

CES 2019: Same Technology, New Possibilities

Article

Last week, more than 188,000 tech enthusiasts descended upon Las Vegas for CES to get a glimpse of the latest and greatest gadgets from around the world. As far as dazzle, the show didn't disappoint. Hundreds of products were on display, including eye-popping 8K TVs, super-fast computers, dancing robots, self-driving cars and higher-tech drones.

The show was also abuzz with keynotes and panels of experts extolling the virtues of 5G, the internet of things (IoT) and artificial intelligence (AI)—long-awaited technologies that will eventually make everything work better. In this regard, not much was new since last year. While these technologies have tremendous promise, 5G is still not ready for primetime; the IoT remains fragmented; Amazon and Google are still locked in a voice-assistant battle; and AI—which is quietly making its way into products and services—still needs humans.

While we wait, many of the world's largest electronics manufacturers have developed a new message: We want to make your life easier. Rather than focusing on individual components, they have laid out futuristic visions of how these big-picture technologies will help their customers live simpler, healthier and more convenient lives.

For example, LG's exhibit was chock full of smart home appliances, smartphones, TVs and robots designed to connect through its ThinQ AI system. In one of the show's keynote addresses, entitled **"AI for an Even Better Life,"** LG's President and Chief Technology Officer Dr. I.P Park outlined the company's plans to become a "lifestyle innovator" and deliver an AI ecosystem "for the real world" that delivers "a new and daring definition of better life."

In a similar vein, both Samsung and Panasonic featured their own array of robots, appliances and electronics designed for smart homes and transportation. Samsung Electronics promised to showcase the latest ways its 5G, AI and IoT innovations would **"simplify daily life,"** while Panasonic announced it would demonstrate how it's using technology to **"merge the physical and digital, and the real and virtual worlds to create better experiences for customers."**

Haier, which manufactures both its own and GE-branded appliances, also showed off its smart home devices, announcing **"solutions that promote healthier eating, cleaner air and enhanced convenience."**

Google and Amazon were almost singularly focused on how everyday voice-controlled devices, such as Google Assistant and Alexa, could help users at home, at work and on the go. The Amazon exhibit, understated with a "homey" feel, featured various stations with Alexa-enabled products. Google opted for a larger, outdoor amusement-park ride that highlighted ways Google Assistant could help members of a busy, animatronic family buy a birthday cake for their grandmother.

This noteworthy, ramped-up focus on simplifying life is taking place for several reasons. First, because there weren't any groundbreaking technologies announced at CES this year, companies felt the need to hook consumers with relatable future applications. Second, 5G,

IoT and AI—when combined—can result in life-changing improvements that are greater than the sum of their parts. And finally, after many years of technology overload and privacy and security concerns, consumers are ripe for messaging that promises them easier lives.

The approach appears to be on target. Research by Ipsos and the University of Virginia McIntire School of Commerce found that attitudes toward automation are becoming more positive, and the number of US internet users who believe automation has made life easier rose from 63% in 2017 to 67% in 2018, while the percentage who believe it has made life more interesting rose from 52% to 56% during the same period.

How Do US Internet Users Feel About the Impact of Automation?		
% of respondents, July 2017 & Aug 2018		
	2017	2018
Automation has made products and services more accessible	65%	70%
Automation has made life easier	63%	67%
Worry a lot about data security when using automated devices	70%	64%
In general, consumer automated devices are easy to use	56%	61%
Automation isolates people more than it brings them together	69%	57%
Automation has improved the shopping experience	58%	56%
Automation has made life more interesting	52%	56%
Automation has improved the quality of products and services	51%	53%
Automation destroys more jobs than it creates	56%	49%
Automation has more benefits than it has drawbacks	43%	48%
I worry a lot about my safety when using automated devices	47%	40%
Computers can produce more accurate health diagnoses than doctors	22%	22%
Note: n=3,016 ages 18+; includes responses of "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree"		
Source: Ipsos and the University of Virginia McIntire School of Commerce, "Americans' Attitudes Toward Automation in 2018"; eMarketer calculations, Sep 6, 2018		
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The trend should continue as more concepts come to fruition and people understand how these technologies integrate into their lives.