Bits of Blue

| Vol. 31 No.5 | May, 2018 |

Upcoming Meetings – The May date has changed:

NEW DATE!! - May Meeting: Wednesday, May 2 6:30 PM
6:30-7:00 PM Windows SIG – Merle Nicholson
7:00 PM Presentation by Dave Palmer

"Tech in the News - The Good, the Bad & the Ugly"
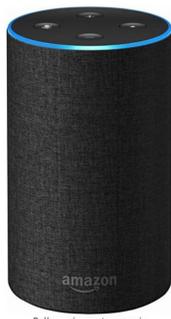"Privacy, Tracking, Crime, Facial Recognition, Etc."
by Dave Palmer

ON VACATION – June, July and August meetings - ON VACATION, resume in September

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Pg 5-7 FREE 2018 SPRING VIRTUAL TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE (VTC)

Roll over image to zoom in

Amazon Echo & Google Home Mini
By Merle Nicholson, secretary TPCUG

Four days ago we received a Google Home Mini and have it installed just about three feet from our Amazon Echo. We're using both Mini and Echo even though they do largely do the same things. There are definite differences though and as we're learning each strengths and weaknesses, we're currently planning to leave them where they are and use them both. We'll see.

In case you're living in an off-the-grid cabin in Montana, both devices are voice-command connections to the internet and have a lot of built-in functions that serve as a personal assistant and access to vast amounts of information. You interact with them by voice, but they require an Android or IOS application for setup, and you can further interact through that app on your phone or tablet, even remotely. Everything you do on either the device or on the phone is recording a history that is a part of the app. Both products' capabilities are evolving and since the firmware is updated remotely, we are expecting them to last a long time.

We have plenty of experience with the Echo. Ours is three years old this month. We pre-ordered it in January, 2015 and it was delivered in May. It is used every day. It's located in our media area above the TV on a shelf. If you look it up on Amazon, there's a later - second generation version now at $100. By the time it was delivered to us the price was $200, and we got a pre-order discount at $105. This model is tall and has an excellent speaker system worthy of listening to good music.

For the Google Home device, we opted for the mini at $50. It's hockey puck size, attractive and unobtrusive. The speaker is very good for voice and is pretty much worthless for music. There are three models; Mini at $50, Home for $130 and Max for $400. They are available in a variety of stores or directly from Google - everywhere but Amazon.

Both products have an app for Android and IOS. My experience is completely about Android. I'm assuming IOS functions are identical, but I have zero experience with that. The Amazon Alexa app is specifically for Amazon, and there are required setups and for interconnecting devices that must be done within the app. Then the Alexa app can also be used just as if you're interacting with the Echo device either by voice or keyboard.

The Google Home app is more tightly integrated within an android phone or tablet. That's because the Home device and Google Assistant are one and the same. When you speak to the Home device, you're interacting with Google Assistant and obviously, Google Search because Google has integrated the two for Android 6 and up. The Google Assistant integration is what triggered our purchase of the mini, along with the realization that it can control our Chromecast device on the TV as well. More about Chromecast further on. Our interest really peaked when Google Assistant recently became the search engine for Android Auto.

Music
We almost never play music even though the Echo has plenty available. Being an Amazon product, my Amazon personal music library includes all the music CD's I've ever bought from them going back many years, and of course they're all my personal choices. This is in addition to the huge Amazon Prime library. It's interesting to be able to choose music by voice command, but after the initial amazement, it's just too tedious. A better choice is to set up Amazon Music on a tablet, and command the Amazon Alexa app from there. Echo knows all about Amazon Prime Music Playlists. Now I would never have a playlist otherwise since I play albums, not songs. So to abbreviate the process of identifying an album, I can create a playlist that contains just one album. This works because I can just say "Alexa, playlist Rare Bird" and get a specific Steve Martin album, instead of some random

accidental pick. But it's just too tedious, and there's no way to track fifty playlist names. And by the way you would NEVER ask for anything random, because you'll probably get some loud four-letter rap song. That happened once to me in the car and I could have had an accident in scrambling to turn it off.

Google has "Google Play Music" and "Google Movies and TV", "YouTube", "YouTube Music" and "Youtube TV", all of which you can direct to a Chromecast device. I don't use any of these services except YouTube, which I use a lot on either my tablet or notebook. When on the tablet, I can direct any content to the TV using the Chromecast. Experimentally after discovering the Home Mini speaker is unsuitable for music, I directed a 70's song Valerie wanted to the Chromecast using voice command on the Home Mini. It was simple to do, and doing so turned on the TV and started playing through the stereo system speakers attached to the TV speaker output. By default, apparently it uses "Google Play Music" which we do not subscribe to, but nevertheless has an extensive library of free music.

Devices
We control our house thermostat a couple of times a day especially when we're baking in the kitchen - we lower it a couple of degrees then set it back to normal when we're away from the oven. The Echo is within voice range of the open kitchen downstairs. The house thermostat is on the second floor saving a trip up and down, although we do have specific Android apps for the thermostat, but this is really easy and fast. We have daytime and nighttime temperatures, and since we are night owls setting by voice is better for us than setting rigid schedules.

Our security system can be queried, armed and disarmed through Echo voice command, but although we test it, it's never been used. A more useful feature is querying the status of the garage door. It's a detached garage and we're very cautious about leaving it open accidently. The door could be opened and closed by Echo voice, passing the command onto the security system. It works, it's never been used, but comforting because of its remote capability. I'm sure that we could also send a voice panic command to the alarm company. That would be useful. I just thought of it.

Last, we have one controlled outlet (so far). I found one at Amazon for $13 that needs no hub for controlling by both Echo and Home. It works really well, it's fast, and we're delighted with it. Looking at these devices, many are in the $40-$50 range and need some kind of controller hub. I gave it a name "Living room light" and we can say "Alexa .. living room light off" or "OK Google living room light off"

On the Home Mini ,we have connected just the outlet. I did that just for the experience to see how difficult it is (about 1 minute). It isn't set up for security or thermostat, and there's no reason to.

Day to Day use
We use both Echo and Mini many times a day. Since we bake (mill flour, bake bread, cake, pies, scones) , cook and Green Egg Grill, we get a lot of use out of timers. "OK Google set timer for five and a half minutes" or "Alexa set timer for one hour", "Alexa time remaining?", "Alexa cancel timer", "Alexa Stop". They handle multiple timers - I don't know how many. This is an excellent, capable way to set cooking timers. We have abandoned use of our kitchen timers.

Weather reports - "Alexa .. is there rain nearby?", "Alexa what is tomorrow's forecast for Seattle?", "Alexa, seven day forecast", "Alexa is there rain today?"

Much other stuff. Just today - "How old was Chief Dan George?" (119 years this July), "When was Little Big Man made?", "what time is it in Barcelona?" - (Tennis match). "Hours difference in Barcelona?", "How many days since February second 2018?" (answer 83 days to mark in the log for changing the water filter).

We do lots of conversions like "convert 23.4 degrees centigrade".
"Distance Paducah, Kentucky to Kansas City" (ans - 419.8 miles, 6 hours and 23 minutes via I-70 . . trip planning .. remember paper maps?)

Differences Echo vs Home
We have had the Home Mini just for a few days, but a few things stood out from the beginning. The Mini is way faster. When you want to say something to Echo, you say "Alexa" .. hesitate .. look at the blue listening light and the listening sound then say what you want. It's fairly fast, but you can't just command it. You have to use the "wake" command, then say what you want. With Home Mini, you just say "OK Google living room light on". It gives the impression that it's always listening. I can see that it may put you off, but it's doing it the only way it can to accomplish the task really quickly.

We're both convinced that the response in looking things up on the internet is much more powerful on Home. It has really impressed us several times with its responsive speed. Valerie asked for some sports score the other day kind of vaguely and Home had a surprising fast answer. She immediately asked the same of Alexa, and got a "Sorry I don't know the answer to that one." Sports scores aren't something we're interested in, except rarely for major tennis tournaments. The Echo has never satisfied us in any case, but today the Home came up with a detail score at the Barcelona match quite by accident when we were trying to find the home country of a player. (Tunisia). We have the impression that Echo knows American football scores really well though.

Valerie and I set up our Android Google Home apps on our respective phones and linked them to the Home Mini. The app wants to do a voice recognition process and link it to our respective Google mail accounts, which also links to Google Calendar and Contacts. It's easy to set up, just do what it says. Then I ask "OK Google who am I?" it says "You are Merle", and for Valerie it says "You are Valerie". So if I ask for my next calendar appointment it recognises my voice and uses the appropriate calendar.

I'm assuming I can send SMS and email by voice command and for the two of us use the correct address book and sending email account. I'll try that.

The Echo does have multiple accounts. I had to research for the instructions to set them up, and it did not seem trivial to me, and as far as I know you have to name the account to switch it to. I saw no indication that it recognizes the voice to decide who you are. We would leave it on my account in any case because we use Echo for information on shipments from Amazon which it does really well. Valerie and I use one Amazon account (mine).

You can make internet telephone calls from either device. I have not done that yet, but I'm especially intrigued by the Google setting where you set the caller ID that you want to appear on the callee's screen. It defaults I think to the number on the phone you set it up on. The Echo will make Echo to Echo calls, if that is of interest. Google has always had "Google Voice" available as an Internet-caller-to-POTS bridge, and I noticed when I looked at it that it knows my one Google Voice telephone number and offered that number to use for Home device internet calls. In my case it's attached to a FAX machine so perhaps it's not suitable.

Being an android user I'm delighted to have the same Google Assistant on my phone, car and living room voice commands.

We are very happy to have these in our home. They're unbelievably useful. At only $50 I'm looking at someday getting enough use to have one in every major room in the house. It could happen if it keeps evolving at the current pace.

FREE 2018 SPRING VIRTUAL TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE (VTC)
SATURDAY, MAY 5
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm ET / 12:00 – 3:00 CT
11:00 – 2:00 MT / 10:00 – 1:00 PT

Thank you for forwarding this message to your members.

Attend APCUG's May 5, 2018 Virtual Technology Conference (VTC) from your own home, invite some of your members to join you, or have a Technology Tailgate Party with your club members!

You only need to register once; you do not need an Eventbrite account to attend the conference. Before the VTC, you will receive an email with directions and links for attending both conference tracks.

You can attend using your computer or tablet with Zoom software. The sessions are 50 minutes in length and offer attendees the opportunity to ask questions via a chat window.

Make sure you have the latest version of Zoom for your device. "Zoom Client for Meetings - The web browser client will download automatically when you start or join your first Zoom meeting and is also available for manual download here."

https://zoom.us/download

When you attend the conference, please sign in with the user name and e-mail address you used to register for the VTC.

Register at Eventbrite

For detailed information about the presentations, including the presenters' bios click here.

If you would like further information or have questions, please send an email to virtualconferences@apcug.org

TRACK 1

1:00 PM ET

AI Assistants / Smart Homes
Joe Melfi, Mobile Road Warrior and Die-Hard Tech Enthusiast

Description TBD

2:00 PM ET

What's new in the Spring Windows 10 update
Jere Minich, Program Chair, Lake-Sumter Computer Society

Microsoft is readying the release of its semi-annual update to Windows 10. The upcoming update is expected to be called Spring Creators Update - Windows 10, version 1803. There are several new and useful features coming your way with Spring Creators Update. Here are the headlines, they will all be covered:
- **Timeline**
- **Nearby sharing**
- **Focus assist**
- **Password recovery for local accounts**
- **Choose your GPU (graphics processing)**
- **Windows Diagnostic Data Viewer**
- **Mute tabs in Edge**
- **Swift Pair**
- **Better privacy**
- **A better Microsoft Store**

3:00 PM ET

Teaching Computer Skills to Seniors
Ray Baxter, Payson Computer Meet-Up Club, APCUG Treasurer

As we know, Seniors are special; some are up-to-date with technology and some are still learning about it. Ray's presentation will give us tips on how to open the world of technology to seniors as well as enhance the skills of others.

TRACK 2

1:00 PM ET

Synchronizing Your PC, a Guide to…..
Bill James, VP, Computer Club of Oklahoma City; APCUG Advisor, Region 8

There are numerous ways to sync desktops, laptops, tablets and phones.
From the complex to relatively simple solutions, this presentation will cover sharing over a

network, local file sync programs, LANs, Cloud services and more.

2:00 PM ET

What's new with Ubuntu?
Orv Beach, Training Chair, Southern California Linux expo – SCALE

Named "Bionic Beaver," it is a Long-Term Support release with 5 years of support for both the desktop and server version. What's new?

- **Minimal install option**
- **Faster boot speed**
- **Easier live patching**
- **New Linux Kernel**
- **GNOME desktop environment**
- **New default apps**
- **New way to install apps**

3:00 PM ET

Write and Publish Your eBook on Amazon Kindle… for Free
Bill Neves, Member, Silvercom Computer and Technology Club

In this session you'll learn how to easily and quickly do the following:
- **Research your book**
- **Write your book**
- **Name your book**
- **Format your book**
- **Set up your Amazon Kindle account**
- **Upload your book**
- **Offer your book for sale, or free**
- **Rinse and Repeat**
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Francis Chao
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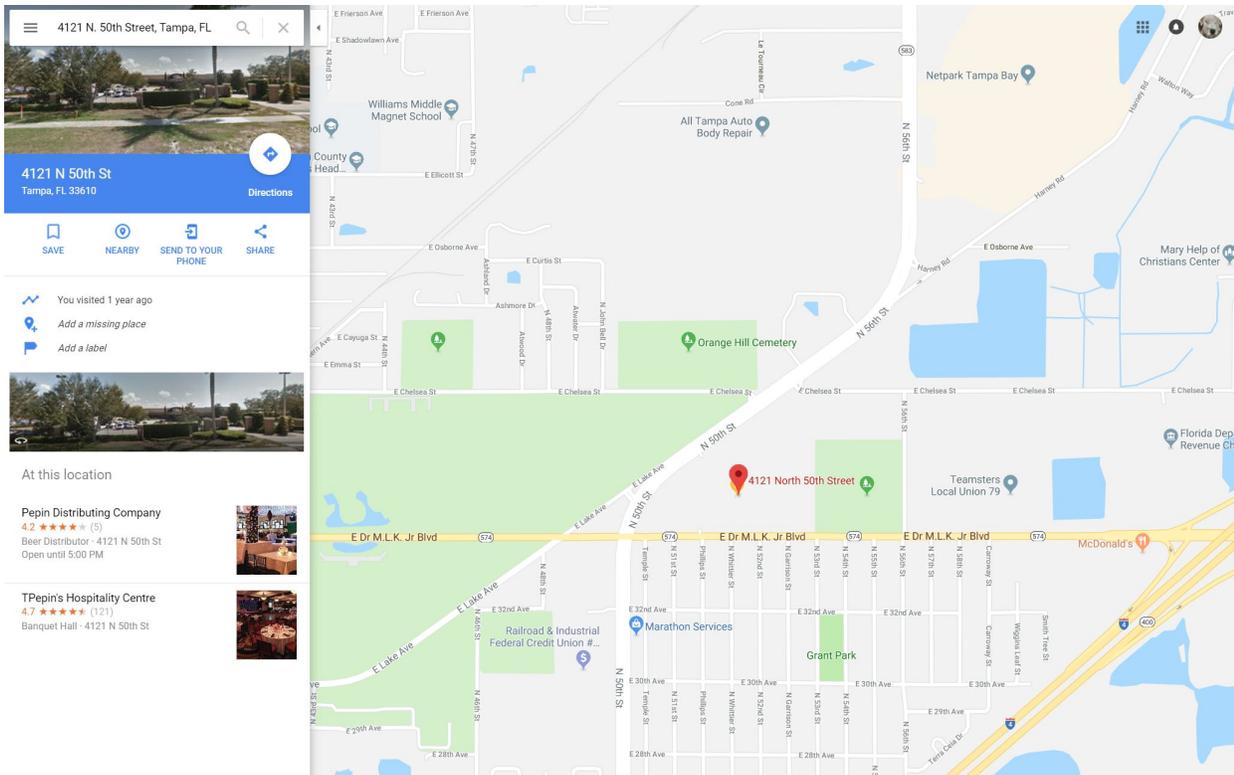
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