



## Tech Talk

### Google's Hardware Ambitions ©

by John McCarthy

Hi and a very warm welcome to Tech Talk. This week, Google officially stakes its claim as a hardware brand to be taken seriously by releasing the Pixel and Pixel XL smartphones, the Daydream View virtual-reality headset, the Google Home Wi-Fi speaker, a small rounded obelisk that will sit in people's homes working as a smartphone centre and an assistant for the whole family, enabling users to playback entertainment throughout their entire house, seamlessly manage everyday tasks and ask Google what they want to know. Finally the Chromecast Ultra, a 4K version of its highly popular streaming device, which as its name would imply enables it to stream 4K content from YouTube, Netflix, Vudu and coming shortly Google Play Movies.

Google will undoubtedly be hoping that their brand new all-singing-and-dancing Pixel will be a serious contender to the likes of the iPhone and Samsung's latest S series, but it's already come in for some criticism for releasing a model that looks like an Apple clone, albeit with a headphone jack. It will be available in three colours: 'very silver', 'quite black' and 'really blue' – a veiled attack on their Cupertino adversaries. It's made of metal and glass, and where it may well stand apart from all other smartphones is that Google will be incorporating its own Assistant in the very heart of the phone. It will answer all sorts of questions, such as those about nearby restaurants, upcoming films, your calendar, information from Wikipedia, and so on. 'Hardly innovative', I can hear you think, as other smartphones, of course, can already perform these menial tasks, but the Pixel will have access to all the information that Google stores and this may well give it the competitive edge over its rivals. There are one or two immediately useful innovations, such as quick battery charging, which means the phone can be charged up a substantial amount in a mere 15 minutes. The phone's camera is also the best ever made; according to initial reports from DxOMark, an acknowledged authority on phone cameras. 12.3 megapixels, with unlimited full-size photo and video storage on Google Photos – that should ensure you'll never run out of space.

The company explained that the Pixel will call on different parts of its technologies: the Assistant, photography tools, storage options and communication apps. Google also built the phone for Virtual Reality, soon releasing a new headset – the Daydream View – which will allow anyone with a brand new phone (for now only the Pixel) to experience the intoxicating delights of VR, although future Android devices are also expected to support the standard. It resembles a pair of binoculars, made out of cloth, with an

opening rear compartment into which the Pixel slides, and then its single elastic band can be strapped onto people's faces. Practically all those who have tested the device concur that it feels comfortable and it's supposedly considerably lighter than other models made by Oculus Rift, Sony and Samsung. The Daydream View comes with a remote control that cleverly tucks into the headset when you're not using it and allows you to control your phone wirelessly for navigating your way through menus, playing games and even walking around virtually in Google Street View.

Google is faced with two enormous challenges: building a world class phone that will hold its own against classy and well-established competitors, and of course breaking into the potentially hugely lucrative market of Virtual Reality. After all, walking around one's living room with a VR headset could be a migraine-inducing experience for many of us ... not to mention the inherent dangers of bumping into furniture or falling down a staircase while totally engrossed in one's favourite 3D cyber escapades. Google Daydream could be the next big hit in the virtual reality market simply because it's financially accessible. That's its big advantage over the main competition and it will be available in the coming weeks for the relatively modicum sum of approximately 70 Euros.