

CES 2019: Alexa vs. Google, foldable TVs and 5G to take center stage in Las Vegas

January 8 2019, by Jefferson Graham, Usa Today

Every year, the Consumer Electronics Show kicks off the new year with a smorgasbord of new gadgets that may—or may not—ever see the light of day, gee-whiz new prototypes that do, indeed, wow us, and lots of talk about the next big thing in tech that's right around the corner.

This year, the show floor chatter will be all about 5G broadband and artificial intelligence, and how they will change our lives as we know it. The faster 5G internet signals will provide the backbone needed for autonomous self-driving cars and [smart cities](#), for improved traffic flow and other services. AI will take the promise of the still burgeoning Smart Home, and using our voices to command Alexa and Google to turn on and off the lights and tell us the weather. These personal assistants will be "in virtually every product you see at CES," says Bret Kinsella, the editor of the Voicebot.ai website, which tracks the rise of voice computing.

CES, which kicks off unofficially Sunday, will have over 4,500 exhibitors showing thousands of products to an expected crowd of 180,000 or more people.

Some of the trends we expect to see in product form:

New form factors

South Korea-based LG is expected to roll out a foldable, 65-inch TV with a hefty sales price over \$10,000. Think it of as a portable movie

screen, but with high-definition resolution. The idea is not to crowd your living room with the big screen. When you're in the mood for entertainment, just unfold it. LG, Samsung and several other manufacturers are also expected to show off foldable phones, which can double the effective screen size. Instead of a 6.2-inch Galaxy phone, a foldable model gives you a 12.4-inch device that, when folded, fits in your pocket.

Tired of 4K TV? Well, here comes 8K

Because 4K is so yesterday, right? There still isn't much 4K programming available, but virtually all sets sold today have upgraded from standard high-definition to 4K Ultra High-Definition. Manufacturers are looking to the next trend to reinvigorate TV sales, which market researcher the NPD Group says are flat, with double the resolution of a current 4K set, at sky-high prices. A \$15,000 85-inch 8K set from Samsung is currently available. LG, Sony, Vizio, TCL and HiSense are also expected to have 8K models on display at CES for 2019 release. But don't worry, these products (with lower pricing) are not expected to go mass market until 2020. Perhaps by the time viewers can find 4K programming at their fingertips.

In-car entertainment

Speaking of viewing, Hollywood powerhouse Disney and auto manufacturer Audi have teamed up with ways to keep us busy in the future, when we're in the back seat of an autonomous car. The two will unveil the new concept Sunday.

Self-driving cars and motorcycles

Manufacturers love to show off autonomous vehicles at CES. But this year, BMW has something a little different. A riderless motorcycle. The

cycle was "developed as a research platform to gain insights about how to help drivers improve their maneuvering in the future," BMW says.

Voice commands everywhere

If 2018 CES was notable for such newcomers as voice-activated showers from Moen and an "Alexa, flush the toilet for me," command on a new Kohler commode that never got released, 2019 will see an even more heated battle from Amazon and Google to get their personal assistants everywhere, from toys to every conceivable kitchen product.

"Almost every device will have this capability," notes Gary Shapiro, the CEO of the Consumer Technology Association, which produces CES:

"Amazon and Google are in a land grab," says Jason Johnson, the founder of August Home, which makes a popular smart lock that works with Alexa, Google and Apple's Siri. "It's a race to get Alexa or the Google Assistant into every home. Because once you start with one, you're unlikely to switch."

This year, we saw Roku, which makes the most popular TV streaming player, add the Google Assistant, while its rival Amazon, which makes the Fire TV Stick, obviously works with Alexa. In the TV world, Amazon invaded the space of TV manufacturers with a branded set under the Toshiba and Best Buy Insignia house brands name, featuring Alexa commands to turn the set on and off and change the channel. These sets rank as Amazon's best sellers, but right behind are the TCL sets with built-in Roku and, thus, the Google Assistant. This means that if the consumer wanted to bark commands to the TV from another room, the Roku owner would need to buy a Google Home, and the Amazon TV viewer would buy an Echo speaker.

LG may have the best solution. It works with both Amazon and Google,

offering consumers the choice.

"Alexa or Google is like this year's VHS or Betamax of years ago," says Kinsella of Voicebot.ai.

Stephen Baker, an analyst with the NPD Group, has been going to CES for over 20 years and notes that many of the products we actually buy for our homes are rarely displayed there. "They show the stuff you won't be able to afford, the best tech these guys can deliver."

They do it for bragging and PR rights, he says, but also to show what's possible.

The big trend he sees for 2019 is how to sell bigger products in smaller frames.

Consumers want the larger products, he says, but have been uncomfortable with how they dwarf our living rooms.

So this year, look to TVs with fewer bezels and thinner frames, similar to how Apple made a larger iPhone with the X series models that actually looks smaller than the previous 8 Plus edition.

"When you thin them (products) out, people will look at it differently," Baker says.

Among the chatter on the show floor, top executives from wireless powerhouses Verizon and AT&T will give keynote speeches where they are expected to outline why 5G will change the world. Both have launched limited 5G service in select cities, as consumers await the release of mass-market phones that can access the faster 5G signals. The talk will continue to heat up in February in Barcelona for the Mobile World Congress show, where more manufacturers are expected to show

off new 5G phones.

But that's another show. For now, it's onto Vegas, baby.

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Citation: CES 2019: Alexa vs. Google, foldable TVs and 5G to take center stage in Las Vegas (2019, January 8) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2019-01-ces-alexa-google-foldable-tvs.html>

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