

Wearables fight back as Apple Watch raises bar

June 3 2015, by Laura Mannering



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New kids on the block at Taiwan's Computex tech fair insisted that style

and simplicity were more important than myriad features, in the face of Apple's intimidating offering.

Apple's iPhone-compatible smart watch enables wearers to answer calls, check emails and access apps without taking their phones out of their pockets.

It also tracks fitness, plays music, offers customisable watch faces and comes in different colours and styles.

"Within consumer technology, smart watches are the biggest new category since tablets," said Daniel Matte, US-based analyst for research firm Canalys.

"The Apple Watch has very much defined the category and set the benchmark for other vendors to follow."

Canalys has forecast 20 million Apple Watch shipments for 2015.

"Vendors other than Apple are improving their designs to be more fashionable and of higher quality, but the Apple Watch still has a significant design advantage," said Matte.

A host of smart watches are on the market from major players including Samsung, Sony, LG and Motorola, with Taiwan's Asus launching its new ZenWatch 2 Android Wear watch at Computex.

But lesser-known names are also taking their cue from Apple and attempting to forge their own direction.

"The Apple Watch is free advertising for less famous brands like us, because it makes more people interested in [smart watches](#)," said Christophe Arathoon of US-based watch-brand Omate, which launched

its first smart watch in 2013, crowdfunded by Kickstarter.



Journalists take photos of smart watches made by Taiwan's ASUSTeK Computer during the Computex trade show in Taipei, June 2, 2015

Its watches are fashion-focused, says Arathoon, with the latest "Racer" a rugged sporty model in black, white, grey and red.

It links to iOS and Android phones, with wearers able to choose which notifications they receive. It also includes a music player and pedometer.

"Apple Watches are a good thing but they are too complicated," said Arathoon.

"We have simplified our watches and made them fashionable and affordable."

The Racer costs US\$149, less than half the price of the cheapest Apple Watch model.

'Zero features'

Taiwanese smart watch "Noodoe" also trades off its simplicity—with its founder boasting it has "zero features".

The simple black band is billed as the "opposite of Apple Watch" but promises to help wearers channel their self-expression as they can copy their own hand-drawn images onto its monochrome watch face via a camera app.

Due to launch later this year for less than \$100, it links to smart phones for notifications but has no fitness tracker.



A man shows off a Chinese-made copy of the Apple Watch in Huaqiangbei Commercial Street in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen, April 24, 2015

"Most wearables of the last two years are more and more feature-centric," said founder John Wang, a former HTC executive.

"What we are trying to do is to recognise that wristwear has always been about self-expression.

"In a way, Noodoe is much closer to Swatch than to most of the wearables on the market today."

Other wearables on show at Computex ranged from mind-reading headsets to rings that might save your life.

Silicon Valley's Neurosky headsets—which use EEG sensors to read

brain activity—are already on the market and will be used in new Star Wars game The Force Trainer II, released in September, in which wearers can imagine and control a hologram.



A visitor looks at smart watches designed by Taiwan's Oaxis during the Computex trade show in Taipei, June 2, 2015

A less obtrusive wearable from Taiwan, the Keydex NFC Ring—a ceramic ring which stores data—introduced its new "SOS" model, which stores the wearer's medical information and can be accessed in an emergency with the tap of a smart phone.

And homegrown firm ChipSip showed the latest version of its smart glasses, which are being used in art galleries in Taiwan and Europe.

Wearers look at a painting and, through image recognition, explanatory

text will appear in the glass.

The glasses can also be hooked up to headphones so wearers can watch and listen to movies and videos.

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