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Bragi's truly wireless earbuds are finally here, and they're actually good

The wireless earbuds of my dreams

By [Sean O'Kane](#) on January 7, 2016 12:56 pm [@sokane1](#)

Bragi's truly wireless earbuds are actually good — CES 2016

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It took more than a year, but German company Bragi is finally shipping those buzzy wireless earbuds to its Kickstarter backers. Better yet, the company has a handful of those final production versions here at CES, and I finally got to try them.

During my elevator ride up to Bragi's suite on the 29th floor of the Venetian, the question in my mind was: can a hot product live up to a year's worth of expectation, especially considering [the delays and mounting doubts?](#) One hour later, on the ride back down, I was measuring just how much the Dash exceeded those expectations.



Let's rewind real quick. Bragi first got attention in 2014 with a flashy idea on Kickstarter: truly wireless earbuds with a portable charging case, health tracking, a slick design, and a personal assistant with hints of *Her's* Samantha. Before anyone even questioned if it was too good to be true, some [16,000 backers pledged \\$3.4 million](#) in support of the Dash.

Bragi brought a working prototype to CES last year with plans to ship in April. I tried and liked it, but I wasn't bowled over — I was only allowed to use one earbud, and the touch controls were finicky or didn't work. I came away from CES optimistic about the possibilities of wireless earbuds, but it wasn't a surprise when that April ship date got pushed back.

April became November, which became "the holiday season." In the meantime, our own James Vincent got a second look at the Dash at IFA in [September of last year](#), but the earbuds were still in beta. Most of the features were in place, but performance was still buggy.

Some of Bragi's Kickstarter backers were upset about enduring that wait, and they had a right to be. But what became apparent in my demo of the Dash is that the company didn't waste that extra time. There are lots of smart, little touches. For instance, every time you swipe up on the right earbud to increase the volume, a very soft tone rings in real time, at increasingly higher pitches. That's the kind of feedback you need when you're using a

BRAGI DELAYED THE DASH
A NUMBER OF TIMES

Captured by FireShot Pro: 23 August 2023, 09:58:04
https://getfireshot.com

Exhibit 2016
IPR2023-00901
U.S. Patent 10,635,385

touch interface you literally can't see. (Another touch: a help section in the app dedicated to letting you chat with one of 25 support staffers, something made possible because Bragi now has over 100 employees.)

Back in the suite, Bragi CEO Nikolaj Hviid hands me a box; it's the final production version of the Bragi dash. He tells me 4,500 have already been shipped to backers, and that the rest will be on their way in the next month.

The box that those 4,500 backers have received is the same that will wind up on retail shelves (no official partners yet, but deals are in place) and in Amazon.com shopping carts, and is one of the best product packages I've ever seen. You actually learn more and more about the Dash and how to operate the earbuds as you thumb through the book-like box.



On the left, last year's prototype. On the right, the final production model.

Eventually you get to the important stuff: the Dash earbuds. At a glance, they look just like the ones from the Kickstarter. But a second look shows that they're much more refined. They're even much more polished than the ones we saw in September. They're thinner, lighter, the seams are harder to find, and they fit better in my ears.

THE DASH GOT BETTER IN THE LAST YEAR

The Bragi Dash earbuds are Bluetooth headphones, but that only describes the connection from the phone to the earbuds themselves. Bluetooth was originally how the earbuds talked to each other (and passed the music from the left one to the right one), but Bragi ditched Bluetooth for a newer technology called Near Field Magnetic Induction. It's something that's used in the hearing aid industry, and it's able to penetrate your head (and all the water inside it) much more reliably than Bluetooth can. This was a big problem [when I reviewed the Earin earbuds](#); they sync together over Bluetooth, but that connection often cut out, which made them really frustrating to use.

Switching from Bluetooth to NFMI was one of the reasons that Bragi had to be delayed. "I made a call at that point saying that, even though the performance was really good with Bluetooth, it's never going to be good enough," Hviid tells me. But it seems that it was worth the wait. I experienced none of those interruptions, and the sound quality was excellent.

Of course, Bragi wants the Dash to be much more than just a tool you use for listening to music. There's also fitness tracking, motion commands, and a few other software features. I didn't get to test out the fitness tracking, and I'm still skeptical of the value there — there are a lot of good reasons why we might be [misplacing our faith in devices like these](#) when it comes to tracking our health.

What I did test was some of the gestures. For example, if you receive a call while you're wearing the Dash, all you have to do is nod your head to accept or reject the call (up and down for accept, left and right to reject). It sounds goofy, and I definitely doubted its usefulness last year — especially because this particular demo didn't work well at CES 2015 — but Bragi has tuned the gesture recognition in a really careful way. I tried to reject a phone call with a nod that I thought was too subtle for the Dash to pick up, but it worked. If anything, I came away afraid I'd be wearing the Dash and quickly hang up on someone because of the involuntary reaction to the idea of speaking to them. (Oh, Terry's calling? Nope. Waitt!)

But the best feature by far is that the Dash can allow outside noise to pass through into the earbuds. Since the earbuds create a very good seal, and have noise cancelation as well, they present you with a heightened version of the same problem that plagues dumb headphones: when someone tries to talk to you, or you need to hear the world around you, you have to fumble to take them out of your ears. (This problem becomes an especially clumsy one when your earbuds are wireless.)

I THOUGHT I WANTED SIMPLE WIRELESS EARBUDS. I THINK I WAS WRONG

With the Dash, you just swipe on the left earbud and the ambient noise around you suddenly appears in your earbuds. Better yet, Bragi has done some especially tricky software work to make that ambient noise sound like it's coming from the corresponding direction. If someone is speaking to the right of you, it *sounds* like their voice is coming from that direction. You can do this while music is playing or not, and it's the kind of feature that you wind up wanting on any pair of headphones even after using it just one time.

Bragi still has a lot left to prove, but my first impression with the final version of the Dash was a strong one. And even though I thought I wanted a [simpler wireless earbud](#), I left the demo desperate to put the earbuds, the charging case, and all of the Dash's other features through their paces. My colleague James Vincent was right when he saw the last Dash beta version at IFA. The Bragi really is [the wireless earbud of my dreams](#). But not for long.

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