

5 CES Trends to Watch

January 13 2021, by Mae Anderson



People look at a 145 inch Ultra Large UHD display in the LG booth at the CES tech show, on Jan. 8, 2020, in Las Vegas. CES, the annual gadget show that showcases the buzziest and brightest tech, looks different this year—less Vegas glitz, more internet efficiency. With no physical conference in Las Vegas due to the pandemic, 1,800 companies are instead taking to streaming video to show off new products and technology to 150,000 CES attendees across the globe. (AP Photo/John Locher, File)

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tech, looks different this year—less Vegas glitz, more internet efficiency. With no physical conference in Las Vegas due to the pandemic, 1,800 companies are instead taking to streaming video to show off new products and technology to 150,000 attendees across the globe.

Trends to watch reflect the tumultuous year that preceded it. These include COVID-related robots and gadgets, products that make it easier to work from home, more uses for 5G technology, AI infused in everything, and TVs that can bend or even become transparent.

COVID TECH

Technology to battle the coronavirus will be big on the virtual show floor this year. Several companies are showcasing disinfecting robots. LG is introducing an autonomous UV-C light robot designed to irradiate viruses on heavily touched surfaces. (Largely unmentioned is the fact that COVID is largely transmitted by airborne vapor droplets, not viral smears on surfaces.)

To that end, LG is promoting a wearable air purifier and a portable air purifier that you can use to purify air in a car or office. They both have fans and HEPA filters. A smaller company called AirPop debuted the Active+ Smart Mask, which monitors your breathing and the quality of the air around you.

Meanwhile several companies are offering "touchless" appliances and fixtures. Kohler and Toto are showcasing touchless sinks and toilets that automatically turn on and off or open and flush by waving your hand in front of a sensor or using a voice assistant.

FUTURE TV

Each year, big TV makers display the dazzling technology that could eventually come to your home TV set, though generally not soon. In addition to the yearly crop of ever-bigger, brighter and sharper TVs, LG Display will show off a "smart bed" that includes a 55-inch transparent TV that rises from the bed frame. Another version of the transparent TV is designed for restaurants, so customers could browse the menu and watch a chef prepare food behind it at the same time. LG has also announced a bendable version of a 48-inch display that can curve on demand—a feature designed for gamers.

5G REDUX

After years of telecom companies promising new superfast 5G wireless networks, 5G will actually be here in 2021. Verizon Chairman and CEO Hans Vestberg delivered the CES 2021 kickoff keynote all about 5G and what it can offer for telemedicine, distance learning, and other uses. He gave examples of projects Verizon has been working on, including virtual tours of Smithsonian exhibits, virtual reality science lessons for students, and drone deliveries by a UPS pilot program of medicine and other deliveries, all powered by Verizon's 5G network. On the last day of CES, Samsung will debut its new 5G enabled iteration of its Samsung Galaxy phone—an event that isn't affiliated with CES but still likely to draw buzz. In between, expect plenty of demos and panels about uses for 5G in phones and beyond, such as in cars and smart cities.

FUTURE OF WORK

Many of us have now had almost a year of experience adjusting our home office setup and are painfully aware what works and what doesn't. Companies will be touting devices and accessories to improve working from home and help make people more productive. For example, Dell is offering a video-conferencing friendly monitor that is easy to adjust and swivel to get the optimum angle for video calls, complete with a high

resolution webcam. A company called Shure is promoting a microphone for the home office designed to enhance speech audio quality for video conferencing. And Targus is offering a suite of products for remote or hybrid work: a UV-C LED light that sits on your desk to disinfect electronics, an antimicrobial backpack to carry around work tablets and laptops, a tablet cradle workstation and a universal phone dock.

SMARTER CARS

CES will be a major showcase for the newest in electric cars and autonomous vehicles. GM CEO Mary Barra will deliver a keynote Tuesday on the future of its car brands and electric vehicles. Mercedes-Benz will show off its AI-infused "Hyperscreen," a display that extends across the entire width of the dashboard. It can be voice activated and lets the driver and front seat passenger do everything from make calls to activate a seat massage. Fiat-Chrysler will offer interactive, three-dimensional virtual tours of its cars and technology. It also worked with Google to create an augmented reality model of its Jeep Wrangler 4xe hybrid you can see on your phone.

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