

## At CES, PCs relegated to sidelines

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To experience a world empty of PCs, walk around the flashy displays of the latest and greatest technology at CES.

Smartphones and their accessories are ubiquitous. So are Internet-connected devices of all sorts, from televisions to watches and stoves, even socks and shoes. Automakers are out in force.

For decades, personal computers have been the focal point of human interaction with machines. But at the 2016 edition of this major consumer-electronics show, other than some sleek models sporting Intel's latest processor, they've been pretty much relegated to the sidelines.

Increasingly small- and mobile-computing devices and advances in Internet connectivity have expanded the reach of technology well beyond a piece of hardware bound to a desk or laptop case, raising questions about the future of the PC and the industry it seeded.

"There's a tremendous amount of apathy, and a general feeling of irrelevance associated with the PC," said Steve Kleynhans, an analyst with researcher Gartner. "People just aren't really thinking about it."

The PC isn't going to disappear any time soon, analysts and industry executives say. For one, it's still a ubiquitous workplace tool.

"I'm bullish on the PC market," Jeff Clarke, vice chairman of Dell, told conference goers here. The PC maker, after years of struggling,

abandoned its public-stock listing with a buyout on 2013. The market "is far from dead," he said.

Gartner estimates 291 million PCs will sell worldwide this year. That's flat from 2015, but a relatively good year during a dismal period for the PC industry that saw smartphones and tablets eat up an increasingly large share of consumers' time.

CES, a trade show dominated by audio equipment and televisions, took up the PC-market mantle a decade ago when Comdex, a computer-focused trade show also held in Las Vegas, blinked out of existence. As an annual referendum on the state of consumer technology, CES this year doesn't have a lot of good things to say about the PC.

Brian Krzanich, chief executive of Intel, the Santa Clara, Calif., chipmaker that powers most of the world's computers, spent more than an hour of his keynote speech Tuesday evening discussing the applications for his company's products outside the plastic-and-metal frame of a computer, touting voice-activated exercise assistants and sensor-embedded clothing.

Meanwhile, top PC makers Lenovo and Dell are camped away from the main show floor.

Fellow PC titan HP doesn't have a formal presence at CES. Microsoft, which helped push the desktop device to prominence with its software, also has a subdued role.

The PC industry's effort to preserve its domain recently has centered on trying to reclaim its image from a stereotype of clunky devices that look like they belong at work.

Microsoft joined with a slate of hardware makers last year for an ad

campaign designed to tout advances in PC technology that consumers might have missed while looking at their smartphone.

This year brings the rollout of computers running on Intel's sixth-generation processor, based on an architecture dubbed Skylake.

"Every processor (over the years) has kind of promised you'd get thinner design, longer battery life, without sacrificing performance," said Kleynhans. "Skylake is kind of the first time they're delivering on all aspects of that."

The processor had its first showing with Microsoft's Surface Pro 4 tablet in October, but CES is its real coming-out party.

PC makers announced a range of new devices this week powered by the sixth-generation processor. Thin, light laptops that used to be reserved for expensive, high-end machines are suddenly resident in business-focused mainstays like Lenovo's ThinkPad and Dell's Latitude lineup.

For Microsoft, the stakes are high. The company is counting on PC sales to fuel sales of both its Windows 10 operating system and Office suite.

The Seattle-area company, which has a small presence in smartphones and other areas of electronics, relies on such PC-related sales for most of its profit.

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