

Tech world crawling into the crib

January 10 2013, by Sophie Estienne



A young boy listens to music on a pair of headphones at the CES in Las Vegas on January 9, 2013. The technology industry displaying its wares at the massive Consumer Electronics Show this week included a variety of products and apps aimed at the youngest audiences, even those unable to walk.

One is never too young to be connected. The technology industry displaying its wares at the massive Consumer Electronics Show this week in Las Vegas included a variety of products and apps aimed at the youngest audiences, even those unable to walk.

The baby tech offerings featured accessories and apps marketed to parents as tools to help children learn at a very tender age.

Fisher-Price was showing a bright plastic object with teething rings that doubles as an [iPhone](#) case. That makes it possible for a six-month-old to use the smartphone.

"It's a great learning tool," said Julia Maher, marketing manager for infant toys at Fisher-Price, a unit of Mattel.

"We see moms passing back their devices to occupy babies all the time."

She said babies "like to turn pages" and can in fact interact with a mobile device.

For 18-month-olds, another device from the toymaker attaches to the [iPad](#), giving toddlers another option to start a digital lifestyle.



The Belkin WeMo Baby is displayed at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas on January 9, 2013. The wireless room monitor allows parents to listen to their baby through a smartphone.

A tablet designed specifically for young children was on display at CES from the French company Lexibook.

The colorful device, which can withstand the numerous drops expected from the young ones' heavy usage, is designed for children from four to eight years old "but kids have the ability to use this at age two," said sales representative Robert Manlin.

These gadgets come on top of others such as the "tabeo" from retailer Toys "R" US designed for children, and released last year.

Tactile screens make it a lot easier for kids to go mobile, but some experts worry about prolonged exposure to these devices.

Company officials argue, however, that parents know best the limits for their kids.

"When I was young, people asked if kids watch too much TV," said Bill Hensley, vice president for marketing at Wanderful, which was showing its apps and interactive books for kids at the CES in Las Vegas.

"Education is a big part of what we do."



Smart device-controlled toy robots are displayed at the International CES at the Las Vegas Convention Center on January 9, 2013. Tactile screens make it a lot easier for kids to go mobile, but some experts worry about prolonged exposure to these devices.

The new technology "helps children not only to learn to read, but also to love stories. It's a gateway to real books," he said.

In some of the new interactive devices, children can find a word or image and figure out how to match them, or to make them move, part of key early learning skills, according to backers.

"If the app is used properly, there's no harm for kids to develop creativity or Internet skills early in the childhood," said Steven Chu, chief operating officer of Canadian child mobile app maker ToonBoom.

Others note that tactile screens and apps can be especially beneficial for children with disabilities.

Interbots has developed a system aimed at autistic children, allowing them to control a robot through a tactile screen. A therapist can also use the robot to speak, offering a new type of interaction for the children.

"[Children](#) with autism like working with touchscreens, they're a little more keen on interacting with a robot than with a parent or a therapist," said Interbots chief technical officer Michael Knight.

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