

At The Gadget Show: Curved phones, smarter homes

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A man photographs the LG G Flex 2 during a media preview before CES International Sunday, Jan. 4, 2015, in Las Vegas. The phone has a curved screen, as the name implies.(AP Photo/John Locher)

Would-be novelists rejoice! No need to write your masterpiece with finger taps, Lenovo is launching AnyPen, which lets you write on a tablet with any ordinary pen or pencil. Elsewhere, LG unveiled a new curved smartphone at CES. The International CES show in Las Vegas this week

isn't typically a major forum for mobile products, as many manufacturers wait a month or two for the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona. But it's hard to separate mobile from other technologies these days.

That's underscored as everyday products such as cars and home appliances get Internet connectivity. Consequently, many manufacturers promoted their mobile products and smart-home developments alongside new televisions and other traditional consumer electronics. Here are the highlights of those announcements Monday.

WRITE ME:

Sometimes, it's easier to write or draw something than to type. Some tablets including Microsoft's Surface and Samsung's Note series come with styluses to do just that, but that means having an extra item to carry around and potentially lose.

Now you can write on a tablet screen with just an ordinary pen or pencil. Lenovo is introducing a technology called AnyPen in its new 8-inch Yoga Tablet 2. Lenovo says the pen or pencil will even make touchscreen navigation easier than using a finger.

The tablet is built to withstand normal pressure, but don't press too hard, or you might scratch the surface.

ALL IN THE SCREENS:

LG's new G Flex 2 has a slightly curved screen, as the name implies. LG

says that makes phones easier to hold and the display easier to read. Even more notable is the fact that LG is also making the Flex 2 smaller than its predecessor, countering a trend toward bigger and bigger phones.



A man photographs two stacked LG G Flex 2 smartphones during a media preview before CES International Sunday, Jan. 4, 2015, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)

LG says it got complaints that the previous, 6-inch version felt too big. The new one will be just 5.5 inches, which LG considers the "sweet spot" for smartphones. That's the same screen size as Apple's new iPhone 6 Plus, though it's actually slightly shorter when placed side by side.

LG is also making the back of its new phone "scratch-proof" by adding self-healing properties. Scratch or nick it under normal use, and the

mark disappears in seconds. The screen itself isn't scratchproof, but LG says it's more durable than usual with a special chemical layer applied to Corning's Gorilla Glass.

The Flex 2 has improved screen resolution over the original Flex, at 1080p high definition, though that's still behind LG's G3 in sharpness. The Flex 2 also introduces some selfie features and a way to quickly check the time and notifications without turning the entire screen on.

Curved-screen phones remain a niche product, and LG doesn't expect to ship as many Flex 2 phones as its flat G3 smartphone. A price hasn't been determined, but it's expected to be more than the G3 and other high-end phones, which typically cost \$600 to \$700 without a two-year contract.

Meanwhile, Sharp plans to release a 5-inch frameless phone—the screen goes right to the edge. It actually uses an optical-lens trick to make the front panel appear to extend to the edge. Magic or not, the trick keeps the overall phone smaller.



The LG G Flex 2 smartphone is displayed during a media preview before CES International Sunday, Jan. 4, 2015, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)

LET'S ALL GET ALONG:

Many of the smart-home products out so far haven't been that smart in the sense they communicate only with their own app and products from the same manufacturer. That's starting to change.

AT&T, for instance, said its Digital Life home-security and automation system will soon work with products from Samsung, Qualcomm, LG and Lutron. AT&T's app, for instance, will be able to control Lutron window shades and Samsung's security cameras, while consumers will be able to see on the LG TV that someone is at the door.



The LG G Flex 2 during a media preview before CES International Sunday, Jan. 4, 2015, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)

AT&T officials say that such collaborations are needed to drive greater adoption.

Other companies are using CES to showcase compatibility with Google's Nest smart thermostat and Apple's HomeKit—two of the emerging hubs for controlling the smart home. That will allow a new Whirlpool dryer to run slower and save energy, for instance, when Nest senses that no one's home.

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