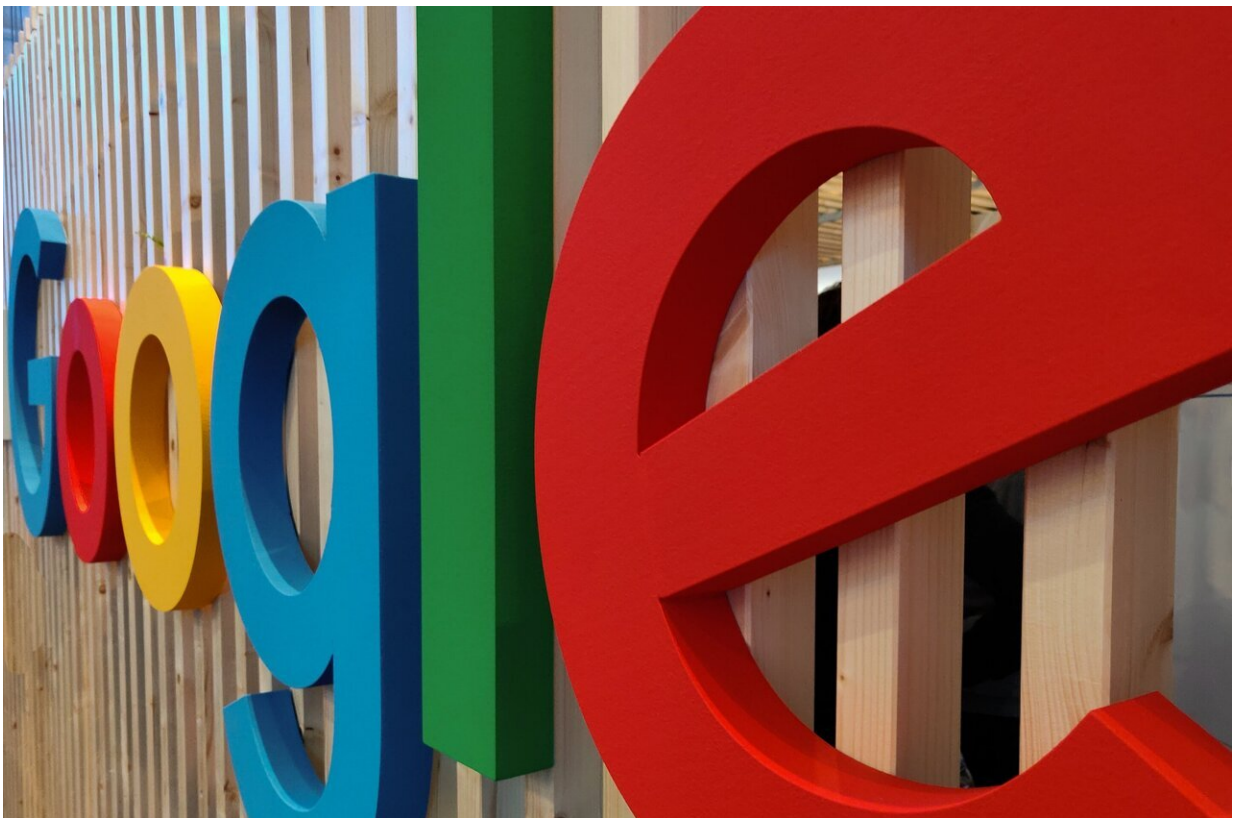


Are you willing to pay for email? How about podcasts? Here are our tech predictions for 2021

January 4 2021, by Jefferson Graham, Usa Today



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

It's that time of year where we make predictions about what to see from technology in 2021.

We already know we're good for new iPhones and Samsung Galaxy phones, new smart speakers from Amazon and beautiful new smart TV sets that will have higher resolution than ever before—at a lower cost.

So let's offer up some tech predictions about what else we'll see, or just might.

Let's start with a given:

You'll be paying for email in 2021

The world's most popular email program Gmail, is owned by Google, which has decided to follow in Apple's footsteps by getting more people hooked on monthly subscriptions. (Apple's Services—which includes Apple Music, News and iCloud—is now its second highest revenue generator, above Macs, iPads and Apple Watches.)

As of June 1, Google will no longer allow users to upload their photos and videos to Google Photos for free. Google offers 15 GBs of free storage for photos, but that also includes Gmail and Google Drive backup. The ask is that you pay for storage, which starts at \$1.99 monthly—but for just 100 GB of storage.

I don't know about you, but my Gmail is 41 GBs worth now, I have 15 GBs worth of photos in Google Photos and 1.7 TBs on Google Drive.

Sure, I can clear out Google Drive, but the thing is, my email is a living, growing thing that is just not going to get smaller, no matter how hard I try to clean it up. It grows every day. So if you like your Gmail, get used to it, you'll might be paying.

Microsoft and Yahoo still offer free email, but they're littered with ads, and you're encouraged to step up to the "premium" versions, which starts

at \$5 and \$3.49 a month, respectively, to go ad-free. Yahoo is eliminating the ability to automatically forward emails from Yahoo Mail, beginning next week, unless you spend \$34.99 yearly for the service.

Big tech won't find the new administration any friendlier

Facebook and Google's D.C. woes won't change with a new Biden administration, we believe. The companies will continue to be hauled into Washington to defend efforts about being broken up. President-elect Joe Biden has complained to the social network many times about all the disinformation coming out about him on Facebook, and the company declined to act. That certainly isn't likely to play well in the Biden years.

The Streaming Wars will lose a big player

So many new streaming networks launched in 2020, most notably HBO Max and Peacock, and many more are on the horizon for 2021, including Paramount Plus and Discovery +, but at least one of the new networks will go down. Or so says my U.S. TODAY colleague Brett Molina, who puts Paramount Plus as the most likely victim.

Paramount Plus is the soon to be new name for what was CBS All-Access, with the addition of movies from the Paramount Pictures library and TV shows from the Viacom (MTV, Comedy Central, Nickelodeon) vault. "There's just too many of them," says Molina. "I can't see it lasting." (You will see many more first-run films on streaming channels in 2021, as Warner Media has announced its entire slate for HBO Max and Disney + has several first run fare scheduled as well.)

5G won't get any better until late 2021

The launch of new phones with access to the supposedly faster wireless speed of 5G, and the wireless carriers breathless hype about faster speed left many consumers scratching their heads. The promised speeds were no faster than 4G. One day 5G will live up to the hype, but not until "late 2021," believes Gene Munster, an analyst and investor with Loup Ventures. For real progress, we'll have to wait for 2022.

Local retailers will find a way to compete with Amazon

It's an aspirational wish, but "someone will solve the need and find a way to fill it," says Kieran Hannon, the chief marketing officer for OpenPath, a company that offers next generation office entry technology. He believes a service will be developed to help local retailers compete with the Amazons of the world by letting customers order from a direct website serving locals and have products delivered to them at home, thus keeping sales in the neighborhood.

Zoom and video meetings will only get bigger

Business travel may start to come back from the dead in the second half of 2021, but all the companies that saved money from the trips won't likely be as eager to send staffers traipsing around the country when meetings can be done cheaper and more efficiently via video meeting.

Students will one day return to the classrooms, but company meetings, seminars, webinars and the like will likely continue. No need to return those ring lights to improve your appearance yet.

Speaking of Zoom, a possible acquisition?

The video networks is one hot property that saw its usage numbers climb

from 10 million to 300 million post pandemic, making it one prime acquisition target. Who better to buy Zoom than Amazon?

The companies already work together, with Amazon Web Services providing the server backbone for all those Zoom meetings. Unlike Google, Apple and Facebook, which have their own well established video networks (Google Meet, FaceTime and Messenger) Amazon doesn't have one.

So with Zoom in the company, and all those meeting minutes (some 2 trillion, in April alone,) what an attractive target that would make for Amazon to remind us to use Alexa and buy more stuff, right?

Pay for podcasts?

Finally, Munster from Loup Ventures believes Apple will follow its smash success with the Services division by introducing a new way for podcasters to make money on their shows by charging admission. He sees a "Podcast +" that sees everyone's favorite audio shows (like Talking Tech) added to the Apple One bundle with Apple Music. "Good news for podcasters, who may see Apple as another avenue to monetize their listener base."

We love it.

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