

MWC mobile tech fair to show off new phones, AI, metaverse

February 25 2023, by Kelvin Chan



A car passes Facebook's new Meta logo on a sign at the company headquarters on Oct. 28, 2021, in Menlo Park, Calif. The latest folding smartphones, immersive metaverse experiences, AI-powered chatbot avatars and other eye-catching technology are set to wow visitors at the annual MWC wireless trade fair. The four-day show, also known as Mobile World Congress, kicks off Monday in a vast Barcelona conference center. It's the world's biggest and most influential meeting for the mobile tech industry. Credit: AP Photo/Tony Avelar, File

The latest folding-screen smartphones, immersive metaverse experiences, [AI-powered chatbot avatars](#) and other eye-catching technology are set to wow visitors at the annual MWC wireless trade fair that kicks off Monday.

The four-day show, held in a vast Barcelona conference center, is the world's biggest and most influential meeting for the mobile tech industry. The range of technology set to go on display illustrates how the show, also known as Mobile World Congress, has evolved from a forum for mobile phone standards into a showcase for new wireless tech.

Organizers are expecting as many as 80,000 visitors from as many as 200 countries and territories as the event resumes at full strength after several years of pandemic disruptions.

Here's a look at what to expect:

METAVVERSE

There was a lot of [buzz around the metaverse](#) at last year's MWC and at other recent tech fairs like last month's CES in Las Vegas. Expect even more at this event.

A slew of companies are planning to [show off their metaverse experiences](#) that will allow users to connect with each other, attend events far away or enter fantastical new online worlds.

Software company Amdocs will use virtual and augmented reality to give users a "metatour" of Dubai. Other tech and [telecom companies](#) promise metaverse demos to help with physical rehab, virtually try on clothes or learn how to fix aircraft landing gear.



The Microsoft Bing logo and the website's page are shown in this photo taken in New York on Tuesday, Feb. 7, 2023. The latest folding smartphones, immersive metaverse experiences, AI-powered chatbot avatars and other eye-catching technology are set to wow visitors at the annual MWC wireless trade fair. The four-day show, also known as Mobile World Congress, kicks off Monday in a vast Barcelona conference center. It's the world's biggest and most influential meeting for the mobile tech industry. Credit: AP Photo/Richard Drew, File

The metaverse's popularity exploded after Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg in late 2021 exalted it as the next big thing for the internet and his company. Lately, though, doubts have started to creep in.

"All the business models around the metaverse are a big question mark right now," said John Strand, a veteran telecom industry consultant.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI has caught the tech world's attention thanks to the dramatic advances in [new tools like ChatGPT](#) that can hold conversations and generate readable text. Expect [artificial intelligence](#) to be deployed as an "overused buzzword" at MWC, said Ben Wood, principal analyst at CCS Insight.

Companies are promising to show how they're using AI to make home Wi-Fi networks more energy efficient or sniff out fakes.

Microsoft's press representatives have hinted that they might have a demonstration of ChatGPT but haven't provided any details. The company added AI chatbot technology to its Bing search engine but scrambled to make fixes after it responded with [insults or wrong answers to some users](#) who got early access.

Startups will demo their own AI-powered chat technology: D-ID will show off their eerie "digital human" avatars, while Botslovers says its service promises to "free humans from boring tasks."



A ChatGPT prompt is shown on a device near a public school in Brooklyn, New York, Thursday, Jan. 5, 2023. The latest folding smartphones, immersive metaverse experiences, AI-powered chatbot avatars and other eye-catching technology are set to wow visitors at the annual MWC wireless trade fair. The four-day show, also known as Mobile World Congress, kicks off Monday in a vast Barcelona conference center. It's the world's biggest and most influential meeting for the mobile tech industry. Credit: AP Photo/Peter Morgan, File

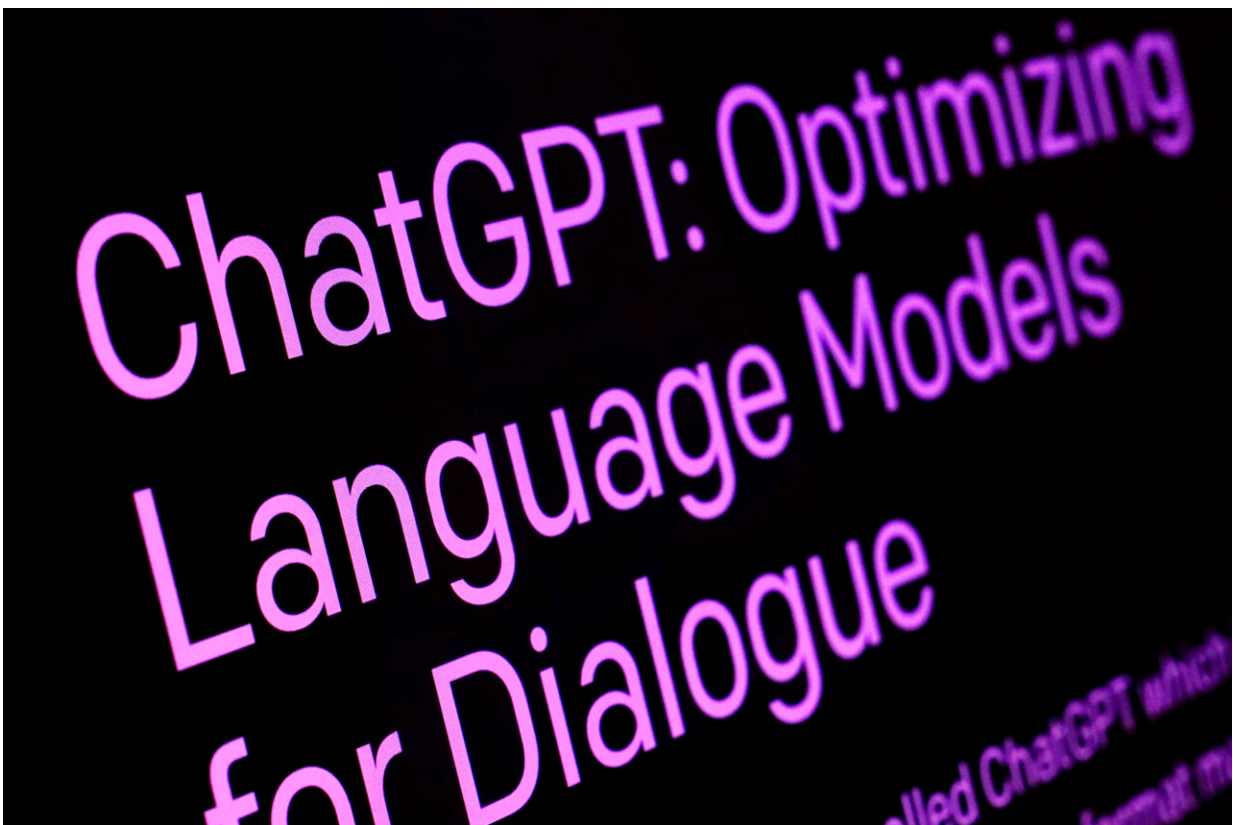
NOT JUST SMARTPHONES

MWC hit its stride in the previous decade as the smartphone era boomed, with device makers competing for attention with glitzy product launches. Nowadays, smartphone innovation has hit a plateau and companies are increasingly debuting phones in other ways.

Attention at the show is focusing on potential uses for 5G, the next generation of ultrafast wireless technology that promises to unlock a wave of innovation beyond just smartphones, such as automated factories, driverless cars and smart cities.

"Mobile phones will still be a hot topic at MWC, but they've become a mature, iterative and almost boring category," Wood said. "The only excitement will come from the slew of foldable designs and prototypes, but the real size of the market for these premium products remains unclear."

Device launches will be dominated by a slew of lesser known Chinese brands such as OnePlus, Xiaomi, ZTE and Honor looking to take [market share](#) from the market leaders, Apple and Samsung.



Text from the ChatGPT page of the OpenAI website is shown in this photo, in New York, Feb. 2, 2023. The latest folding smartphones, immersive metaverse experiences, AI-powered chatbot avatars and other eye-catching technology are set to wow visitors at the annual MWC wireless trade fair. The four-day show, also known as Mobile World Congress, kicks off Monday in a vast Barcelona conference center. It's the world's biggest and most influential meeting for the mobile tech industry. Credit: AP Photo/Richard Drew, File

CHINESE PRESENCE

Chinese technology giant Huawei will have a major presence at MWC, despite being blacklisted by the Western governments as part of a broader geopolitical battle between Washington and Beijing over technology and security.

Organizers say Huawei will have the biggest presence at the show among some 2,000 exhibitors. That's even after the U.S. pushed allies to get their mobile phone companies to block or restrict Huawei's networking equipment over concerns Beijing could induce the [company](#) to carry out cybersnooping or sabotage critical communications infrastructure.

Huawei, which has repeatedly denied those allegations, also has been squeezed by Western sanctions aimed at starving it of components like microchips.

Analysts say one message that Huawei could be sending with its oversized display is defiance to the West.

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