

## 5 reasons electronics show is still relevant

January 9 2009, By Stanley A. Miller II

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The International Consumer Electronics Show wraps up in Las Vegas Friday, and despite the annual hype, the cavalcade of shiny tech didn't reveal any jaw-dropping creations that will dramatically change the way people digitally divert themselves.

In fact, it's been years since the show offered up anything that truly changed the electronic entertainment landscape. And over the last few years, the MacWorld Expo in San Francisco has outshined the Vegas event with Apple iPod, iPhone and other revelations that sent America's high-tech heart racing.

Still, the CES has its role as a venue for companies to show off their latest incremental developments, product line updates and niche products.

And although there was no "wonder gadget" announced this year that will transform the typical American living room, there were several promising technologies and exciting devices unveiled.

It's unlikely hordes of people are going to stand in line overnight to buy my favorite five gadgets of CES, but they still deserve a little attention.

LG Electronics announced a new line of video-streaming HDTV sets that connect to the Internet and play movies from Netflix.

There are already cheap, easy-to-use devices that can do this, but having the technology built into the sets is a big deal because typical viewers

need new television technologies spoon-fed to them, even if they are in their best interest.

LG says streaming video to the Internet-connected TV sets will be simple, with subscribers queuing up the movies they want to see through Netflix's Web site and then browsing their selections on the TV screen.

These video-streaming LG sets will come in plasma and liquid crystal display versions and will go on sale this spring, but prices have not been announced yet.

I cringe whenever a company ever calls its product the "ultimate" anything, and that was my initial reaction to the WristFone from Neutrano, which melds a phone, music player and camera into a wristwatch.

It's hard not to look forward to a gadget that promises all those features in a fashionable form. Neutrano says the WristFone has a touch-screen LCD for easy dialing and texting, and it can connect to a Bluetooth headset. The watch can also play music, video and surf the Internet.

Sound too good to be true? It probably is, but if it pans out, it could be a neat little toy for the nerd niche. Unfortunately, with all of its alleged abilities, a suspicious lack of specifications makes me worry it will never make it to market.

No details are currently available on how much storage space it has, the size of its screen, how much it weighs or the resolution of its digital camera. Neutrano says the WristFone is compatible with GSM wireless carriers such as AT&T Wireless and T-Mobile, but it's unclear whether it has any 3G connectivity for fast mobile Internet speeds. We'll see ...

A new Internet car radio from Blaupunkt and miRoamer hopes to

challenge the fun and features of satellite radio. The companies say the in-dash console system delivers thousands of Internet stations, along with regular AM and FM radio and a CD player. Users will be able to easily switch between terrestrial and Internet radio stations, the companies say, and the device is configured using miRoamer's Web site.

This Internet car radio is going to go public as built-in, original equipment in vehicles, and no U.S. partnerships were announced. But I wouldn't rule out this technology finding its way into the American market, whether it's this make and model or a similar system manufactured by a different company.

There are universal remotes, and then there is the Logitech Harmony 1100 advanced universal remote control. This remote has it all, and for \$499.99, it should.

The control scheme on the Harmony's 3.5-inch color touch screen can be customized so you can organize the layout your way. And although the device doesn't have physical buttons, it has several tactile guides around the screen to help you position your fingers so you select the right commands.

The Harmony supports RF wireless technology, so you can use an extender and keep devices like DVD players or stereo equipment behind cabinet doors. And the remote supports 225,000 devices from 5,000 brands.

Its battery is rechargeable, so you'll never have to do that spur-of-the-moment hunt for batteries, and weighing about 7 ounces, it's not too unwieldy for extended sessions lounging on the couch.

Altec Lansing introduced some new stereo Bluetooth headphones, including the BackBeat 906, which comes with a wireless stereo adapter

so you can listen to music from your iPhone, iPod and other digital music players.

The BackBeat has a mic for making and taking phone calls on any mobile phone with Bluetooth. It's designed with a soft neckband that folds up, and it has telescoping, contoured, soft-silicone-tip earpieces for a snug fit.

These headphones are good for working out, the company says, noting that they are "sweat-resistant and highly durable."

The BackBeat 906, which includes the Bluetooth stereo adapter, goes on sale next month for \$129.95, and the BackBeat 903, which is just the headphones, cost \$99.95.

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(Stanley A. Miller II covers personal technology for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. He can be reached at 414-223-5162 or [smiller\\_at\\_journal sentinel.com](mailto:smiller_at_journal sentinel.com).)

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