary and capricious," which is a fairly high bar.

The Legislative Strategies — States aren't pinning all their hopes on successfully suing the FCC: several are working to enact their own net neutrality laws, and this week Washington became the first state to put such a law in the books.

Washington State's new law basically punches the new FCC regulations in the teeth. The FCC says things like fast lanes, rate limiting, and content blocking are now permissible? Well, not in Washington! This means the state is almost certainly headed to court, but only time will tell if it will take on the FCC directly or by proxy, perhaps instead being sued by one or more industry groups representing broadband and Internet operators. Washington State's argument will likely be that, yes, the federal government can impose policy, but states have an absolute right to protect their citizens and the net neutrality rollback is a direct threat to consumers, especially in an era of giant media companies

and ISPs being free to sell customers' browsing histories (see "Congressional Republicans Kill FCC ISP Privacy Rules," 3 April 2017). Consumer protection laws are pretty powerful.

So far, the FCC has not commented on Washington's new law. However, the last thing broadband providers want is to shift from a world where they had to deal with one set of federal regulations to a world with 50 sets of inconsistent state regulations. So the agency will be feeling some pressure to get Washington State in line.

Other states — like Oregon, New York, and Rhode Island — may swing for the wallet rather than the teeth. Bills up for consideration in these states — but not yet enacted into law — don't try to impose state-wide net neutrality policy. Instead, they allow state and local governments to contract only with broadband operators that meet the states' net neutrality criteria. This could mean that state and local governments won't give direct business to broadband operators unless they're net-neutrality compliant. However, the laws could also block broadband operators' ability to use utility poles, access state- or city-owned land to run fiber, or install facilities.

Going for the purse strings is a nice idea — and very likely ducks under the FCC's preemption authority — but broadband operators are already used to dealing with innumerable state and local utility commissions. It's the sort of thing that can be sidestepped with shell companies and finagling — and in markets like New York, Texas, and California, there's more than enough money at stake for broadband operators to do just that. In smaller markets, broadband operators may simply choose not to comply, effectively holding improved Internet service hostage until regulators relent. That too would hurt users — and, of course, state services like schools and educational institutions.

Look Who's Not Talking — Notice who isn't participating in this debate? Major Internet companies like Google, Facebook, Amazon, and Apple. All these firms took public stances in favor of net neutrality — because it helps their businesses — but have been remarkably silent on state efforts to preserve some semblance of net neutrality.

In part, this is because they don't want to deal with a morass of individual state regulations any more than broadband providers, but it's also because most of them aren't strongly in favor of consumer privacy laws. If states can successfully use consumer protection laws to preserve net neutrality, it might not be good news for companies whose businesses involve collecting and collating oceans of data about Internet users. So, expect most of the major Internet companies to sit this one out.

The bottom line here is that it's unrealistic to expect states to neatly solve the net neutrality debate: it's going to be a complicated and messy fight. If nothing else, though, the states' actions may buy time, potentially allowing party balance to shift in Congress. And, who knows, one day Americans might get a president willing to stand up for net neutrality. Stranger things have happened.

byJosh Centers

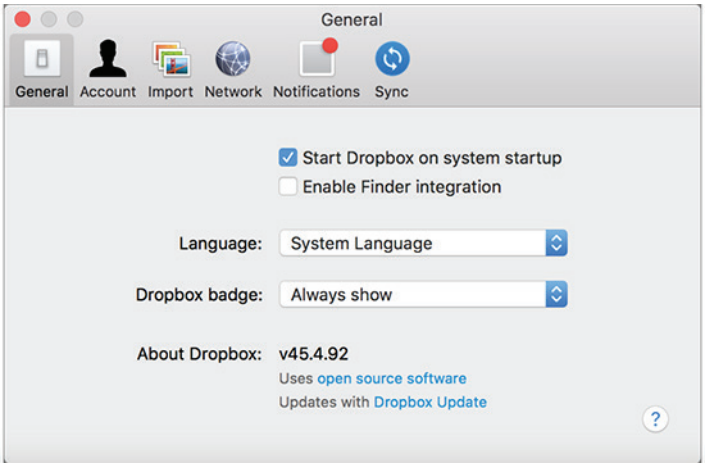
Freezing Finder? Dropbox and Overstuffed Folders May Be the Culprit

For the last few months, my iMac had been getting slower and slower. Specifically, I was seeing the dreaded beachballs of death far more often than I care to, and the Finder was freezing regularly, forcing me to relaunch it multiple times per day. (If you ever need to do this, hold down Option, click and hold the Finder icon in the Dock, and choose Relaunch. For more Dock tricks, see "macOS Hidden Treasures: Dominate the Dock," 6 March 2017.)

I first tried all the usual fixes, like deleting all the Finder plist files in ~/Library/Preferences/ and running First Aid in Disk Utility. On a hunch that Dropbox was somehow involved, I had even tried revoking its Accessibility access, and although that seemed to help for a while, the frequent beachballs returned. The main thing I had left to try was a clean install, but since I had done one of those when I installed macOS 10.12 Sierra, doing another so soon seemed excessive.

I kept looking for a solution that didn't involve repaving my iMac, and after some spelunking through the Internet, I found that turning off Dropbox's Finder integration fixed the problem. Here's how you do that:

- Click the Dropbox icon in the menu bar.
- Click the gear icon in the upper-right corner and choose Preferences.
- Uncheck "Enable Finder integration."



The downside to disabling Dropbox's Finder integration is that doing so eliminates the sync icons in the Finder for files and folders synced with Dropbox, along with the special Dropbox options in the Finder's contextual menu. I wasn't thrilled about losing those capabilities, so I kept searching.

Eventually, I found some hints that a folder containing a very large number of files could cause Dropbox, and thus the Finder, to choke. It doesn't make sense that this could be true of folders outside the Dropbox folder, but after I cleaned much of the junk out of my Downloads folder — it had over 1500 items in it and consumed over 26 GB — I was able to re-enable Dropbox's Finder integration without bringing back the beachballs or freezes.

However, I have some folders that are legitimately large and not just full of junk. After re-enabling Dropbox's Finder integration, a week of solid performance was ended when the Finder choked while browsing one of these folders, which has some 8800 items in it. I turned off Finder integration again and relaunched the Finder, and I haven't seen any problems in a week since. I hope the solution sticks this time.

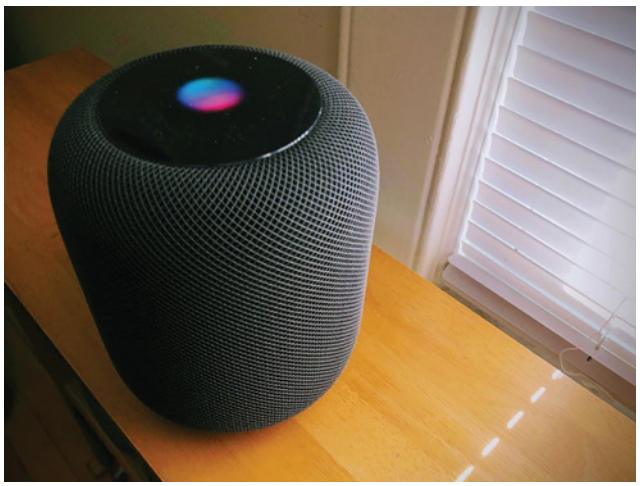
So if you're suffering from Finder problems along these lines, it's worth toggling Dropbox's Finder integration and taking a few minutes to clean out unnecessarily overstuffed folders. You probably have an idea of which folders contain vast numbers of files, but if not, DaisyDisk is a handy tool to find them. For free options, you could turn to OmniDiskSweeper or the open-source GrandPerspective.

by Adam Engst

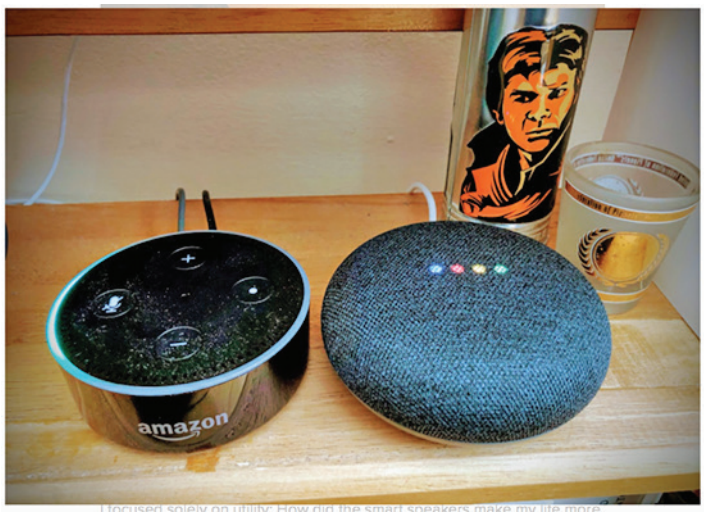
Beyond Music: Comparing the HomePod to Amazon Echo and Google Home

The HomePod has landed, to the delight of music fans — well, primarily Apple Music fans, for whom the smart speaker is mainly intended (see "HomePod First Impressions: Let the (Apple) Music Play," 12 February 2018). With help from Siri, the HomePod can do quite a bit more than just play music, but it has a lot of room for improvement.

I spent a few weeks putting the HomePod and Siri through their paces for a broad range of non-music tasks that include communication, personal management, and retrieval of information.



For context, I compared the HomePod to the rival Echo Dot (Amazon's entry-level Echo, with its Alexa assistant), and the Google Home Mini (Google's entry-level smart speaker, with Google Assistant).



I focused solely on utility: How did the smart speakers make my life more convenient or informed? How did they assist or enlighten me? I ignored the speakers' associated music services. I also disregarded the role each can play in home automation since that deserves its own article. Finally, I didn't compare sound quality since the lower-cost Echo

Dot and Google Home Mini aren't in the pricier HomePod's audio class (the Google Home Max is more comparable; see "New Google Gear Once Again Takes Aim At Apple Products," 18 October 2017).

Information and assistance I sought from the speakers included news and weather, my agenda, non-musical entertainment such as podcasts and audiobooks, the option to make telephone calls and send text messages, and the capability to create notes and reminders. Also, to what extent were speakers able to roll multiple kinds of information into a single, convenient report? And how well did they support multiple users in a household?

It was a fun challenge, and it clarified how, while the smart speaker race has a distinct frontrunner in Amazon's Echo line, Apple's HomePod is very much in the running, despite its late entry.

For each of the categories below, I'll award each company up to 3 points. The ranking won't always be 3-2-1 because in some cases, a company's speaker deserves no points at all, or may be second but deserve only a single point. These rankings are from the perspective of an Apple user; there are a few spots where Amazon's and Google's devices would rank better for Android users.

Multiple User Support — A smart speaker should be smart enough to recognize multiple users in a household and allow them to interact with the device with their own data and accounts.

The HomePod fails entirely in this sense. It does not support multiple accounts in any way and cannot identify users by their voices. That's a problem both for the primary user if an unauthorized user begins extracting personal information from Siri on the speaker. And it's a problem for non-primary users, who can't get to their playlists in Apple Music, create reminders on their lists, and so on.

The news is better with Amazon Echo and Google Home gadgets, both of which can be trained to recognize different voices and personalize services for multiple users.

Amazon uses what it calls Voice Profiles to this end. Such profiles can be set up, trained, and deleted. They give each user access to his or her own messages, music settings, Flash Briefings, shopping updates, and so on.

Hardware support isn't complete, though. Of the current-generation Amazon devices, the Echo, Echo Dot, Echo Plus and Echo Show have the feature, but the Echo Spot does not.

Similarly, Google has a Voice Match technology for shared use of its smart speakers. Up to six people can use Voice Match on a single Google Home device, and each has access to personalized info, such as commute times, daily briefings, favorite music services, and preferred video services.

There don't appear to be any restrictions on which Google Home devices can use Voice Match, which gives Google a slight edge over Amazon.

Ranking:
Google (3 points),
Amazon (2 points),
Apple (0 points)

Give Me the News — In addition to its primary role as a music-delivery system, the HomePod can read you the news. This isn't surprising since Amazon and Google have made much of this capability.

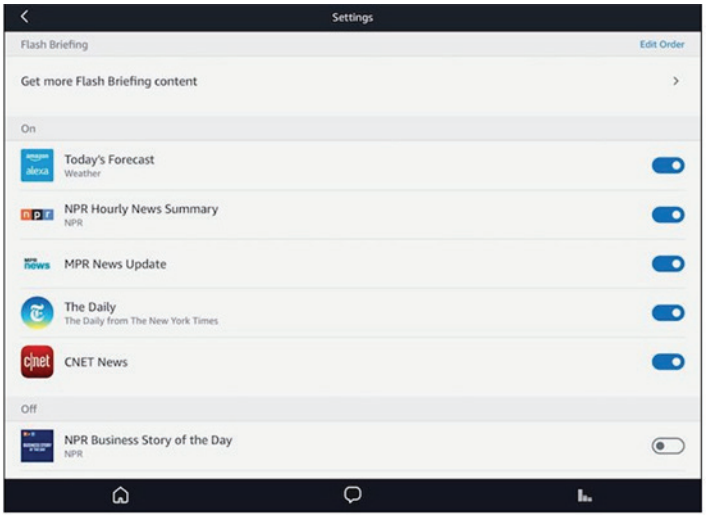
Before the arrival of my HomePod review unit, I had been in the habit of requesting the morning news from Alexa or Google Assistant using the Echo Dot and Google Home Mini in my home office.

More recently, I've taken to asking the HomePod for the morning news as I'm getting ready for my day. This has been both satisfying and frustrating. The HomePod does reasonably well but has room for improvement.

Ask Siri on the HomePod to "give me the news," and it automatically plays a news summary from one of its news partners. In the United States, these official news sources are Bloomberg, CNBC, CNN, ESPN, Fox News, National Public Radio, NBC, and the Washington Post.

If the HomePod does not give you the source you want when you ask for news, you can ask Siri to "switch to (news provider)." That media outlet becomes the default from then on.

While Siri's play-me-the-news command plays from only a single source at a time, Alexa users can set up a Flash Briefing containing a string of news sources in a particular order. Selection can be overwhelming: a search in the Alexa app finds hundreds of options.



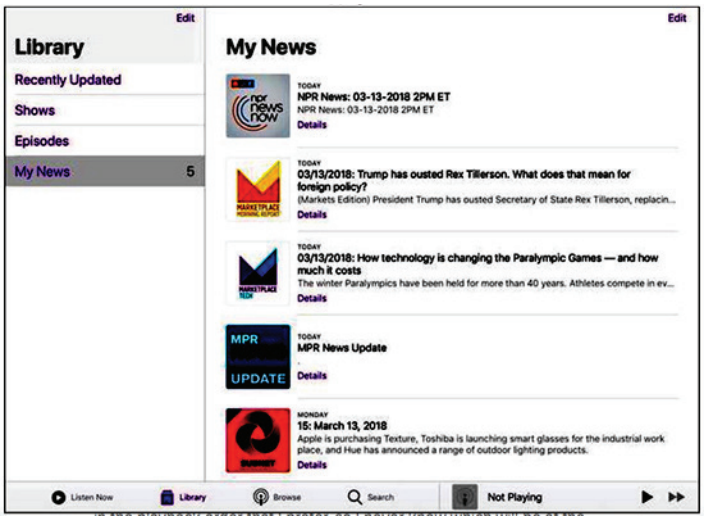
Some flash-briefing content is now in video form, too, since two of Amazon's newest Echo speakers — the Echo Show and the Echo Spot — build in displays.

Similarly, Google includes news among the services its smart speakers can readily provide. Setup in the Google Home app is a breeze; select among dozens of news sources that Google furnishes in nearly a dozen categories, then order them as you like. That's how they play, always from the top, when you ask Google Assistant to "give me the news."

If you want Siri to read from several news sources in one go, things aren't as convenient. You have to cobble together a combo newscast manually with Apple's Podcasts app. Specifically, you need to set up a "station" containing a series of short-duration news-related podcasts that function collectively as a single news report.

Examples of such digest-style news podcasts include NPR Up First, NPR News Now, the Washington Post's The Daily 202's Big Idea, the BBC Global News Podcast, and for tech-news junkies, APM Marketplace Tech, Relay FM's Subnet, and Tom Merritt's Daily Tech News Show.

Create a station in the Podcasts app, give it a name Siri will understand, and populate it with news podcasts. Then, on the HomePod, ask Siri to "play (station name)." That should fire right up and begin working its way through podcast episodes.



Frustrations remain. I can't rearrange my station's various news sources in the playback order that I prefer, so I never know which will be at the top of the queue. The Podcasts app does have useful settings, including a toggle to prioritize unplayed content and an option to play content newest to oldest, both of which make sense for regularly updating news sources.

There is one other way to get news on the HomePod: use it as live-streaming appliance — essentially a very expensive radio. If you ask for "NPR live," Siri plays an NPR live stream via iTunes Radio. Other such live options include the BBC, Bloomberg Radio, CBS News Radio, CBS Sports Radio, ESPN (in English or Spanish), NBC Sports Radio, and Public Radio International. You need to experiment because requests for terrestrial-radio sources sometimes cough up canned content (such as podcast episodes or news summaries) instead of live streams.

Apple has put some thought into how news is delivered via Siri requests on the HomePod, but its rookie effort needs polishing to match the more sophisticated news-delivery capabilities on Amazon Echo and Google Home devices. Amazon is slightly ahead of Google with more available content — and some of that content, uniquely, is in video format.

Ranking:
Amazon (3 points),
Google (2 points),
Apple (1 point)

Play Me a Podcast — The HomePod and Apple's Podcasts iOS app are designed to work together, which is a great thing for podcast fans.

Let's say you've been a regular listener of the TidBITS podcast, which provides audio versions of TidBITS articles, read by the authors. Playing it is easy; just ask Siri on the HomePod to "play the TidBITS podcast," and the show's most recent episode will begin.

Subscribing to a podcast is similarly straightforward: ask Siri to "subscribe to the TidBITS podcast." That adds the TidBITS podcast to the Podcast app's library for future consumption.

From that point on, episode playback on the HomePod and on iOS devices is supposed to be in sync. Pause on one device, and you are supposed to pick up where you left off on the other. In practice, I found this feature to be a bit hit-and-miss, but I suspect Apple will improve it over time.

The HomePod does not support third-party iPhone podcast apps such as Overcast and Pocket Casts, so devotees of those clients must forgo tight HomePod integration. You can always stream podcasts from apps to the HomePod via AirPlay, though.

What about the competition? On Echo devices, Alexa fetches podcasts from the TuneIn service. Ask the assistant to "play (podcast name)" and the most recent episode of that show

fires up. Pause and the show will later pick right up where you left off. You can also say "play previous episode" to go back through a podcast's catalog.

There doesn't appear to be a subscribe option, but you can try your luck with third-party "skills," which are Alexa add-ons that provide additional features. The AnyPod skill, among others, adds subscription capabilities.

On Google Home devices, you can similarly crank up the first episode of a podcast by requesting a show by name (though the source of the podcasts is a bit unclear). But, again, there's no subscribe option I can see.

Apple wins this category, clearly. The HomePod's integration with the Podcasts app on iOS devices lets users readily subscribe to podcasts and sync playback across Apple devices, two features that are key to a complete podcast experience. Apple just needs to smooth out some rough edges.

Ranking:
Apple (3 points),
Amazon (1 point),
Google (1 point)

Read Me a Book — If you have purchased audiobooks via the iTunes Store, you'd think these would play just fine on your HomePod. Nope, or, at least, not by asking Siri for them. "Sorry, I can't play audiobooks," Siri on the HomePod tells me. "HomePod doesn't support audiobooks at this time," Apple confirms. Seriously?

This isn't a total deal-breaker since I can play any of my iTunes-purchased audiobooks from my iPhone or my iPad to the HomePod via AirPlay. But still, for a $350 smart speaker, that's low-hanging fruit left unplucked.

What about the competition? Amazon is well-positioned here in that it owns Audible, an audiobook service, along with its Kindle ebook store. This means that, in many cases, users can alternate between audio and text versions of books — provided both versions have been purchased — without losing their places. Echo devices support this WhisperSync capability; to use it, ask for the book you were reading in text form on your computer, phone or Kindle earlier, and you'll pick up right where you left off.

Likewise, if you're solely listening to the audio version of a book, ask Alexa for the title of your current book in progress. You can also just say "play an audiobook." When I did that, Alexa dropped me right onto the spot in a sci-fi novel that I had last accessed about a year ago; it knew that I had been reading that book, even though I had forgotten all about it.

Audiobooks are a recent addition to Google's Play Store, a longtime source of ebooks. This means a Google Home device can play audiobooks once they've been purchased from that online storefront. Plus, audiobooks from Google tend to be more affordable than the Apple and Amazon equivalents.

Audio syncing among devices works nicely, too. When I paused playback of "The Art of War" in my desktop browser and then asked my Google Home Mini to "play an audiobook," Sun Tzu picked up precisely where he had left off.

So who wins? The absence of Siri-enabled audiobook playback on the HomePod is a big disappointment that Apple should remedy soon. Amazon and Google handle this chore pretty well, but Amazon has the edge with its WhisperSync synchronizing feature and the fact that it's integrated with Audible.

Ranking:
Amazon (3 points),
Google (2 points),
Apple (0 points)

Make a Call — The HomePod is an excellent speakerphone, but there's a catch: you cannot start (or answer) calls on it by, for instance, asking Siri to "call my wife," as you would on your iPhone.

Once a phone call is in progress on an iPhone, however, you can switch to the HomePod (via the Audio button on the call screen) to continue the call there. The top of the HomePod turns green when it is on a call.

The HomePod even lets you manage multiple calls. Touch and hold the top of the device to end the current call and answer an incoming one, to answer an incoming call and put the current call on hold, or to switch between calls.

What about the competition? Amazon one-ups the HomePod by providing both Echo-to-Echo calling and calls between Echos and smartphones with the Alexa app installed on them. The Alexa app on the iPad and other tablets has also just acquired this capability.

The Echo can call regular telephone numbers, too. Initiate such a call by asking for a contact by name, or voice-dial just about any mobile or landline number. The only exclusions are the 911 emergency number, international numbers, and premium-rate numbers — to call these numbers, users must purchase a $34.99 add-on gadget called the Echo Connect).

The Echo line has one other obvious differentiator. Since two of Amazon's speakers — the Echo Show and the Echo Spot — incorporate displays, video messaging is possible and has been implemented accordingly.

Google Home devices are roughly comparable to Echo devices in that they can make hands-free voice calls to contacts, along with voice dialing of mobile and landline numbers. The Google speakers also offer a few additional bells and whistles. Calls to international and premium-rate numbers are supported without additional hardware, provided the users have set up paid-calling capability via either the Google Voice voice-over-IP service or Google's Project Fi cellular service.

The HomePod may be a high-quality speakerphone, but its inability to initiate or answer calls is a significant minus. Apple should enable this feature as soon as possible. For now, Google Home gadgets have the audio advantage with the most calling features, thanks to integration with Google Voice and Project Fi. They cannot do video, though, the way some Echo devices can.

Ranking:
Google (3 points),
Amazon (3 points),
Apple (1 point)

Send a Message — The HomePod can send and receive messages using the Messages app.

Those who use Siri to manipulate the Messages app on their iPhones and iPads will be on familiar ground, so I will not go through a tutorial. Suffice it to say you can use your HomePod to send a message to a person or persons in your contacts, have new messages (from everyone or specific people) read to you, and so on.

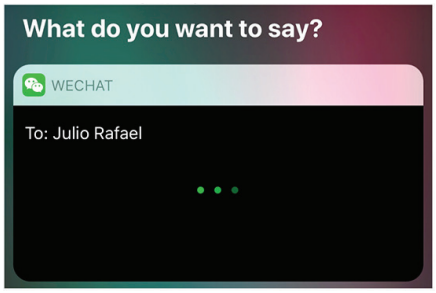
To enable Messages on your HomePod, you have to set up a feature called Personal Requests that's also necessary for reminders and notes.

The HomePod also supports third-party messaging apps, including Skype for iPhone, WhatsApp Messenger, WeChat, and Viber Messenger. The first time you use one of these, you will be asked to authenticate on your iPhone with a screen tap.

Testing third-party messaging apps with the HomePod was a hit-or-miss proposition for me. Of the officially supported services, I mostly use Skype. But when I asked Siri to send a Skype message to my wife, the HomePod response was, "I wish I could, but Skype hasn't set that up with me yet."

I have recently become a casual WeChat user because of relatives using the messaging app abroad, where it is much more popular. The WeChat integration worked better for me on the HomePod. I was able to send messages once I'd authenticated on my iPhone. Sort of.

First, I had to authenticate WeChat on the phone each time I sent a message. (I think it's supposed to be necessary only once.) Also, in an odd twist, messages apparently were not sent on the HomePod itself, but instead on the iPhone. The HomePod seemed to hand off the task to the iPhone, where a WeChat composing field appeared. That's not terrible, but WeChat integration has been billed as a HomePod capability.



What about the competition? Amazon's Echo devices recently gained the capability to send SMS messages, with a catch: users need to have Android phones. In the Alexa app on such handsets, there is an option to enable SMS voice sending on a companion Echo device. No such option exists in the iOS version of the Alexa app.

As with voice and video calling, however, Amazon allows Echo-to-Echo messaging via Alexa. Again, this in-system messaging also works with phones and tablets with the Alexa app, including the iPhone and iPad.

Google Home devices don't officially support texting. I have seen a few workarounds, but they require an Android phone — a dealbreaker, again, for iPhone users.

Ranking:
Apple (3 points),
Amazon (1 point),
Google (0 points)

Add to Calendar — The HomePod has no Calendar support, for now, so it cannot inform you of your daily agenda or let you verbally create Calendar events. Bzzz!

What about the competition? Echo users can connect their calendar to Alexa, which supports iCloud calendars. You accomplish this via the Alexa app on your iPhone, but you must first set up two-factor authentication. Calendars associated with Google accounts — including paid business (G Suite) accounts — also are supported.

Google Home supports Google calendars, obviously. Unfortunately, these can only be generic accounts, not paid G Suite variants with personalized domain names. This limitation annoys me greatly since all my activity happens within such a G Suite account, where my longtime domain name lives.

Amazon wins this category going away. It has the most robust calendar support that includes Apple and Google flavors. Apple is the big loser, and Google isn't much ahead due to surprisingly limited Google Calendar support.

Ranking:
Amazon (3 points),
Google (1 point),
Apple (0 points)

Reminders, To-Do Lists, and Timers — Apple's Reminders is an endearingly minimalist app, and now you can add items to it using your HomePod.

As with messages, you must first turn on the HomePod Personal Requests feature.

Once that's done, verbally creating reminders or to-dos on the HomePod is straightforward, and much the same as with Siri on the iPhone. You can add reminders to lists and check off completed items, ask to be reminded when arriving at or departing locales you specify, ask to be reminded at a future point in time, and create recurring reminders.

The HomePod also lets you set alarms and timers, but they do not appear to sync in any way with the Clock app on the iPhone.

What about the competition? Amazon's Echo devices do reminders in much the same way the HomePod does. Alexa-initiated reminders can include time elements. Recurring reminders are available, too. Location reminders are not supported. You can set alarms, make shopping lists, and create to-do items.

The Echo supports multiple, overlapping timers, whereas Siri can only do one timer at a time.

You can manage your reminders using the Alexa app on your iPhone or iPad, too. Amazon lumps this capability together on the app with alarms and timers. Elsewhere in the app is a place to manage shopping lists and to-do items.

In addition, Amazon has support for third-party list apps such as Any.do, AnyList, Cozi Lists, Picnic, and Todoist. Users can choose to manage their Alexa lists in any of those apps by default.

Google Home devices handle reminders similarly. For instance, you can create a recurring time-based reminder, ask to review all your reminders, and even delete reminders individually or en masse. Location-based reminders are not supported.

To get reminders on an iPhone (and even the iPad now), download the Google Assistant app, and turn on notifications. Google stores reminders created with Google Assistant in Google Calendar.

Like the Alexa app, the Google Home app includes a separate shopping-list feature. It also can be set up to support the third-party Out of Milk service.

Google Home, like the Echo line, supports multiple and overlapping timers.

Apple appears to have the most full-featured reminders support — including location-based reminders, which its competitors lack for now. Also, its simple Reminders app is nicer than the cluttered Alexa app, which has to handle a lot of other duties and can be daunting to use (cough — iTunes — cough).

But Amazon, in addition to its default list-making features, has good support for third-party lists apps. In addition, for those willing to tinker a bit, the IFTTT (If This, Then That) automation service can connect Alexa or Google reminders to Apple reminders.

Ranking: Apple (3 points), Amazon (3 points), Google (2 points)

Create a Note — Just as the HomePod works with the Messages app for messaging and the Reminders app for reminders and to-dos, it can add notes to Apple's Notes app, though this tends to be frustrating to pull off using Siri on the iPhone.

As with messages and reminders, you must first turn on Personal Requests.

From then on, you can create a note with a title, an untitled note (which makes the first bit of the note text into the title), or add to a previously created, titled note.

As with messaging and reminders, the HomePod supports third-party apps — or, at least, one app in the category, Evernote. Linking my longtime Evernote account to Siri was painless, for the most part. So was creating notes in Evernote using Siri commands.

What about the competition? Neither Amazon nor Google has given their voice assistants decent notes support, but there are workarounds.

Scrounge through the vast library of Alexa skills, and you're bound to find something useful, such as the EverPad skill for adding a note to Evernote via Alexa. Likewise, the IFTTT automation service offers applets for note-related actions, like the Evernote action to create a note by telling it to Google Assistant.

But the lack of native Amazon and Google support is a disappointment. I'd like to see Google Home support for Google's terrific Keep notes app, for instance.

Ranking:
Apple (3 points),
Amazon (1 point),
Google (1 point)

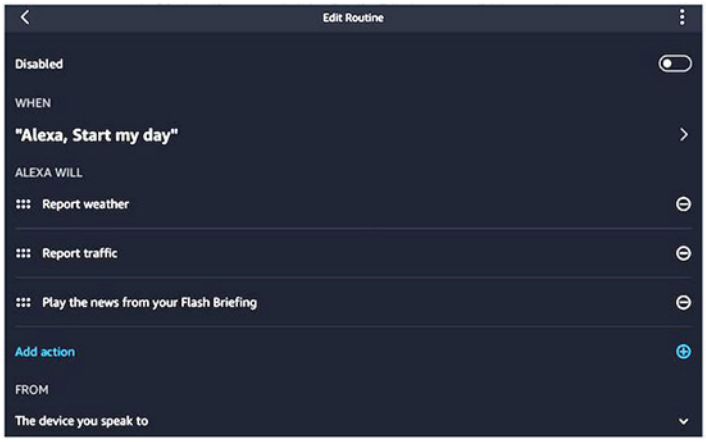
Tell Me About My Day — A smart speaker really shines if it can take a variety of information nuggets — news reports, weather forecasts, traffic updates, upcoming calendar events, and so on — and consolidate them into a personal report that can be invoked with one spoken command.

The HomePod can kinda sorta do this via the previously mentioned collection of short podcasts. But setting that up takes time and effort and yields results that are often unpredictable. Amazon and Google are far ahead of Apple here.

Amazon's Flash Briefings can also include a weather forecast. Amazon helpfully includes a Today's Forecast item for this purpose.

Beyond that, there are myriad Flash Briefing add-ons. They can include many things beyond news and weather, such as the word of the day, the riddle of the day, "Comedy in a Flash," and "Daily Devotions for Women."

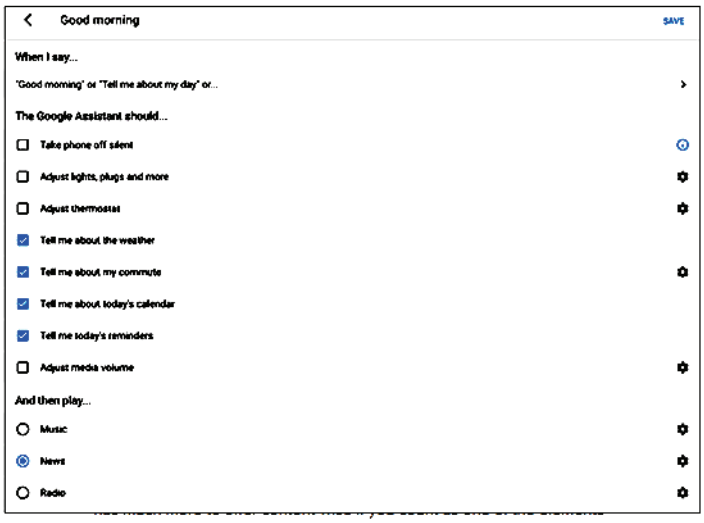
In addition to the Flash Briefing, Echo devices have an "Alexa, start my day" feature (Amazon calls this a "routine") that can consolidate several elements — including traffic and weather along with the Flash Briefing — into one combined offering.



Similarly, Google provides a Good Morning feature — what it also calls a "routine" — that is richly complex and customizable. Via a series of checkboxes in the Google Home app, users can configure the Google Assistant to offer information about the weather, calendar events, upcoming commutes, and so on.

A Google Home routine can also, optionally, play the news, the user's choice of music, a radio live stream, a podcast, or an audiobook.

All of the above can then spew from the Google speaker with a single request to "tell me about my day" (or "good morning" or "I'm up").



It's a close call here. Amazon and Google excel with respective about-my-day offerings. Amazon's variation is structurally a bit more limited but has much more to offer content-wise if you count as one of the elements the Flash Briefing, with its potentially vast amount of information.

Ranking:
Amazon (3 points),
Google (3 points),
Apple (1 point)

Picking an Overall Champ — So how do these three companies' smart speaker lines compare in the end?

Let's tally up the results:

Amazon is the overall winner, with 23 points. That's not too surprising, given that Amazon was first out of the gate with a smart speaker and thus has the most experience in the field. Amazon also sells a wide selection of Echo devices, giving it more capabilities than Google and Apple.

Google comes in second, with 18 points. Again, that makes sense, given its head start on Apple. As with Amazon, the original Google Home has now been joined by siblings that offer different price points and audio capabilities.

Apple comes in third, with 15 points. However, that's deceptive, since the HomePod struck out completely in two categories — audiobooks and calendars — where Apple should be able to add functionality. Adding multiple user support, which was the HomePod's other goose egg, would likely be harder.

Siri understands quite a few calendar-related commands in iOS and macOS, for instance, so why not on the HomePod? And why no audiobook support? If Apple were to bring those features in and improve the areas where the HomePod scored only 1 point, like voice calling, it would be right in the thick of things. That's especially true because, in four of the categories where it does compete, the HomePod scored 3 points.

Although smart speakers have been out for a while now, the race is in many ways still getting started. All the participants have distinct strengths and weaknesses at the moment.

In other words, even though the HomePod was late to market and is trailing overall, it has a number of bright spots, and Apple has clear marching orders regarding what to add and improve. By the end of 2018, with appropriate changes and the promised stereo and multi-room audio features, Apple could catapult the HomePod to the top of the heap.

That said, this is a race, and Amazon and Google aren't sitting still. So Apple will need to do more than just catch up in the existing categories. Time to rev up that innovation engine, Apple!

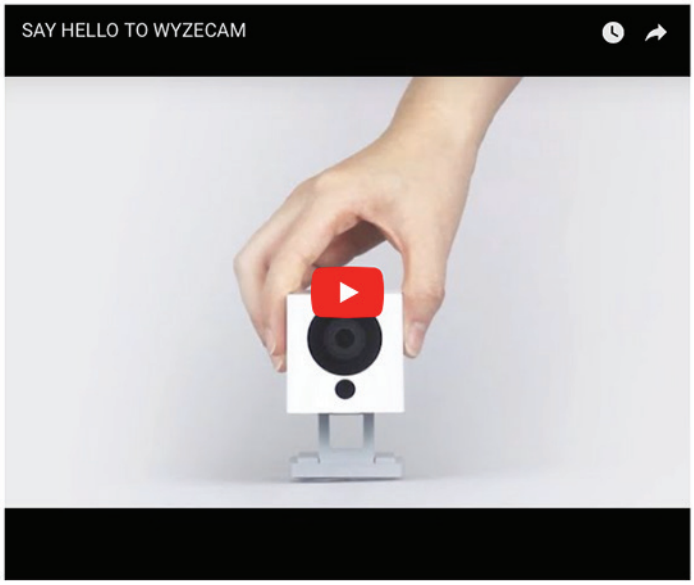
by Josh Centers

$20 WyzeCam Security Camera Is Almost Too Good to Be True

When our previous dog mysteriously went missing, I decided that we had to get some security cameras for the house. I wanted something that wouldn't require complex wiring, and given my role at TidBITS as "the HomeKit guy," I ideally wanted something that would integrate with Apple's Home app.

I first looked at the options Julio Ojeda-Zapata identified in his "A Prairie HomeKit Companion: HomeKit Security Provides Peace of Mind" (11 September 2017), but I found those options unsatisfactory. The main problem was that Wi-Fi-enabled cameras are expensive. You're looking at about $150 per camera, and not many support HomeKit yet.

I didn't know what to do until I saw a recommendation for the WyzeCam, a boxy little 1080p Wi-Fi video camera with limited free cloud storage, night vision, and a speaker and microphone for two-way communication — check out its video (which was not captured on a WyzeCam, alas). Those are all standard features for connected security cameras, but what seemed too good to be true was its price: $19.99. Add in $5.99 for shipping, so it's really a bit closer to $30, but that's still a fraction of the price of the competition.



https://youtu.be/kRytpc3q4Lw

Unfortunately, the WyzeCam doesn't support HomeKit, but for the cost savings, I'm willing to put up with that. I wouldn't want a bunch of home automation devices that ignore HomeKit because having to interact with each individually would be a nightmare, but it's acceptable for one or two. That said, now that Apple lets manufacturers enable HomeKit via a simple software update, I hope Wyze Labs adds support.

Other than a lack of HomeKit support, what's the catch? A $20 video camera must be a piece of junk, right? No, the WyzeCam's hardware is solidly built and attractive. There's no creaking nor rough edges — fit and finish are fantastic. And mine (for $20, I bought a couple) have suffered a number of drops from several feet onto hard surfaces with no ill effects.

The WyzeCam is a little cube with a pull-out base stand that can rotate on three axes, so it's highly flexible in how you position it. The base is magnetic, so it will attach to any surface with sufficient iron content. It also includes an adhesive metal plate you can stick anywhere you please. The included AC power adapter connects to the camera via a Micro-USB port, and the cable itself is detachable, so if

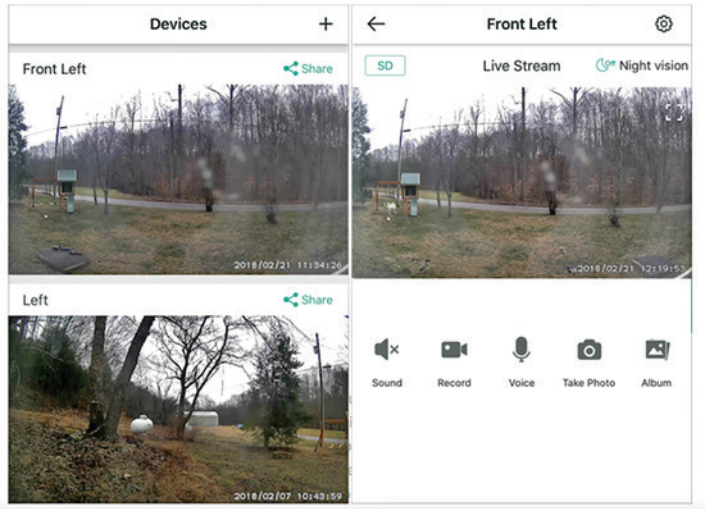
you need a shorter or longer power cable, you can swap it for something that works better.

There must still be a catch. The software — in the form of apps for iOS and Android — has to be lousy, right? Nope. The iOS app could be better, but it's far from bad.

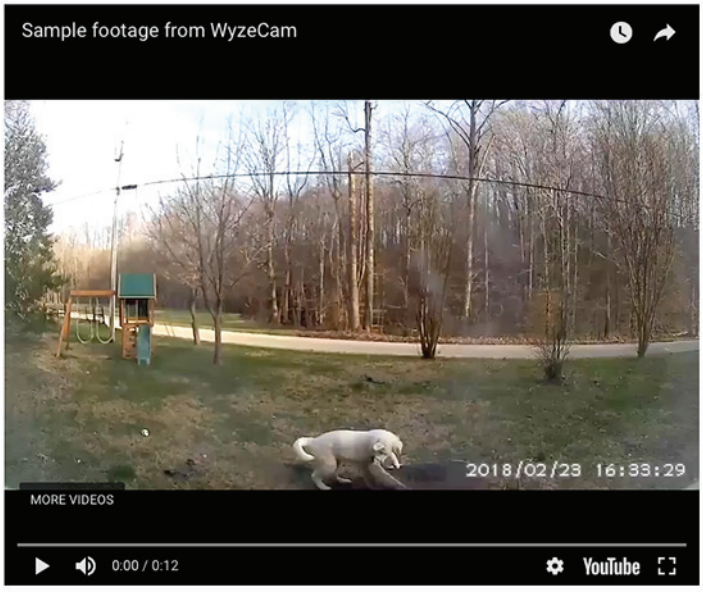
The software often wants you to log in to your WyzeCam account when you first open the app, which is a little annoying. But since it supports Touch ID and Face ID authentication, the login process is quick and painless.

The first screen shows you a list of your cameras, with a photographic preview of each. Tap a picture to see a live feed of that camera. Unfortunately, the app updates the previews only when you view the camera feed, making them less helpful than they would be if they updated as soon as you opened the app. As it is, they're useful only for helping you remember where each camera is placed.

In the iPhone screenshots below, you can see the preview on the left and the live feed on the right. As you can see, my dog has again dragged his bed into the yard because he enjoys soaking in the rain. If you're wondering why the lens looks like it has something on it, that's because it's being reflected by a window directly in front of it. I explain why below.



For $20, the camera feed must be blurry or blocky, right? No. The WyzeCam captures video in 1080p high definition with a 110-degree field of view. That said — and this does appear to be the catch — the WyzeCam captures only 10 frames per second, so its video isn't terribly smooth. But the WyzeCam makes up for that by also recording video in the dark at up to 29.6 feet (9 meters), thanks to four built-in infrared LEDs.



https://youtu.be/yWnNLRms0xo

While viewing a live video stream on your iPhone, you can manually record videos and take still photos, which are stored on your iPhone's camera roll. You don't have to be home to view your camera feeds or record images, either. I often check my cameras when I'm out and about.

You can enable motion detection and the WyzeCam will automatically capture 12 seconds of video when it senses motion in its field of view. It then stores that video in the cloud for up to 14 days for no charge and can notify you afterward. You can download these videos to Photos in your iPhone if you want to save them. The bad news is that the WyzeCam will record such video only once every 5 minutes at the most. I'd happily pay a reasonable fee for more frequent recording of detected motion — that seems like an obvious business opportunity for Wyze Labs.

The WyzeCam can record continuously if you insert a microSD card. Unfortunately, it supports cards only up to 32 GB, which can either record about two days of HD video or a week of SD video. And, of course, you'll have to extract the video from the microSD card in order to view it.

The WyzeCam's built-in microphone and speaker allow for some interesting features. It can alert you when it hears sounds, but more interestingly, it can listen for smoke and carbon monoxide alarms and notify you when it hears one go off in your house. You can schedule these alarms so you receive them only at certain times of day, like when you're at work. While viewing a live stream, there's also a voice button that you can hold down and speak into, which is then broadcast from the WyzeCam. I suppose you could use that to talk to a loved one or scare a burglar. In any case, it's a neat feature.

You're probably curious about the WyzeCam's security. In its FAQ, Wyze Labs says:

We take our customers' data safety very seriously. The communication between your mobile device, the WyzeCam, and the AWS Cloud Server are made via https (Transport Layer Security (TLS)). We used symmetric and asymmetric encryption, hashing and other ways to make sure users' information cannot be stolen. Each camera has its own secret key and certificate so that we can validate its identity during handshake. The contents are encrypted via AES 128-bit encryption to protect the data. Even if a hacker intercepts the data package, the data cannot be decrypted.

More importantly, the Wirecutter had Bill McKinley, executive director of Information Security at the New York Times test the WyzeCam along with other Wi-Fi security cameras, and it received his approval.

As for privacy, Wyze Labs has a solid privacy policy, but be aware that in most places in the world, the company is required by law to cooperate with law enforcement. In other words, your monitoring devices can and will be used against you. If you're worried about that, you're better off just not having any.

The biggest drawback of the WyzeCam is that you won't want to install it outdoors because it can't handle freezing temperatures or getting wet. You could put it into a PVC enclosure, but night vision would be blocked, and you'd still have to figure out how to run power to it.

I work around that by placing it on the top rail of my windows, pointed outside. Unfortunately, that renders its night vision useless, since the infrared light is reflected by the glass. So I turned night vision off and rely instead on standard motion-activated exterior lights.

In fact, my WyzeCams mostly serve to monitor my exterior trail cams, which last for months on a battery and take still pictures whenever motion is detected — day or night.

The trail cams are strapped to trees and the WyzeCams are pointed at the trees with the trail cams, so if someone messes with my trail cams, they'll be filmed by a WyzeCam, and even if they subsequently broke in and grabbed the WyzeCam, it would be too late because the video would be uploaded to the cloud. I have the WyzeCams' motion sensors on, but I turned off notifications so they can capture video without hassling me. If anything goes awry, I can check the footage.

If you're interested in a WyzeCam, I have good news. You can now pre-order the second-generation model, which provides motion tagging (which puts a green box around moving objects), a better camera sensor, improved audio, and a less shiny matte finish. The bad news is that you may be waiting a while to get one — it's backordered by several weeks.

Alas, we never found out what happened to our dog, but we got a new one, a Great Pyrenees who you can watch playing with his bed in the video above — he also made a cameo in "Rescue Blurry Photos with Live Photos in iOS 11" (7 February 2018).

Software Review

Apple Updates

macOS High Sierra 10.13.3 Supplemental Update iMac Pro

Mar 1, 2018 – 591.9 MB

System Requirements
- macOS 10.13.3
- iMac Pro

The macOS High Sierra 10.13.3 Supplemental Update fixes an issue where using certain character sequences could cause apps to crash. This update is recommended for all users.

Security Update 2018-002 (El Capitan)

Mar 29, 2018 – 869.6 MB

System Requirements
- macOS 10.11

Security Update 2018-002 is recommended for all users and improves the security of macOS.

Security Update 2018-002 (Sierra)

Mar 29, 2018 – 779.6 MB

System Requirements
- macOS 10.12.6

Security Update 2018-002 is recommended for all users and improves the security of macOS.

macOS High Sierra 10.13.4 Update

The macOS High Sierra 10.13.4 update improves the stability, performance, and security of your Mac, and is recommended for all users.

This update:

- Adds support for Business Chat conversations in Messages in the U.S.
- Adds support for external graphics processors (eGPUs)
- Fixes graphics corruption issues affecting certain apps on iMac Pro
- Allows jumping to the right-most open tab using Command+9 in Safari
- Enables sorting Safari bookmarks by name or URL by right clicking and choosing 'Sort By…'
- Fixes an issue that may prevent web link previews from appearing in Messages
- Helps protect privacy by only AutoFilling usernames and passwords after selecting them in a web form field in Safari
- Displays warnings in the Safari Smart Search Field when interacting with password or credit card forms on non-encrypted web pages
- Displays privacy icons and links to explain how your data will be used and protected when Apple features ask to use your personal information

macOS High Sierra 10.13.4 Combo Update

The macOS High Sierra 10.13.4 update improves the stability, performance, and security of your Mac, and is recommended for all users.

This update:

- Adds support for Business Chat conversations in Messages in the U.S.
- Adds support for external graphics processors (eGPUs)
- Fixes graphics corruption issues affecting certain apps on iMac Pro
- Allows jumping to the right-most open tab using Command+9 in Safari
- Enables sorting Safari bookmarks by name or URL by right clicking and choosing 'Sort By…'
- Fixes an issue that may prevent web link previews from appearing in Messages

• Helps protect privacy by only AutoFilling usernames and passwords after selecting them in a web form field in Safari

• Displays warnings in the Safari Smart Search Field when interacting with password or credit card forms on non-encrypted web pages

• Displays privacy icons and links to explain how your data will be used and protected when Apple features ask to use your personal information

Share Keystone MacCentral with other MACaholics

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State ___ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Day Phone _____

E-mail Address _____

Date _____ Is this ❍ Renewal or ❍ New?

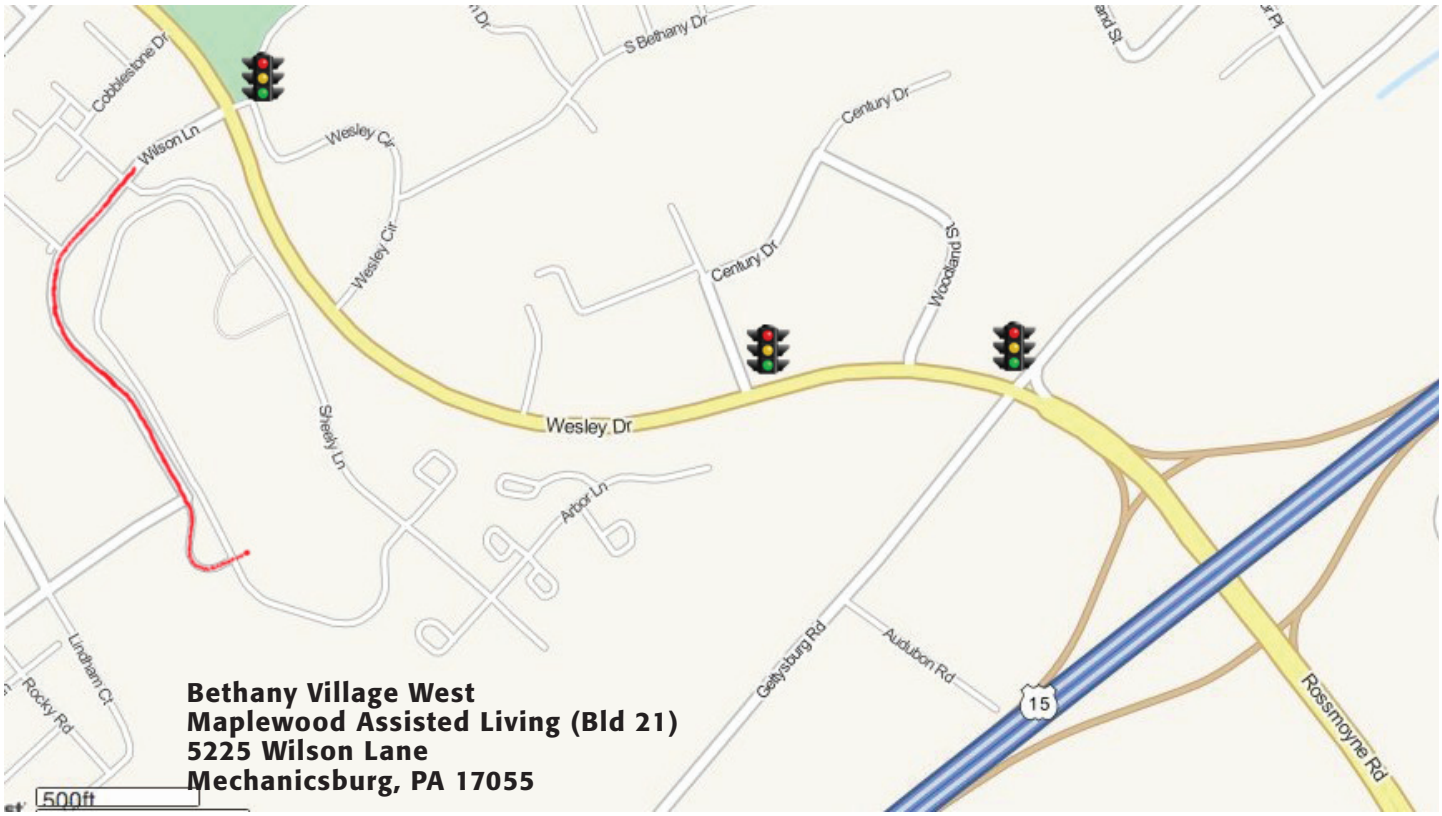
How did you hear about us? _____

Dues for one person are ❍ $20/yr. Family or Corporate dues are ❍ $30/yr.

To join Keystone MacCentral, mail this form with your membership dues (payable to Keystone MacCentral) to:

Keystone MacCentral
Membership Chair
310 Somerset Drive
Shiresmanstown, PA 17011

Keystone MacCentral meetings are held at 6:30 p.m. on the 3rd Tuesday of the month at Bethany Village Retirement Center, 5225 Wilson Lane, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055



Turn onto Wilson Lane from Wesley Drive. Follow Wilson Lane until you see Bld 21 straight ahead. There is parking to the right.

If the door to Bld 21 is locked, press the "Intercom" button. Tell them you are attending the Keystone MacCentral computer meeting.

We will be in the Education Training Room. In the lobby turn left, go to the end of the hall, and turn right. The Education Room is about half way down the hall, on the right.