



**DIGITAL TRENDS**



**2017 CES COVERAGE**

## **DIGITAL TRENDS ON DIGITAL TRENDS: A CES 2017 PREVIEW**

Great things happen rarely: Santa drops by only once a year, we eat stuffing on just a single day in November ... heck, we only have the opportunity to make America great again once every four years. And likewise, the gadget paradise CES comes to Las Vegas every January for just four short days. Fortunately, the stuff unveiled there continues to dazzle and delight us for the rest of the year.

It may not officially be the biggest, but it's easily the most important tech show of the year. And biggest or not, it's certainly enormous: CES 2016 saw 177,393 attendees and spanned 2.47 million net square feet of exhibit space. What will 2017's show hold? Here's my list of the 9 biggest trends to watch for --what you'll see in the year ahead -- as well as a few tips about companies to keep your eye on.



# 01. YOU'LL GET A DIGITAL ASSISTANT

It started out in your phone, just a way to ask Siri for a weather report or a silly joke. But artificial intelligence and digital assistants is no laughing matter: It's likely the way most Americans will experience the Internet of Things (IoT) explosion, and finally a cheap and easy way for mere mortals to automate their homes as only the wealthy once could.

Last year Amazon brought its AI Alexa to homes – next year it's going to be in YOUR home. Cheap and affordable voice-controlled artificial intelligences like Amazon's Alexa and Google's Home are going to be everywhere, and you'll see that in spades at CES. You'll hear from companies like Neura that “enhance products with AI.” You'll read about it when you hear about Ara by Kolibree, the world's first toothbrush with embedded AI. (My brain hurts thinking about that.) But it'll be more than just assistants, some say. “This will be the first year in which AI-generated art will achieve commercial success. An artist will use an AI-created element, like a song melody, in a piece of work that achieves mainstream recognition, explained Nvidia's Bryan Catanzaro, Vice President, Applied Deep Learning Research.



## 02. **BIG BRANDS GET INNOVATIVE**

Over the last few years, we've seen small new companies with big visions transform and disrupt the world. Nest kicked the whole IoT thing into high gear, Uber changed the taxi world, and so on. Both blossomed into enormous companies, of course, but the point remains: small companies doing new stuff.

This year I'm seeing big names like Comcast and Netflix and Hulu and Amazon driving the most interesting changes. Take Amazon and its push into artificial intelligence. Sure, other companies are doing it, but it's the Echo and the Dot that you'll end up buying. Comcast's Xfinity Home group is another big company shaping the IoT space. The premise is as smart as it is simple: Why buy several different devices from different companies operating on different protocols with different apps when you can just get them all from one space, and manage it on your TV? Consumers appear to be responding, too; according to Ericsson, more than two out of five advanced internet users would like to get all their products from the biggest five IT companies. Of those, three in four believe this will happen only five years from now. Go figure.



## 03. HD AUDIO MAKES (ANOTHER) COMEBACK

Yes, I know, we've all been down this road before. But this year, they swear we'll finally get high-resolution audio right. There will be a high-resolution audio pavilion at the Las Vegas Convention Center, for the first time ever, as well as a lengthy series of panels by our very own Audiophile, Mike Mettler. Sound engineers at the pavilion will demonstrate the advantages of high-res audio, and companies like Astell&Kern will have their line of products on display. Watch for ultra fancy digital preamps as well from some of the biggest names in the business. You can expect new speaker systems as well, from leading brands like Harman Kardon.



## 04. AR/VR GETS REAL

Yes, you'll read about several hundred companies unveiling 360-degree cameras at CES. Yes, this is neat: Imagine how much more interesting your next selfie is going to be when you can see the band playing behind you, or the mountain peak you stand on (or the bathroom in which you're taking that selfie). Proof of this? For the first time since the flesh show AVN Adult Entertainment Expo changed dates, we'll have a full-on pornography company at CES. Naughty America's booth is intended to show off the company's work in the VR space – the company will have Rifts and Daydreams and Vives galore.

Beyond that, from the vat of VR stuff out there, I'm interested to see French company Voxel's offering: the company claims to offer VR without a headset. Sure, it's in a VR booth, but still. And on the cutting edge of cutting edge, Insta360 will show off its new camera, which takes 8K 360-degree images. Expect to hear dozens of enormous content providers announcing their push into AR as well.

A small subset of this: augment listening. A half dozen or more companies are building devices to improve your hearing, either by helping boost volume like a traditional hearing aid or by focusing it on what counts: the person seated across from you at dinner, the actors on stage, whatever. A new headphone from a company called Stages promises to let you listen from a specific direction; Audicus bills itself as the 'Warby Parker of hearing aids,' and there's more where that came from.



## 05. **EVERYBODY WILL FIGHT TESLA**

Meanwhile, electric cars are everywhere. From today's Tesla's to Faraday Future's far off promise, from the Chevy Volt to the Toyota Prius, electric cars are having a moment. Faraday Future is certainly among the most interesting of a growing group of domestic and overseas companies created with one explicit goal in mind: to take down Tesla Motors. The California-based, China-backed startup has hired employees from BMW, Lamborghini, Chevrolet, Jaguar Land Rover, Tesla, and even SpaceX in a bid to get its ambitious project off the ground.

We'll also have self-driving cars at some point (or even right now, depending on how you view that Tesla autopilot stuff). But if you aren't looking to buy a new car right now, you can add brains to your existing brawn thanks to a slew of new gadgets that plug into your existing car. Devices like PilotHUD and Navdy that add a head-up display to your car seem futuristic, but they're everywhere. Meanwhile, there's a bunch of stuff that plugs into your car's OBD port: Verizon's Hum, Automatic, Vinli, Zubie, and other gizmos will make you a better pilot.



## 06. **THERE WILL BE 4,000 4K ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Bought a TV? You'll finally appreciate the investment, as the content providers are finally catching up to the wave of improvements from panel makers. Watch for news from Netflix and Comcast and Dish and others. Meanwhile, CES wouldn't be CES without televisions. expect dozens of new devices to take and display 4K content, including a new line of cameras from audio giant Monster, new TVs from Westinghouse and LG and Samsung (OLED! QLED! Other LEDs!), and more. We expect great things from LG, after a recent visit to the LG Display facilities in Korea. Much talk will center around high dynamic range (HDR), which improves contrast between light and dark areas and is surprisingly challenging to get working.



## 07. YOU'LL FEAR FOR YOUR SAFETY

Fears about information sharing will shape many of the devices and services we see over the coming year. Concerns about Internet of things, which has been used to create giant botnets, will shape future devices. Enter companies like BullGuard, a security company, which is set to unveil Dojo – a security solution meant to protect smart home devices from cyber threats and botnets. Meanwhile, Android smartphones are limiting themselves when they detect that they're in your car, a trend I anticipate to increase in the year ahead. And there are several personal safety devices emerging from the show as well: Silent Beacon is a dead-simple way to get help in an emergency, Aluma Connect aims to keep women safe from sexual assault, and several devices smarten your stove to ensure you (or grandma) haven't left it on by accident.



## 08. **WE'LL GET 5G PHONES**

This year is a rarity for CES: All of the major cellular carriers will have a presence at the show, Shawn Dubravac, research director for the CTA, told me. Why? The rise of 5G networks is imminent, with most beginning trials and testing new tech. 5G means more than just fewer dropped calls, he noted: It means new services and new technologies. Michael Björn, Head of Research, Ericsson ConsumerLab, agreed, noting that “consumers also want the future to remain fully mobile, implying that demand for battery-friendly, instant and fast connectivity is set to grow rapidly. In that sense, reality time means it is time for 5G networks.”



## 09. **DIGITAL TRENDS WILL BE EVERYWHERE**

At this year's CES show, Digital Trends will itself be a trend to watch, with our largest staff ever -- and for the first time, a booth. We'll be live-streaming interviews with the CEOs and top tech folks at dozens of leading brands on YouTube and Facebook, and bringing you our Top Tech of CES awards to highlight the show's most innovative products and services.

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