

What CES 2020 taught us about this year's phones: Cheaper foldables, 5G and more

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The phones of CES weren't many, but they were informative, hinting at important trends we'll see in 2020—including cheaper applications of 2019's most expensive features. Typically, the CES showing settles on

midrange devices, but this year also brought us some interesting concepts to chew over, and a realistic look at what we can look forward to.

This isn't unusual. Phone makers are far more likely to save their whiz-bang features and high-powered specs for Mobile World Congress, the world's largest mobile show, which takes place Feb. 24 to 27 in Barcelona.

Until then, soak up the hints of what's to come, including a concept for a peek-a-boo camera that disappears from view when you're not using it.

Cheaper foldable phones are coming

The Motorola Razr costs \$1,500. The Galaxy Fold is \$2,000. And the Huawei Mate X is \$2,400. Foldable phones are anything but cheap.

Foldable phones are an emerging category that shakes up an otherwise static world of phones by bending the display in half. The high cost of research and development and new manufacturing techniques make these early foldable designs at least double the cost of their 4G counterparts. The "privilege" of owning a cutting-edge device may also contribute to the price.

But the high price of these first foldables means that few people will actually be able to buy one. Lowering the price will also mean lowering the barrier to ownership, which foldable phones need if they're going to stick around.

At CES, TCL showed us a working prototype of a foldable phone that's designed to cost less than the Motorola Razr. It features a 7.2-inch display and three rear cameras and will support 5G.

5G phone prices are already dropping

5G phones aren't as expensive as foldables, but they still cost more per device than 4G handsets with the same specs. The same rule also applies to the faster 5G data technology—cheaper 5G options will get more people using these devices.

And for carriers, the faster data speeds could translate into more profits as customers use more data per person.

For phone buyers, it's just nice to have more affordable ways to get 5G speeds. Enter the TCL Pro 5G for under \$500, the CoolPad Legacy for \$400 and Verizon's plan to sell 20 5G phones in 2020, including some that cost less than \$600. Compared to the \$1,300 Galaxy Note 10 5G, that's a pretty good deal. Just expect trade-offs in the features department.

Cameras continue to be a design element

Camera tech has always been essential for phones, but even the look and placement of the lenses elicit strong opinions.

The Galaxy Note 10 Lite and Galaxy S10 Lite both feature square and rectangular black camera mounts respectively, mimicking the Google Pixel 4. Some industry watchers think that Samsung is taking the bold road to counter the iPhone 11, whose large, protruding cluster of rear lenses makes Apple's phone immediately identifiable.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the OnePlus Concept One phone uses an electrical current to either hide or reveal the phone's multiple cameras on its back. The concept is to make the phone look sleeker, especially at a time when camera lenses are proliferating.

Gaming phones continue to carve a niche

Phones aimed at gamers have made up a small but steady contingent of handsets. 5G data has a huge implication for gaming, promising far more immersive and sophisticated graphics through the kind of on-the-fly rendering that can be achieved through 5G's increased data delivery.

Processors, too, are getting into gaming, with the Snapdragon 765G, a midrange chipset that's specifically made for gaming phones. And more [phone makers](#) are set to embrace displays with 120Hz refresh rates for smoother animations.

The Black Shark 2 Pro has neither of the first two things, but it's still possibly the best gaming phone we've seen, complete with a case that makes it work a little like the Nintendo Switch. A helpful gaming mode also makes this handset specifically geared toward gaming, rather than a mainstream [phone](#) that's powerful enough to play long sessions of resource-heavy games.

CES may be over, but for phones, the year is just beginning.

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