

>> Loudspeakers vs soundbars

QUALITY VS CONVENIENCE

Well, another year has come and gone and, as you'd expect, technology has moved forward in leaps and bounds.

We now have self-driving cars, videogame consoles that strap onto your head, solar roof tiles, six private space programs, hoverboards and, of course: we no longer use 3.5 mm headphone jacks...

I wrote this same article last year and raised some pretty decent points, even if I do say so myself, about quality versus convenience. Because that's the main argument around these two different setups, isn't it?

The more traditional 5.1 speaker and AV receiver combo offers the full quality surround sound experience, but can cost you quite a bit of money and is a bit of a pain to set up.

The soundbar option is relatively less expensive, takes up less space and is up and running in a matter of minutes. But, despite what the soundbar manufacturers say on the box about bouncing sound off walls and delaying it for the 'ultimate' surround experience, it's always been more of a pseudo surround experience that just doesn't compare to being physically surrounded by speakers.

Cut to 2016 and all those pretty decent points I raised last year are quickly becoming irrelevant because, well... soundbar technology has moved forward in leaps and bounds, too. A lot of soundbar manufacturers seem to have heard their critics and are coming up with some exciting and innovative solutions to the 'surround' concept.

The multi-room model of having an app that controls all connected devices is now being applied to the soundbar array. This is happening in two ways. Firstly, because all speakers in the multi-room setup can be linked to play the same thing, separate

devices that you may have in other rooms, can be moved around to act as surround speakers.

Independent volume control can then be used to set the levels of each and, presto ... your soundbar is now a 3.1 system that, instead of filling the room with virtual surround sound, now fills your room with actual, physical surround sound. Of course this is a quick fix and, once you're done watching TV, you'll have to schlep your other devices back to where they came from.

The second solution is far more elegant. Some soundbar arrays now come with additional wireless surround speakers included, which require

only a power cable to make them work. This is far less of a hassle than running speaker wire as discreetly as you can along skirting or through the ceiling. However, unless you have a power socket close by to where



these surround speakers are placed, this can look a bit messy.

In anticipation of this problem, some soundbar manufacturers have taken things a step further with surround speakers that live inside and are charged by the main unit. These then detach from the main unit and can be placed anywhere your heart desires.

Also, employing the multi-room app, they can be used as stand-alone speakers that can be used independently in any room of the house, and be reconnected to the main unit to charge.

I'd carry on but I'm sure that by the time I was done, some new innovation would have been launched to make this article at least semi-obsolete!

So there you have it. I can no longer make the arguments I previously did, because surround sound just got an upgrade, and a wireless upgrade at that. If you'd like to see what I've been talking about, go to YouTube and search for 'Best Soundbars 2016'.

Hopefully soon, the *AV Magazine* will get its hands on some of these innovative new products so that we can play around with them and give you a more accurate comparison between them and the more traditional setups.

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