

THE APPLE BARREL

the **JOURNAL** of the **HOUSTON AREA APPLE USERS GROUP**
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Home Automation with HomeKit

featuring Josh Centers of TidBITS

Saturday, March 17

CenterPoint Energy Community Center

7001 Fifth Street; Bellaire, TX 77401

9 am - 1 pm

HomePod First Impressions: Let the (Apple) Music Play

by Adam C. Engst of TidBITS, page 2



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Annual membership is \$35 for regular members, and \$10 for

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by Phil Booth, 2018 HAAUG President

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March 2018

February's meeting was one of the best we have had. Bob LeVitus as usual brought in the crowd and Jonathon helped explain things in the Mac 101 session before. March will be just as good but more about that later.

For the last two years Bob has been talking about working smarter. He explained that he has received a diagnosis of ADHD, which cleared up some of the reasons for the way he worked. He explained that he would start the day with a goal of getting X number of pages finished but because he would go down the rabbit hole of YouTube and other distractions would take him until late in the evening to finish the task.

He has subscribed to a new system of working. He gets up and writes down the three most important things that he needs to accomplish that day. Then he works in twenty-five-minute chunks than takes a break. You do that until you get your self-assigned tasks finished. No going down the rabbit holes stay on your task.

Other ideas to speed your work; learn to touch type. That will improve your productivity if you can type without thinking about it. Self-confession: I am a sort-of touch typist. I hit the backspace key a few too many times when I am writing. I took typing in high school and have the fundamentals, but the backspace key and I are very good friends, just like the gallon of Whiteout I had when I was in college.

Learn the keyboard shortcuts. Cmd + S will save you a lot of aggravation. Save early and often. Cmd + C and Cmd + C will keep your hands on the keyboard and away from the mouse. I will admit that I am a mouse person but copy and paste are handled by using the key commands. The fewer times you handle the mouse the better.

The last thing Bob mentioned was using text expansions—short key sequences for larger blocks of text. Using the text expansion section in System Preferences or software like Text Expander, you create a key sequence like HA for your home address; typing that key sequence will put in your address.

There are Bob's tips: make a plan and stick to it, learn to touch type, and memorize the keyboard commands and think about using keyboard short cuts.

In March we will have Josh Centers, Managing Editor of TidBITS, as our main presenter. His topic will be home automation using HomeKit. Josh finished a "Take Control" eBook on Apple's HomeKit. I thought we would be doing this by FaceTime video but Josh will be with us live. If you have home automation questions this would be a good meeting to attend. March 17; get there early for the best parking.

The news has been quiet from Apple. There have been rumors about new iPhones, which usually are announced around this time. The iMac Pro was finally released and it seems to be getting good reviews, but it is expensive. Although dates have not been announced the Apple World Wide Developers Conference is the next big Apple event. That is in the June–July time period.

If you would like to see someone other than me in these pages our newsletter editor would be happy to receive an article from you. Think about contributing to the Apple Barrel. See you in March.

February 2018

It looks like our favorite fruit company will be around for a while. Apple announced its December quarter results. The company said that they made \$88.3 billion in revenue. The major driver was iPhone sales accounting for 70% of the revenue. Mac, iPad and Services make up 26% and 6% from other sources. If you want to dive deeper in to Apple financials, look at [Six Colors](#).

In other Apple news the HomePod smart speaker was finally released to generally good reviews. I hope that we can get one at a future meeting for a demo. All the reviews point out that the HomePod sounds great. Since it is an Apple product, the setup is easy.

Club and Meeting News

Home Automation with HomeKit

featuring Josh Centers of TidBITS

Saturday, March 17

CenterPoint Energy Community Center

7001 Fifth Street; Bellaire, TX 77401

9 am - 1 pm

CenterPoint Energy Community Center	
9:00 am	Mac 101 and Fundamentals, iOS Jonathan Magnus and Rick Roberts
9:30 am	
10:00 am	
10:30 am	
11:00 am	Home Automation with HomeKit Josh Centers
11:30 am	
12:00 pm	
12:30 pm	
1:00 pm	
1:30 pm	
2:00 pm	

Special Interest Groups

Mac 101 and Fundamentals with Jonathan Magnus: The SIG for basic to advanced Mac topics.

iOS with Rick Roberts: Discuss all things iPhone, iPad, iPod, iTunes, and iCloud.

Special Interest Group and Ad Hoc Meetings: Groups are welcome to use the casual spaces to meet on other topics. Scheduled SIGs take precedence. If you have an idea for a SIG, email the HAAUG SIG Coordinator at SIG_Coordinator@haaug.org!

HomePod First Impressions: Let the [Apple] Music Play by Adam C. Engst of TidBITS

My HomePod arrived on Friday, February 9th, and I wasted no time in extracting the surprisingly dense HomePod from Apple's elegant, almost artistic packaging, and setting it up on the dining room table. I call this photo "Still Life with HomePod."

I use the singular above because, although many HomePods will live in shared spaces throughout our houses, the iOS 11-like Quick Start process made it clear that it was essentially "my" HomePod. Tonya is, of course, welcome to use it, but it will take its cues for what music to play from my Apple Music collection, it will send texts from my Apple ID, and any reminders added via Siri will collect in my default Reminders list.

Obviously, there are a few minor

workarounds to this single-user limitation, such as creating a shared Reminders list (or using the Family Reminders list, if you're using family sharing) and explicitly directing new tasks to that list, and I'm sure we'll discover more as we go. But my first impression is that Apple has punted on the technically difficult question of connecting multiple accounts to the HomePod so Tonya could send texts, add things to her Reminders lists, and access her Apple Music playlists and personalization.

It's worth noting that the HomePod can play only music from Apple Music, purchased from the iTunes Store, or stored in iCloud Music Library via iTunes Match. Notably, it can't play tracks in your iTunes library via Home Sharing,

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We will soon be asking for members to volunteer to serve on the Board of Directors. Please consider putting your name up for a leadership position. For more information, talk to any board member at a meeting or send an email to president@haaug.org.

Meetup Group

The Houston Area Apple Users Group is now on Meetup.com! Click here to visit our group's Meetup page and join. We will of course continue to publish all meeting news on our website at haaug.org, to our Facebook group, and all other outlets as usual; this is simply an additional way to market our organization to the local community. If you are already a HAAUG member and join the Meetup group we will mark your dues as paid on the Meetup website, so you won't have to pay HAAUG dues twice!

HAAUG Website Updates

If you haven't visited the [HAAUG website](http://haaug.org) recently, stop by and check it out. Learn more about the organization, get up-to-the-minute news and updates, and browse the Apple Barrel archives, dating back to 1996!

Submit Your Content to Apple Barrel!

Have you tried a new Mac or iOS application? Found a neat accessory for your iPhone? Want to share a cool tip you've come across? Write about it, and send your column to editor@haaug.org. You can help make the Apple Barrel a better publication while providing valuable insight and opinion to your fellow HAAUG members.

HomePod (continued from page 2)

at least on its own. That said, it works fine as an AirPlay speaker, so anything you can play on your Mac, iPhone, or iPad, you can stream to the HomePod. It would be nice to see Apple adding Home Sharing support in the future, though the company is clearly focusing its energy on paid cloud services.

Audio Quality -- Enough whining — the HomePod is a speaker, so on to the music! I'll date myself here, since the first song Tonya and I played was "The Man's Too Strong," from the 1985 "Brothers in Arms," by Dire Straits. That album was one of the first recorded on a Sony 24-track digital tape machine, and one of the first directed at the then-new CD market. Dire Straits sounded great, far better than an iPhone on its own or an iPhone in a Mangobeat amplifier (see "Mangobeat Amplifies iPhone Volume Naturally and Sustainably," 9 December 2016 — sadly, it appears to be defunct).

Our house, which dates from 1984, was built with speaker wires in the walls and a pair of Realistic bookshelf speakers mounted high up in the kitchen. In the living room, we've attached a pair of decent Mission speakers from 1990 to a somewhat newer Yamaha receiver, and it gets music via an AirPort Express over AirPlay. The HomePod sounds better than the Realistic speakers, which can't compete on bass, but is pretty comparable to the much larger Mission speakers. Comparable, that is, except for the fact that the HomePod can't do stereo. To be fair, the beam-forming tweeter array can provide some spatial separation, so while one HomePod can't provide stereo, it doesn't sound quite like a single speaker.

The HomePod can fill a room with sound — it has plenty of power. In our house, where the first floor is largely open and roughly 24 by 48 feet (7 by 14 meters) with 8–10 foot (2.5–3m) ceilings, there's no problem hearing the HomePod at 75 percent volume anywhere downstairs. At full volume, I measured the HomePod at about 80 decibels at 6 feet (2m) away — definitely louder than was comfortable. We generally run it between 15 and 40 percent.

Happily, unlike our stereo system, which draws about 30 watts idle and 40 watts in use and thus makes us want to turn it on only when we're using it, the HomePod sips power, taking roughly 4 to 7 watts when playing, 2.5 to 3 watts when it is resting but has been used recently, and 0 watts, occasionally spiking to 1.5 watts or so, when it has been alone in a quiet room

for some time.

I won't pretend to be an audiophile, nor to be able to offer any objective advice about the HomePod's sound. If you look elsewhere, you'll find plenty of opinions — the musically involved Kirk McElhearn thinks the HomePod is overly bassy, perhaps due to its digital signal processing, which works well with some types of music, but less well with others. How the HomePod compares to any other speaker probably depends on room setup, connection/transmission technologies, and much more.

True audiophiles have probably invested significant time, money, and effort into building stereo systems that sound much better. They might see the HomePod much like a pro photographer would see a point-and-shoot camera — a distinct step down in quality, but perfect for informal use. Younger, more mobile people might appreciate the HomePod's quality because they've grown up with headphones and don't have ungainly stereo systems. And those who have been struggling along for years with somewhat unsatisfactory audio systems might see the HomePod as the opportunity to leap into the modern era, particularly once Apple updates the HomePod's software so two of them can work in stereo mode. That's due later this year, along with support for multi-room audio.

Speaker Smartness -- Although you can stream music to the HomePod from an iOS device or Mac via AirPlay, and via the new controls Apple recently added (see "New Ways to Control Your Apple TV in iOS 11.2.5 and iTunes 12.7.3," 2 February 2018), you're most likely to control it directly via Siri. "Hey Siri, play some soft jazz," and "Hey Siri, play the Yardbirds radio" work well, with Siri tapping Apple Music for a jazz playlist and pulling out tracks that are similar to the music of the Yardbirds.

However, I often found myself somewhat at sea because I seldom think, "I'd like to listen to songs that are musically similar to the Yardbirds." This may date me too, but I usually approach the idea of listening to music with an open mind, and only hit upon something to play after scanning a list of available albums or artists. Back in the day, that meant looking at a shelf of LPs or CDs, and now it's a matter of looking through my Apple Music library. With Siri on the HomePod, that's not possible, so you have to be specific, or bail entirely and say, "Hey Siri, play music I'll like" to get your personal station in Apple Music. You can work around

this by finding tracks on the iPhone or Mac and then sending the audio to the HomePod via the new controls.

You can adjust the volume by asking Siri to change the volume by percentages — "Hey Siri, set the volume to 20 percent." Other standard controls work via Siri too: pause, play, skip, and so on. You can even tell Siri to fast-forward or rewind some number of seconds. If you don't want to ask Siri for help, just tap the volume buttons on the top of the HomePod, or between them to stop playing.

Notably, the HomePod picks up your commands even if music was playing quite loud. We used a Google Home for a little while last year, and that was one of its problems — it couldn't pick out commands that well when it was itself the source of a lot of sound.

Although Siri does fine at controlling music and telling you about it — I like being able to say, "Hey Siri, what's playing?" when I don't know the name of a song I recognize — it's not nearly as good at general knowledge questions. Sure, it can give you a somewhat lame weather forecast and report on traffic conditions (we don't have anything worth calling traffic here in Ithaca), but those tasks are better accomplished in other ways. (Like with Dark Sky for forecasts and Google Maps for real-time traffic.)

Siri on the HomePod can do some level of trivia, like how far it is from the Earth to Mars, or who wrote "Catcher in the Rye," but organically, I've never had a real question that, when I posed it to the HomePod, it could answer satisfactorily. This was also true of the Google Home, when we had that, and various Amazon Echos I've interacted with in other people's houses. So either I'm an outlier, or this use case is akin to being told that personal computers are great for keeping your recipes — nominally true, but not something people did much.

I don't have any HomeKit devices, so I wasn't able to test the HomePod's capability to control them via Siri. I presume that works — the commands are quite simple, and there's no reason to assume it wouldn't. Honestly, being able to control HomeKit switches and the like via Siri on the HomePod increases our interest in installing such automation a bit, though we could, of course, have done the same stuff through Siri on the Apple Watch.

More successful were simple things like setting a timer ("Hey Siri, set a timer for 20 minutes.") and sending text messages ("Hey Siri, text Tonya 'Dinner will be ready in 15 minutes.'").

HomePod (continued from page 2)

Getting the HomePod to read incoming text messages was a bit clumsier, since it merely binged to indicate there was a response, and then I had to say, “Hey Siri, read my messages.”

Hey Siri Priorities -- Siri on the HomePod is always listening for the “Hey Siri” trigger, but you might have other Apple devices that are as well. I’m in the same room as the HomePod, typing on an iPad Pro, with my iPhone X next to me on the chair, and an Apple Watch Series 2 on my wrist. So which answers to “Hey Siri”?

First, note that, usually, only one responds per owner (by Apple ID). That said, my iPad Pro and the iPhone X always wake up and show that they’re listening, before realizing that another device has priority.

Which device gets priority is interesting. My iPhone X, when it’s unlocked, and the Apple Watch, when I’ve raised my wrist to look at it, share top priority, as the closest devices to me. In fact, if I give both attention at the same time, they’ll both respond to “Hey Siri,” and the HomePod will blithely continue playing music.

However, if neither has my attention, the HomePod takes priority next, which means that it responds most of the time that I’m not actively looking at the iPhone X or Apple Watch. The iPad Pro is the odd man out, getting priority only if I’m not within range of the HomePod and neither of the other two devices has attention. That’s true even if I’m actively typing on the iPad.

Of course, you can always force Siri to respond on a particular device by invoking it manually with a button press instead of “Hey Siri.” That approach becomes necessary for anyone who is not the primary HomePod user, since this priority scheme doesn’t work for them. If Tonya raises her wrist and says “Hey Siri” to her Apple Watch, both it and the HomePod respond. Not great.

HomePod and Apple TV -- You can send audio from your Apple TV to the HomePod. Set this on the Apple TV in Settings > Video and Audio > Audio Output, or, for a shortcut, press and hold the Play/Pause button on the Siri Remote while on the main Apple TV screen. Also, in many apps, you can switch to the HomePod while watching a show by swiping down to reveal audio controls.

This is mostly useful if your HomePod is in the same room as the Apple TV. In my initial testing, I experienced a few audio dropouts right after starting a new program, but it

settled down after a few seconds and the audio synced perfectly with the video. That perfect synchronization also happens if you play video on another device and send the audio to the HomePod via AirPlay, which isn’t entirely common among AirPlay receivers.

A few notes about the AppleTV integration:

When audio is playing through the HomePod, you can use “Hey Siri” to pause and play the Apple TV content, change volume, and even rewind and fast-forward X minutes. However, other things Siri on the Apple TV can do, like tell you who stars in a movie, still work only when you press and hold the Siri button on the Siri Remote.

When you’re not playing audio on the HomePod through the Apple TV, you can control the HomePod normally via “Hey Siri” again.

Activating the HomePod with “Hey Siri” disconnects the HomePod from the Apple TV, forcing you to reconnect via the Play/Pause button shortcut. There might be a way of using Siri on the Siri Remote to connect it, but my guesses at “Change audio output to HomePod” and “Change audio output to Dining Room” (the name of my HomePod) didn’t work.

HomePod as Speakerphone -- I almost forgot about the speakerphone capability of the HomePod — you can start a call on the iPhone and then tap the Audio button and select the HomePod to transfer the call to the HomePod. Honestly, this works brilliantly — the HomePod is unquestionably the best speakerphone I’ve ever used. Sound quality is fabulous, and it handles people moving around the room well.

You can transfer calls made via the Phone app and FaceTime Audio, but not other voice-over-IP apps like Skype, Google Hangouts, and Slack. It’s possible that Apple will provide an API to tap into the HomePod and updates to those apps will support it, which would be great.

Unfortunately, you can’t ask Siri on the HomePod to make calls, which seems a shame. Perhaps Apple will add this capability in the future — it doesn’t seem like it should be that hard for the HomePod to do Wi-Fi calling, as can the Mac and iPad, or even just control its paired iPhone to place the call.

The Competitive Landscape -- Right now, the HomePod occupies a somewhat uncomfortable space at \$349. Amazon now has six Echo products: the Echo Dot for \$39.99, the Echo for \$84.99, the Echo Plus for \$149.99, the small-screen Echo Spot for \$119.99, the

larger-screen Echo Show for \$179.99, and the camera-laden Echo Look for \$199.99. Over at Google, the Google Home Mini costs just \$39 right now, the mid-range Google Home is \$99, and the Google Home Max (probably the most comparable in terms of audio quality) is \$399.

Why would anyone buy a HomePod over one of the more mature and radically cheaper devices from Amazon or Google? Audio quality, perhaps, but the big one is complete integration with the Apple ecosystem. The Amazon and Google devices won’t work with Apple Music, just Spotify, so if you don’t have a Spotify account, the HomePod gets a lot more attractive right off. (Conversely, if you do use Spotify, the HomePod is a lot less interesting.) Having the HomePod appear as an audio output device for any iOS device or Apple TV is similarly a big deal.

Plus, if you want to use voice control to interact with your task lists, text messaging, and so on, you’ll need a HomePod. Support could be deeper — you can’t access calendars or contacts via the HomePod yet — but it’s a safe bet you’ll never be able to do that via competing devices that can’t access iCloud.

You might not be happy about this, but it’s entirely rational for Apple to force users into this choice because “Apple everywhere” is the path of least resistance for those with Macs, iPhones, and iPads. Apple has no incentive to help Spotify in any way, and that’s all that opening the HomePod up would do at this point. Even if Apple does decide to open the HomePod up to the wider world in the future, it’s more important for it to work well within the Apple ecosystem first.

Apple’s greatest resource, in many ways, is its installed base. The fact that the company is making radically more money than ever before in its Services category (including Apple Music) and the Other category (which includes accessories like the AirPods and Apple Watch) shows that Apple thinks its best bet going forward is to entice current users into spending more on Apple services and accessories that will enhance their overall experience. The HomePod fits right into this strategy.

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Membership Benefits

Monthly Meetings

This is where the excitement begins. On the third Saturday of each month, members of HAAUG meet for a day filled with activities, including presentations by major software and hardware vendors, special interest group (SIG) meetings, raffles, and much, much more. Swap Meets are held twice each year, in January and July.

Social Media & Internet Presence

The HAAUG web site at <http://www.haaug.org> is the place to go for up-to-date information on what we are doing. In addition, there is a [HAAUG group on Facebook](#), where people can go to interact with fellow HAAUG members on topics of interest related to Apple and its products.

Club Magazine

Club and industry news, meeting information and special member offers are published in our monthly newsletter – The Apple Barrel, which is available to members on the HAAUG website in Adobe PDF format.

Mentor Program

The HAAUG Mentor Program puts people with hardware, software, system or network problems in contact with volunteers who can provide solutions. Contact with the mentors can be made through the HAAUG Hotline, e-mail, or at the monthly meetings.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

People with common interests, including Macintosh and OS X basics, iOS, Internet, games, educational computing, databases, publishing, graphics, desktop video, programming and more gather for in-depth discussion, product demonstrations, tutorials and general knowledge sharing.

HAAUG Hotline

Call the HAAUG Hotline at 832-305-5999 for the latest meeting information and to leave voice mail for officers.

Lots of Fun & Friendships

HAAUG is a not-for-profit volunteer group founded in 1978, three years before there was an IBM PC. Approximately 200 members enjoy the benefits of HAAUG. We range from beginners to experts, but we all know the secret to making our computers more valuable: a HAAUG membership!

Learn more about the benefits of HAAUG membership at www.haaug.org.

Join by Mail

Please print out and complete the following form. Send a check or money order payable to HAAUG and mail it to the address shown below. Dues for regular members are \$35 per year. Student memberships are available for full-time students at a high school, community college or university for the rate of \$10 per year.

Your membership card will be mailed to you. You may pick up your starter kit at the next HAAUG meeting.

First: _____ Last: _____

Company: _____

Address: _____

City/State/ZIP: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

Type of Computer: _____

Membership:

New Membership (\$35.00) Renewal (\$35.00)

Two-Year Renewal (\$70.00) Student (\$10.00)

Requires Student ID

Check # _____ Member # (if renewing): _____

How did you hear about HAAUG?

Do you know someone who would be willing to join HAAUG? Y | N

Would you be willing to volunteer in HAAUG?

HAAUG Budget 2018

approved by general membership

1/20/18

Account #	Account	Type	Budget 2018	
			Month	Annual
4-0000	Income			
4-1000	Earned Membership Dues	Income	364.58	4,375.00
4-3000	Advertising Income	Income	0.00	0.00
4-5000	HAAUG Boutique Sales	Income	8.33	100.00
4-5090	Raffle Income	Income	0.00	0.00
4-5093	MacFest Event Income	Income	0.00	0.00
4-5097	Photo Contest Income	Income	0.00	0.00
4-6000	Vendor Table Fees	Income	3.75	45.00
4-7000	Miscellaneous Income	Income	2.50	30.00
4-7005	Auction Income	Income	0.00	0.00
4-7010	CD Sales income	Income	0.00	0.00
8-1000	Interest Income	Other Income	0.12	1.44
	Total Income		379.29	4,551.44
5-0000	Cost of Sales			
5-2000	HAAUG Boutique COGS	Cost of Sales	8.33	100.00
6-0000	Expenses			
6-0510	Goodwill	Expense	0.00	0.00
6-0520	Publicity	Expense	16.67	200.00
6-0550	Presenters Expenses	Expense	41.67	500.00
6-0590	Raffle Expenses	Expense	0.00	0.00
6-0593	MacFest Event Expenses	Expense	0.00	0.00
6-0804	Web Services Expense	Expense	10.77	129.24
6-0805	HAAUG FileMaker Server Expense	Expense	54.13	649.56
6-0806	Website Development	Expense	16.67	200.00
6-1200	Cash Over/Short	Expense	0.00	0.00
6-1400	Credit Card Fees (Square)	Expense	4.17	50.00
6-1500	Bank Charges [& bad debts]	Expense	30.00	360.00
6-2500	Hardware Acquisition	Expense	20.83	250.00
6-3010	Legal Fees	Expense	0.00	0.00
6-3500	Maintenance & Repairs	Expense	6.25	75.00
6-4520	General & Memb. Office Expenses	Expense	41.67	500.00
6-5300	Post Card/Ballot Printing & Postage	Expense	16.67	200.00
6-5500	Rent	Expense	229.17	2,750.00
6-5610	General Meeting Expense	Expense	41.67	500.00
6-6000	Software Acquisition	Expense	15.00	180.00
6-7300	Hotline Phone 832-302-5999	Expense	0.00	0.00
6-9000	Miscellaneous Expense	Expense	4.17	50.00
9-5200	Previous Year Sales Tax Payment	Expense	0.69	8.25
	Total Expenses		557.82	6,702.05
	Profit/Loss (Income minus Expenses)		(178.53)	(2,150.61)