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# Google's smart home ecosystem is a complete mess

Is it time to leave the Nest?



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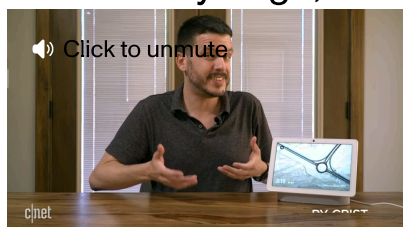
Sept. 14, 2019 5:00 a.m. PT

6 min read



Tyler Lizenby/CNET

A few days ago, I tried and failed to install Google's smart smoke detector --



at the CNET [Smart Home](#) . After nearly two hours on the desk, the [Nest App](#) and device still refused to connect. I discovered, a problem on the iOS version of the Nest App

won't allow a Nest Protect to be installed *after* a Nest Hub Max, Google's shiny new smart display. Eventually, following a suggestion from Google, I had to dig up an old Android-based Galaxy S6 to properly install the smoke detector.

If Google's *own* smart home products act like embarrassed step-siblings, many erstwhile Works with Nest gadgets seem like they won't even visit for the holidays anymore. And it's not their fault: It turns out Google is a terrible parent.

## How did we get here?

Along with the Amazon Echo, the Nest Learning Thermostat was among the first smart home products to gain widespread notoriety: The thermostat was a certified hit. Nest opened up its API to third-party developers, building Works with Nest -- a network of products tethered by Wi-Fi and Bluetooth signals. Then, in 2014, tech giant Google did what tech giants do and swooped in to purchase the up-and-coming home automation company for a tidy \$3.2 billion.



Tyler Lizenby/CNET

Google acquired another smart home product, the Dropcam Pro, and slowly but steadily expanded the Nest brand to include thermostats, smoke/CO detectors, indoor and outdoor cameras, a basic security system and a doorbell camera. More important than its expansion, though, was Nest's reliability and its continued support of hundreds of Works with Nest devices -- even devices owned by Google competitors, like the Amazon Echo.

After this year's Google I/O conference, things changed. First, Google announced a rebranding effort that merged Google and Nest's previously discrete product lines into a unified "Google Nest" umbrella. Google then announced plans to shut down Works with Nest in August, shifting toward a new model called Works with Google Assistant. The central rationale seemed reasonable enough: If smart home gadgets are triggering Nest devices and vice versa, such devices are necessarily sharing user data. Placing Google Assistant at the center of Nest's web of interoperability, then, could improve security. It also brings some unity to Google's previously bifurcated smart home marketing, with Nest on one side and Google Home and Google Assistant on the other.

The problem, of course, was that many people had invested five or more years building Works with Nest smart homes, and Google planned to topple them all in a few months' time. After a swift outcry by Nest users and developers, Google walked back its original statements, saying Nest integrations would continue to work after August, though its users wouldn't be able to create new WWN integrations. Meanwhile, customers could migrate to a Google account and continue to use their integrations.

Of course, it hasn't been so simple.

If you keep your Works with Nest account as is, you can no longer add new products to the setup, and Google has promised to stop updating the system. If you migrate to Works with Google Assistant, *all your Works with Nest integrations end*. Boom. There's no going back.

## 'The Nest x Yale Lock secures your Nest smart home



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That means some integrations end for good. Perhaps most symbolic among them is IFTTT, an app that lets you create your own smart home triggers (e.g. If I pull into my garage, set the thermostat to 70 degrees). For many, IFTTT represents the freedom to personalize your smart home setup, but such user freedom is in conflict with Google's goal: a smart home ruled by the Google Assistant.

While a few developers, such as Lix, have worked with Google to ensure you won't lose functionality by migrating to the new system, many are still playing catch-up. Even big hitters like August, the smart lock developer, have asked its lock owners to hold off on migrating until they receive specific invitations indicating that the company is ready to support the migration.

Philips Hue, like Lix, a leading developer of smart lights, sent me a two-sentence statement, which echoes the majority of official statements online: "We're working closely with Google to continue to deliver the best possible experience and new features to our customers. Existing users can keep using the Nest with Philips Hue integration as long as they don't migrate to a Google account."

Lutron, developer of Works with Nest light switches, worded its statement a little more directly: "Google is removing the ability for other smart home brands, including Lutron, to work directly with Nest devices. They are unifying their smart home experience under a single platform, Works with Google Assistant... If you use a Lutron App to work with or control Nest products and you wish to keep doing so, DO NOT CONVERT YOUR NEST ACCOUNT TO A GOOGLE ACCOUNT." (Emphasis theirs.)

But not every company is as well established as Lix, Philips and Lutron. Smaller developers, defunct companies and Google competitors, regardless of their Works with Nest status before, all seem to be at even more risk under the new Google Assistant regime. In fact, people have already begun reporting problems with their products.

In short, Google Nest is a mess right now. Hell, I felt it simply installing Google's own smoke detector. The move might give tech-savvy customers a headache, but for more casual users, the repercussions are still up for debate. Will a third-party smoke detector or a thermostat eventually lose functionality

after this update because Google decided to stop supporting it? More urgently, if a hearing-impaired user integrates smart lights with their Nest Protect CO detector, that integration might disappear when they migrate to a Google account, perhaps depending on as little as which smart bulbs were on sale when they happened to be shopping.

Google didn't respond when I reached out to ask precisely what the future of Works with Nest products looks like. And while their press releases have included the usual combination of conciliatory language and optimistic forecasts, individual companies seem nervous.

As this messy transition proceeds, Google released its Nest Hub Max. In and of itself, the Hub Max performs well enough. For people excited to see a Google Assistant-equipped, video chat-enabled smart display, the Nest Hub Max checks all the boxes.

But being a successful smart home "hub" requires more than strong standalone features. It requires more than Wi-Fi or Bluetooth connectivity. It even requires more than a replacement ecosystem like Works with Google Assistant. It requires *consistency*. Yet over the past few years, Google has demonstrated itself to be fickle: Among other killed products, the giant bought and in 2016 bricked a \$300 home automation hub with a loyal fanbase. Google's willingness to pull support for Works with Nest -- one of the most promising smart home ecosystems on the market, a system less than a decade old -- is only the most recent data point in a long-established and frustrating trend.

While Google might argue its new system will be good for users in the long run, the fact remains that customers spent money on a product, and Google is taking that product out of customers' hands and replacing it with something different. In effect, Google just unplugged many of its users' smart homes, all while asking them to kindly move into a new, Google Assistant-branded tenement. In the long run, Google assures us, things will get better. Its track record with killing products doesn't inspire confidence.

**Editor's Note:** This article originally referenced the use of a Galaxy Note 6, which as some commenters pointed out, doesn't exist. The text has been corrected (it was a Galaxy S6).

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