

Welcome to the future: air taxis and robodogs

Are we getting tired of tech? Countless weird and wonderful new gadgets are being launched this week at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Here are five ways your life could change...



Gadgets and Gizmos: CES 2018 was launched yesterday, and will run until January 12th.

1/ Homes are getting even smarter. Last year the CES (Consumer Electronics Show) was all about **Amazon's Alexa**, the voice-controlled artificial intelligence (AI) "assistant" that helps to run your life. This year, everything from ceiling lights to bathroom mirrors is integrated with Alexa or Google's AI (called the "Google Assistant"). Elsewhere, there is a "smart sofa" that charges your phone and monitors your posture; apps which control the temperature and humidity; and "Cherry Home": a camera system which tracks each family member's movements throughout the day.

2/ Technology that cares about your health. Glasses that improve your sight. Robots that check whether an elderly person has fallen. An eye mask that vibrates to stop you snoring. A virtual reality (VR) gym that makes exercising "less boring". There is no doubt that "digital health" has been one of the biggest trends at CES so far this year.

3/ Autonomous transport. This is not just about **self-driving cars**, although several

companies are showing off how far this technology has come. CES 2018 has also featured self-driving buses, a suitcase that follows you around, and the **Volocopter**, an "air taxi" which is essentially a giant drone with a passenger seat.

4/ The robots are coming. Admittedly, some have more success than others: there was an awkward moment on Monday when LG Cloi, a small droid that is supposed to help run your home, refused to obey instructions on stage. Elsewhere the humanoid **Sophia** has learned to walk, and Sony's robot dog Aibo has a camera in its nose to help it recognise people.

5/ Mixing reality. VR headsets are not as popular as some thought they might be. Now the focus is on augmented reality (AR) instead. This is when graphics are layered on top of the world around you (think Pokemon Go). So far it mostly does this through smartphones, but yesterday a pair of AR "**smartglasses**" called Rokid Glass was unveiled.

Peak tech?

This is all getting a bit *Black Mirror*, worry some. This year's CES proves that technology is finding its way into every area of our lives. Supposedly this keeps us safer, healthier, and happier. But the opposite is just as likely: smart homes are more vulnerable to hacking, and autonomous transport is still prone to crashing. What's more, if we rely on technology too much we will stop being able to do anything for ourselves.

Calm down, respond others. People always say that new technology will be bad for society, but in the end we always adapt to it just fine. CES is a celebration of human ingenuity. We should be excited for all of the ways the gadgets can change our lives — and if they sound dangerous or scary, we do not have to buy them. End of story.

Q & A

Q: What do we know?

A: The Consumer Electronics Show has been held since 1967. It attracts hundreds of start ups alongside major brands. It is a trade show, meaning that it is about showing off new ideas

and prototypes; many of the products are not yet available for ordinary people to buy. However, if a start up receives a lot of attention at CES, that can be its big break.

Q: What do we not know?

A: Which of the products launched at CES will be big this year. Predicting technology trends is

a risky business: for example, people have been expecting virtual reality to take off for decades, but it never quite has. Meanwhile, few pundits expected Amazon's Alexa to be as popular as it has been for the last two years.

YOU DECIDE

1. Which of the products described in this article will be the most popular?
2. Do we rely too much on technology?

ACTIVITIES

1. Twenty years ago, the technology world was abuzz with the emergence of DVD players. Now, it is artificial intelligence, self-driving cars and robots. Write down five trends which you think might appear at CES in another 20 years. Be creative!
2. Imagine it is your turn to design a technology product, which you aim to launch next year at CES 2019. In groups, design something inspired by one of the five trends listed above. Then pitch your idea to the rest of the class.

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

"Technological progress has merely provided us with more efficient means for going backwards."
Aldous Huxley

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WORD WATCH

Amazon's Alexa – The AI assistant can tell jokes, check your calendar, and shop online. It is most commonly found in Echo speakers, but perhaps not for much longer.

Self-driving cars – Some of the big names include Intel, Google, Byton and Waymo.

Volocopter – Intel's "flying car" has been in development for several years, but this is the

first time it flew in the USA. It has a maximum flight time of 30 minutes and can travel 17 miles.

Sophia – A robot designed to look and sound like a human (incidentally, she is also the first ever robot to receive citizenship of a country, namely Saudi Arabia). On Monday, she took her first steps in public. She currently has a top speed of 30cm per second.

Smartglasses – The glasses respond to voice commands and project images onto their

lenses. Several other companies are also creating smartglasses, but it is not clear whether they will prove popular with ordinary people.

Black Mirror – A TV show created by Charlie Brooker, which recently released its fourth season on Netflix. The show imagines how technology will shape the near future (often for the worse).

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 Notes

