

Wearable tech makers look to push boundaries

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Will your clothes and accessories change how you live your daily life? Wearable devices like smart watches, glasses and activity monitors were a big topic of conversation at South By Southwest Interactive this week - specifically their potential in the future.

Imagine if, when you woke up, the lights in your room turned on and the coffee maker started up, said Brian Friedman, CEO of Loopd, a wearable device company. Or a room that immediately customized to your presence - from its lighting to the music.

"I think this is the very beginning and inception of things like this," Friedman said.

Other possibilities include a wristband that can tell if you need to sleep more - or if you're in the early stages of depression. That's not far away, experts say, especially considering devices like pacemakers that can control a person's heartbeat are already in use.

"People are blown away, but it's possible," said Julien Blin, founder of Gizworld, a wearable computing consultancy.

Fitness-focused gadgets that you snap, buckle or fasten to your body are already marketed to those obsessed with tracking every possible metric their bodies produce. There are countless [smart watches](#) for tech enthusiasts who'd rather glance at their wrists to check messages than reach for their smartphones. And thousands of people are already seeing

the world differently with the help of the Internet-connected Google Glass eyewear.

Overall, the wearables market is projected to grow by leaps and bounds.

Retail revenue from smart [wearable devices](#) will reach \$19 billion by 2018, compared with \$1.4 billion in 2013, according to Juniper Research. The firm also projects that sales of smart wearable devices will approach 130 million units by 2018, which is 10 times higher than the number estimated to sell in 2013.

There are drawbacks to the technology, namely that it makes users easier to track or monitor. And in this age of trepidation over government spying, that could be a concern for many.

"You're going to have a moral dilemma there," said Kip Fyfe, CEO of 4iiii Innovations, a sport-focused wearable tech company. "Do you want to be tracked or do you want information?"

Virtual reality headsets were also a popular spectacle at the tech-focused gathering, especially the Oculus Rift headset.

Palmer Luckey, co-founder of Oculus VR, the company behind the headset, spoke about how his company would take [virtual reality technology](#) further than it had ever gone before.

"Today, the average person's PC, or even a \$400 console can render ... a pretty good-looking 3-D environment," he said.

All sorts of products look to SXSW Interactive to make a splash. It's where Twitter soared from obscurity to the world stage in 2007, where Facebook Chief Mark Zuckerberg appeared on stage in 2008 when his site was still the No. 2 [online social network](#) behind MySpace, and where

the location-sharing application Foursquare emerged a year later.

For Caroline Tien-Spalding, marketing director at imaging firm ArcSoft, the interactive festival is where new ideas percolate.

"You have a lot of things at the very, very beginning. You don't know what's going to make it and what won't," said Tien-Spalding, who gave a presentation about the future of [facial recognition technology](#), titled "The Good, the Bad & the Ugly," on Tuesday.

Rodrigo Martinez, life sciences chief strategist at the design firm IDEO, was part of a Sunday panel about the future of wearable technology called "The Connected Body - Can We Get Value from Wearables?"

The problem, he said, is that the conversations about wearables are being driven by hardware and software rather than the motivations, needs and inspirations of the humans who use them.

"Forget about technology," he said. "What are the things that matter to an individual - and then you design around that."

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