

SOFTWARE AND TECHNOLOGY

8 trends to expect at CES in Las Vegas and beyond

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The Consumer Electronics Show this week in Las Vegas is set to attract 180,000 attendees. Image credit: CES

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Pack your hand sanitizer and sneakers, and charge your Apple Watch. It is time to join 180,000 of your closest techie friends at the 2019 Consumer Electronics Show, starting this week.

To help you navigate CES's 2.7 million square feet of exhibits, here are eight trends to look for in Las Vegas and throughout 2019.

1. Trade and tariffs

Much of the \$377 billion United States consumer electronics marketplace relies on Asia-based supply chains and inexpensive manufacturing centers, and a relatively friction-free global trade system.

So, President Trump's tariffs, strained trade relations, the arrest of an executive from Chinese tech company Huawei, stock market volatility and a possible economic recession are all topics that will echo through hallways and closed conference rooms at the Las Vegas Convention Center.

What to look for: CES 2019 is taking place in front of a backdrop of uncertainty and volatility. Will manufacturers address President Trump's tariffs in their press events, or will they keep headlines focused on their products?

2. 5G, yippee

AT&T, T-Mobile (and Sprint), and Verizon have all committed to rolling out 5G this year, making hyper-fast, latent-free connectivity available, not only to smartphones, but to all kinds of compatible devices.

Much has been written about how 5G will increase connectivity speeds by 100x over existing 4G infrastructure, enabling new capabilities across all economic sectors and facets of society from healthcare and transportation to education and entertainment with the potential to add millions of jobs and billions to our GDP.

Now that the infrastructure is almost in place, CES 2019 will be a key indicator of whether consumer electronics are ready to take advantage of new 5G capabilities.

What to look for: While some manufacturers will save their big announcements for Mobile World Congress next month in Barcelona, Spain, will 5G-enabled devices at CES showcase the maximum potential for consumer and enterprise use cases?

3. Step aside Detroit, CES is all about automotive

Over the past decade, CES and the North American International Auto Show (NAIAS) in Detroit have competed for automotive headlines, with more automakers making more technology announcements at CES year-over-year.

This will be the last year that NAIAS will take place the week following CES. Starting in 2020, the auto show will move from the frigid month of January to the more temperate second week of June.

This year at CES, automakers are planning some big announcements.

Mercedes will debut its latest CLA sedan, the EQC electric SUV a U.S. premiere and its electric van concept, the Vision Urbanetic.

The Toyota Research Institute is bringing back an updated version of its autonomous test car called TRI-P4, which is based on the Lexus LS 500h.

Nissan announced that it will display its Leaf-based NISMO RC electric racecar.

Audi will feature its new in-car entertainment system.

And Honda will show-off robotics capabilities aimed at creating a cleaner, safer and more convenient world.

What to look for: While product launches, especially concept cars, often capture headlines, what does each carmaker's CES booth communicate about their vision of the future of mobility? And how does that vision translate into their four-wheeled-products, through artificial intelligence, augmented reality, device-to-device and device-to-human connectivity, and new modes of transportation and delivery?

4. OK Google, take a swing at Alexa

Apple and Netflix historically stay clear of CES. And Amazon, Microsoft and Facebook typically do not have a large physical presence, instead showcasing their products through a multitude of hardware partners and integrations.

So you can again expect to see "powered by Alexa" in almost every CES booth.

However, Google zigged when everyone else zagged, going big last year, with a three-story experience focused on the smart home.

This year, Google is expected to go even bigger, with a standalone megabooth outside the convention center, where the tech giant will show-off integrations and use cases for its Nest, Home Hub smart display and Pixel smartphone all cornerstones of its integrated smart home solution.

Alexa's share of the voice-controlled device market dominates with more than 20 speakers and accessories, dozens of Alexa-equipped Fire tablets and Fire TV streamers, and dozens more integrations into appliances and electronics. But Google is well positioned with the rise of the ambient Web.

What to look for: If Google's strategy at CES 2018 was to say "Hey Alexa, you've got company," will 2019 be the year Google introduces a truly competitive connected-home offering?

5. No, VR and AR are not dead

CES 2016 and 2017 heralded the rise of virtual and augmented reality.

Despite a slow uptick in consumer adoption, big players such as Facebook, HTC and Samsung continue to invest in the technology, and companies continue to create CES experiences that showcase their brands in virtual reality and augmented reality.

The Oculus Quest, a standalone no PC or phone required fully wireless VR headset with no external sensors needed, is expected to ship in 2019 for around \$400, which could finally put untethered, high-resolution VR in the hands of millions of consumers.

The Quest is not expected to be at CES, but many of its competitors will be, so watch the HTC press conference to see if the Vive Pro will be able to compete.

A new augmented reality-based healthcare provider called Addison Care is expected to launch, and touts two-way

conversations, real-time assessments, health performance measurement, and the ability to conduct in-home examinations.

VR start-up Sense Arena will be demonstrating its hockey-training platform, which boasts that its 70 drills help athletes' reaction time and cognitive ability.

Brands including BMW are expected to immerse consumers in their vehicles and show-off in-vehicle technology such as their Intelligent Personal Assistant with goggles-based experiences and heads-up AR displays.

What to look for: Can tech giants and content makers finally convince consumers that having an immersive experience is worth putting hardware on your head at home? Or will VR/AR continue to be relegated to CES-booth hype?

6. Health tech is the new fitness tech

Wearables have been a major focus of CES the past few years, and most of those wearables have primarily been about fitness tracking. Expect health to take the place of fitness this year.

While Apple will not be displaying at CES, the Apple Watch Series 4 has set the pace and shaped the conversation for competitors, with its built-in ECG, which is gaining notoriety for saving lives, and its fall detector, which has been a key feature for the elderly.

What to look for: Wearable manufacturers such as Matrix, Fitbit, Samsung and Amazfit are all expected to offer competitive products. But will they get what Apple has already achieved: FDA clearance?

7. TVs: No big leap forward for now

Screens always play a big role at CES.

Remember 720p flatscreen televisions? And 1080p?

Like me, you probably have one or two of those paperweights gathering dust in your attic. What about 2K and Ultra HD? And do not forget curved 4K screens.

Well, 2019 brings 8K and it is not only hype. The \$15,000, 85-inch, 8K Samsung Q900 is expected to arrive in fall 2019, and it features four times the total resolution of that 4K screen currently hanging above your fireplace.

But hold your horses.

Most of us will not rush to buy those 33 million pixels, since there is very little 8K content in the world.

In fact, only a few cinema cameras are capable of capturing in 8K, and only a few films, such as *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*, have been shot in 8K.

Then there is the bandwidth necessary to deliver that 8K goodness from a server farm to you as you eat popcorn on your couch: CNET estimates 40 to 50 megabits per second, for which most Americans are not set up. But just like 4K, the rise of 8K will come, and TV makers will not be able to resist building the hype.

What to look for: Between now and the dawn of the 8K era, look for announcements about incremental quality improvements in OLED and MicroLED, as well as thinner and lighter products from all the big brands.

8. The Next Big Thing' will likely start small

The Apple Newton, CD player, VHS VCR and the Sony PlayStation did not all seem industry revolutionary when they were announced at CES.

While it is easy and fun to get lost in the city-sized booths of Samsung and Sony, do not miss the energy and excitement of the dozens of small startups exhibiting at the Sands Expo Center, Tech West and Eureka Park.

What to look for: the next big thing.

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