

**Starting up**

- What electronic gadgets (smartphone, music system, etc.) do you use regularly?
- What are the good points of using them? Are there any bad points?

**Vocabulary 1 – electronic gadgets**

Match the halves of the sentences.

1 A *gadget*

2 “*Smart speaker*”

3 A *wearable*

4 A *smartphone*

5 *Noise-cancellation technology*

- a) is an electronic device such as a watch, *frames for glasses*, or a *smart ring*.
- b) can be used to block outside sounds from *wireless ear buds* and other types of earphone.
- c) is a small *device* or tool.
- d) can also be called a *handset*.
- e) is another name for a *voice-controlled assistant* or *intelligent assistant*.

**Reading 1**

Which two statements are true, according to the article?

- Amazon is working closely with Apple and Sonos on some new gadgets.
- Amazon has announced improvements to its Alexa voice-controlled assistant.
- At the moment, price is an important part of gadget-makers’ competition.
- Apple has recently introduced several new gadgets to compete with Amazon.

## Amazon tries to get Alexa out of the house

Amazon has unveiled a number of low-priced gadgets designed to push its Alexa intelligent assistant into more <sup>1</sup>**corners** of daily life, including its first wireless ear buds and a high-quality “smart speaker” that could pose a significant challenge to rival products from Apple and Sonos.

The ecommerce company also conceded on Wednesday that it needed to do more to reduce privacy worries stirred by its increasingly <sup>2</sup>**pervasive** devices.

In an event at the company’s headquarters in Seattle, Dave Limp, head of devices and services, claimed Amazon had already reduced by 50 per cent the number of times that its Alexa devices mistakenly “wake up” and start listening when no one has called on them.

The company also said it would give users a chance to find out what its intelligent assistant has been listening to with a new command: “Alexa, tell me what you heard”. And customers will be able to request that audio recordings are deleted after three months.

The heightened focus on trust and privacy comes as Amazon is rushing to <sup>3</sup>**embed** its voice-controlled assistant into more parts of users’ lives, in an attempt to outrun Google’s Assistant and Apple’s Siri. Its latest batch of devices include a tungsten smart ring called Echo Loop and frames for prescription glasses called Echo Frame.

Along with the wireless Echo Buds and a deal with General Motors that will enable drivers to download the assistant to their cars, Wednesday’s <sup>4</sup>**blizzard** of new gadgets marked an attempt to push Alexa beyond Amazon’s current stronghold in the home, said Carolina Milanesi, an analyst at Creative Strategies.

The failure of the company’s Fire smartphone has left it with fewer ways to connect to users who are on the move. That poses a risk since people were likely to <sup>5</sup>**gravitate** over time to a single smart assistant service that they can access anywhere, said Geoff Blaber, an analyst at CCS Insight. He described the new “wearables” as experiments, allowing Amazon to learn from users about what might become popular next.

The latest additions to the <sup>6</sup>**armoury** of Alexa-powered devices — including the \$25 Echo Flex and \$30 Echo Glow — extend Amazon’s use of aggressive pricing, in the process undercutting rivals even in <sup>7</sup>**higher-end** categories of consumer technology.

“As Alexa goes into more and more devices, the prices are coming down — that’s pretty scary for competitors,” Mr Blaber said.

That was likely to include a serious challenge to Apple’s HomePod smart speaker, added Ms Milanesi. Amazon announced its first high-end smartspeaker, called Echo Studio, at a price of \$199. That is \$100 less than the HomePod, even after a \$50 price cut by Apple earlier this year. Meanwhile, shares in Sonos, which has embedded Alexa in some of its own speakers, fell nearly 3 per cent on the news.

In another sign of aggressive pricing, Amazon said the Echo Buds — which include noise-cancellation technology from Bose — would be priced at only \$129, or \$50 less than a similar Sony product.

The competition on price reflects a new front in the battle for digital consumers, as some of the big tech companies accept lower <sup>8</sup>**profit margins** on gadgets for the chance to sell more services.

Apple’s annual iPhone event earlier this month was notable mainly for the company’s willingness to shave \$50 off the price of some of its handsets as it looks to expand the market for new services, including a low-priced video streaming service.



### Reading 2

Choose the best answer to each question.

- 1 What product has Amazon launched for consumers to use outside of the house?
  - a) a smart speaker
  - b) an intelligent assistant
  - c) wireless ear buds
  
- 2 What privacy worry does the article mention in connection with smart speakers and other gadgets?
  - a) They know your location.
  - b) They can listen.
  - c) They often contain bank details.
  
- 3 What does Amazon hope to do with the Echo Loop and Echo Frame?
  - a) Encourage people to use Alexa.
  - b) Track customers' location.
  - c) Replace smartphone use.
  
- 4 How is Amazon competing with Echo Flex and Echo Glow?
  - a) low price
  - b) small size
  - c) privacy features
  
- 5 How have Amazon and Sonos worked together?
  - a) Alexa uses Sonos technology.
  - b) Sonos produces Amazon's speakers.
  - c) Some Sonos speakers include Alexa.
  
- 6 What area are electronic gadget-makers now competing in?
  - a) product support
  - b) services
  - c) Apps

### Vocabulary 2 – vocabulary in context

Choose the best meaning of the words in the article in bold.

- |   |                        |                        |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | a) areas               | b) problems            |
| 2 | a) rare                | b) existing everywhere |
| 3 | a) put secretly        | b) put deeply          |
| 4 | a) storm, large number | b) challenge           |
| 5 | a) move, be pulled     | b) leave               |
| 6 | a) customers           | b) range               |
| 7 | a) more expensive      | b) cheaper             |
| 8 | a) money spent         | b) money earned        |

**Grammar – some (of), any, all (of), most (of), no, none (of)**

Choose the correct words to complete the sentences.

- 1 Amazon has launched *some* / *any* new products to encourage consumers to use Alexa outside of the home.
- 2 We have had *none* / *no* problems with our Sonos system.
- 3 Do they need *some of* / *any* help?  
No, they don't.
- 4 Did you find any answers online?  
No, we didn't find *any* / *none*.
- 5 *Most* / *Most of* customers have some concerns about privacy.
- 6 In the current market, *some of* / *all* gadget makers have to compete on price.
- 7 Do you have any questions about the new system?  
Yes, we have *any* / *some*.
- 8 People are worried about privacy with *some of* / *most* the voice-controlled assistances.

**Further discussion**

Would you trust an intelligent assistant that sometimes wakes up and starts listening even when no one calls on it? Why or why not? What problems could this unwanted listening cause?

**Group work**

Work together to answer these questions.

- 1 If you don't already own a smart speaker or similar device, would you like to? Why or why not?
- 2 Analyst Geoff Blaber described Amazon's new wearables as experiments that will allow Amazon to learn about what might be popular next. What do you think they might learn? What do you think could be the next big thing?
- 3 As prices come down, more people can buy electronic gadgets. Is this good or bad? Why?

**ANSWER KEY****Starting up**

Students' own answers. Possible good points: They make it easy to get information and to communicate with people. They are convenient for doing many useful activities such as banking. Possible bad points: You can waste time playing games or going on social media. Some people worry about privacy.

**Vocabulary 1**

- |     |     |
|-----|-----|
| 1 c | 4 d |
| 2 e | 5 b |
| 3 a |     |

**Reading 1**

Amazon has announced improvements to its Alexa voice-controlled assistant. At the moment, price is an important part of gadget-makers' competition.

**Reading 2**

- |     |     |
|-----|-----|
| 1 c | 4 a |
| 2 b | 5 c |
| 3 a | 6 b |

**Vocabulary 2**

- |     |     |
|-----|-----|
| 1 a | 5 a |
| 2 b | 6 b |
| 3 b | 7 a |
| 4 a | 8 b |

**Grammar**

- |        |           |
|--------|-----------|
| 1 some | 5 Most    |
| 2 no   | 6 all     |
| 3 any  | 7 some    |
| 4 any  | 8 some of |

**Further discussion (possible answers)**

Students' own answers. If the device listens when you don't want it to, it could be used to spy on you. This could allow anyone to listen in on your private life.

**Group work (possible answers)**

- 1 Students' own answers
- 2 Students' own answers
- 3 Students' own answers. Possible answer: It's good for companies and in the short term for people, because they will enjoy the products. In the long term, however, gadgets use elements that will become more and more rare, and gadgets also create waste problems.

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