

Battle for digital life takes center stage at CES tech show

January 10 2016, by Rob Lever, Glenn Chapman, Sophie Estienne



An attendee walks by a video display at the Samsung booth at CES 2016 on January 6, 2016 in Las Vegas, Nevada

The battle to be at the center of your digital life has taken on a new dimension amid a proliferation of connected devices.

After smartphone wars, browser wars and platform wars, a fight is on to be the "hub" which connects the millions of connected objects from light bulbs to wearable to washing machines.

At the Consumer Electronics Show which concluded Saturday, the contenders included robots, televisions, speaker hubs and even wearable trackers powered by [artificial intelligence](#). And the connected car raced into the mix.

Exhibitors ranging from startups to big [consumer electronics](#) giants are vying to be the control center for the vast array of Internet of things in your home, car, and elsewhere.

South Korea's LG unveiled its Smart ThinQ home hub, a speaker that lets a user communicate with and get alerts from connected appliances, security systems and even talk to cars.

This allows the [smart home](#) and connected car to communicate with each other. And it can connect with older appliances with attachable sensors.

LG calls this "the future of the smart home" and uses an open platform that can connect with devices using Google Nest, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi and more.



A BMW Connected Mirror shows route warnings and reminders at the 2016 Consumer Electronics Show on January 8, 2016 in Las Vegas, Nevada

Samsung announced its TVs will act as command centers in smart homes by incorporating technology from Silicon Valley start-up SmartThings, which Samsung bought in 2014, allowing them to control devices synched to the platform.

"You can have a smart home basically for free as a starting point; it is pretty amazing," SmartThings founder and chief Alexander Hawkinson told AFP.

Chinese electronics giant Haier unveiled its Ubot [personal assistant](#) robot—a near-humanoid gadget which can control home appliances.

"He's like a personal assistant who can turn on your TV and all your appliances, and when you're not home he helps with surveillance," said Haier's Kristen Smith.



Newly unveiled Haier Ubot household robots at the 2016 Consumer Electronics Show on January 8, 2016 in Las Vegas, Nevada

"The ultimate goal is to simplify your life, to take care of the things you worry about."

Respond and entertain

Segway, which is owned by China's Ninebot, unveiled a personal transporter which morphs into a cute robotic personal assistant.

The robot, made in collaboration with Intel and China's Xiaomi, is open to developers which could add on applications for security, entertainment or other activities.



Alpha 2, a humanoid robot from China's UBTech, is shown at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas on January 7, 2016

After riding it, the device sprouts arms and can navigate and interact with users with its sensors and artificial intelligence. It is expected to be commercialized later this year.

More whimsical, Chinese startup UBTech Robotics unveiled Alpha 2, a prototype personal assistant humanoid which can respond and entertain.

"You can talk to him and he will answer. He can give you the weather," said UBTech's Jessica Pan.

"And he is very lifelike. He has 20 joints and can move like humans, he can dance and show you a yoga pose."



Vivint smart home system products at CES 2016 on January 7, 2016 in Las Vegas, Nevada

These new contenders face a tough battle against entrenched companies like Google and Apple—not part of the floor exhibitors at CES—which each have their own artificial intelligence assistants as well as ecosystems for connected homes and wearables.

And Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg said ahead of the show that he wants to build a robot butler "like Jarvis in 'Iron Man'" which can manage

household tasks.

While Zuckerberg and Facebook were not exhibiting at CES, his comments and the innovations at the show underscore the progress being made in computing and artificial intelligence which can unleash new innovations.



Attendees look at Volkswagen's BUDD-e, a long distance electric vehicle, displayed during a press event at CES 2016 in Las Vegas, Nevada

Wearable Siri

Israeli-based startup OrCam for example unveiled a wearable artificial intelligence clip-on camera which "acts like a personal assistant like Siri or Cortana, but with eyes and ears," says OrCam marketing chief Eliav Rodman.

The device "can provide a real-time profile of people as they walk up to you during a conference, displaying their details on your smartphone or watch; it can track your eating habits," says OrCam co-founder Amnon Shashua.

"It can even monitor the facial expressions of people you meet and topics of discussion and let you know in hindsight the quality of interaction you have with friends and family."



Attendee Wei Rongjie wears a working prototype of his HoloSeer AR/VR all-in-one augmented reality and virtual reality headset on January 6, 2016 at the 2016 CES

Carmakers don't want to be left out either.

Ford for example unveiled an alliance at CES with US online giant Amazon aimed at allowing people to connect their cars into "smart home" networks.

The tie-up will enable drivers to communicate with the hub and, for example, ask if their garage door is open, or request an appointment with their mechanic.

Other carmakers including BMW and Volkswagen showed systems which connect not only to a smartphone but to home networks, enabling users to tap smart appliances or garage door openers, for example.

Wild West

These new systems offer new connecting options but could create confusion because of multiple technical standards.

"It almost forces you to get things within the same brand in order to match up," said Ron Montoya at the auto research firm Edmunds.com.

Roger Kay, analyst at Endpoint Technologies Associates, agreed, saying that There is no grand architecture, so everyone is making a land grab. Everyone wants to be the hub."

Kay said that until players such as Apple, Google and Microsoft agree on open standards, "it going to be difficult for this market to move forward."

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