

Published Nov 27, 2013

Published Wednesday November 27, 2013

For the music lovers on your list: Bluetooth speakers that can go places

By [Howard K. Marcus](#) / World-Herald staff writer



G-Project's G-Boom portable Bluetooth speaker is built to be carried, with a top grip and protective rubber base so it can be picked up and plunked down. Its internal rechargeable battery can play for up to six hours. Besides Bluetooth, it can be connected to external sources via a 3.5mm jack. The list price is \$99.

You've probably seen them in the store. Lots of them, in many shapes, sizes and colors.

Though Bluetooth speakers have been around for a while, the widespread availability of streamed music through Pandora, Spotify, iTunes, Sirius/XM and similar services has contributed to the wireless speakers' recent popularity, said Ryan M. Cameron, executive director of the Division of Information Technology at Creighton University.

When paired with a smartphone, tablet, laptop or mp3 player, Bluetooth speakers can produce sound quality that far exceeds what the paired device's tiny built-in speaker can offer.

Cameron said the speakers' "form factor," or size and shape, is also driving their popularity. Many models are small enough to carry in a large pocket, making them suitable for use on the go.

A decade ago, few manufacturers produced small, powerful speaker systems.

"But now, there's lots of manufacturers that are catering to a small form factor," he said.

The quality is better, too.

"They're more accurate. The speakers are replicating the sound in a much better way than they ever have before. And for whatever reason, the cost of that has become really approachable. Manufacturers can create a really fabulous, small device that you can use indoors or outdoors. It's got a long battery life, and the sound's going to be really good."

Cameron said Bluetooth speakers are available in small, mid-level and large sizes.

Travelers can use a small Bluetooth speaker while watching movies on a laptop, or to listen to music services through a smartphone or mp3 player.

Mid-level devices are not quite as portable.

"You may not travel with it a lot, but you may move it around within your home," he said.

The largest models are in the form of a tower speaker.

"You can connect to it via Bluetooth with multiple devices," Cameron said. "Televisions have now got

Bluetooth in them, so you could potentially stream from your TV right to your speaker system.

"For me, the most incredible thing about having a Bluetooth-enabled speaker system is the idea that it doesn't matter who you are. So if a friend of mine comes over to my house for a dinner party, he can hook his device up to it and share music selections that he likes. Or vice versa, if I go to his home."

Cameron offered some things to consider when shopping for Bluetooth speakers.

» Use. "If it's something you're going to take camping, or maybe out on a boat or something like that, you're going to want really long battery life." For a speaker that will be used only at home, battery life will probably be less important than sound quality.

- » Appearance. Don't judge a speaker by looks alone. "Sound is the most important thing. Eventually, you'll get tired of what it looks like, anyway."
- » Sound. "You want to make sure you get really balanced tone out of it."
- » Price. Look at ratings and consumer reviews. "There's really no easy way to say, 'This is the best in class because it's the most expensive.' That doesn't necessarily equate with being the best device, because there's lots of opportunities from manufacturers across the board."
- » Manufacturer. "The manufacturers use circuitry that they equalize a certain way, so it's like having your own flavor or your own formula to your product. Sony may sound more mid than bass, or Bose may have more bass than Jawbone or some of the other manufacturers. It's real important to go out there, listen to it and kind of see which manufacturer you like the most."

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