

The latest in gadgets: Making apps and robots that think (Update)

January 6 2016

The latest developments surrounding the consumer-electronics show in Las Vegas known as CES (all times local):

6:15 p.m.

IBM CEO Virginia Rometty says the future of gadgets is not just connectivity, but the ability to analyze and "think."

While IBM isn't known for consumer technology, Rometty argued that her company's "Watson" artificial brain can enhance a variety of consumer products. In a talk Wednesday at the CES gadget show, she announced new partnerships with three companies that will use Watson, the IBM "cognitive computing" system that ran the table on Jeopardy a few years back.

Under Armour, the athletic apparel maker, is releasing a fitness app that uses Watson to analyze a users' activity, weight and other data to make personalized recommendations for diet and exercise. Medtronic, which makes medical equipment, has developed an app that uses Watson to help diabetics track their blood sugar level, diet and other factors to warn them of impending hypoglycemic events up to three hours in advance.

Rometty also introduced a humanoid made by Japan's SoftBank that uses Watson's intelligence to work as a mobile concierge in banks and stores. The robot uses voice recognition and synthesis to answer questions and recommend products based on the data it collects from customers.

— Brandon Bailey, AP Technology Writer, San Francisco

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5:00 p.m.

In an event as large and sprawling as CES, sometimes it takes star power to attract attention—the type of star power that Las Vegas and Hollywood understand so well.

Repeat celebrity CES attendees include former basketball star Shaquille O'Neal, comedian and television host Nick Cannon and radio/TV personality Ryan Seacrest. Shaq is here for Monster, the audio equipment maker; Seacrest has represented iHeartRadio and his own mobile keyboard company in the past. This year, both he and Nick Cannon, who was the event's "entertainment matters ambassador" last year, are leading sessions on tech.

Fitness trackers, of course, demand solid athletic endorsements, which is why sports stars such as football quarterback Tony Romo, Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps and baseball hall of famer Cal Ripken Jr. are making booth appearances. All three are representing Under Armour, which announced a new fitness tracker Tuesday.

Most CES celebrity appearances anymore are reserved for evening performances or parties sponsored by various brands.

Hip-hop artist Fetty Wap is featured at a Google cocktail party Wednesday. Chris Brown, a resident performer at Drai's nightclub on the Las Vegas Strip who made news in the New Year when a woman accused him of battery, is the centerpiece of iHeartMedia's annual CES party on Thursday. He's denied any wrongdoing.

— Kimberly Pierceall, AP Writer, Las Vegas

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4:30 p.m.

The automotive presence at the CES gadget show in Las Vegas has grown so large that the show's organizers are bragging about supplanting Detroit.

"You could say we've shifted the center of gravity from Detroit to Las Vegas this week," Gary Shapiro, CEO and president of the Consumer Technology Association, said Wednesday at the introduction of Chevrolet's new all-electric Bolt compact car.

Companies that make auto electronics such as computers, cameras, laser sensors and maps are ubiquitous at the Las Vegas show as the march toward autonomous cars gains speed. But they're largely absent from the big Detroit auto show that opens next week.

Big automakers such as Ford and General Motors are now saving technology announcements for CES, leaving the Detroit show for new product introductions.

But those are down this year to 45, 10 fewer than last year.

— Tom Krisher, AP Auto Writer, Las Vegas

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4:00 p.m.

Don't forget to recharge your coffee mug.

Some people slurp their coffee while it's piping hot, others warm their hands with it till it cools to a drinkable temperature. A smart mug called Ember aims to keep it at the perfect temperature for two hours using a rechargeable battery.

A touch sensitive logo indicates the temperature at which your java is resting, while turning the ring at the bottom lets you adjust that up or down. Apparently, most people enjoy their cup of joe at about 135 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit. A pop-up lid means you can drink from any direction without searching for the opening.

Pre-orders for the Ember cost \$129 and delivery is expected in May.

— Ryan Nakashima, AP Business Writer, Las Vegas

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3:30 p.m.

General Motors executives say the new Chevrolet Bolt electric car was designed so it can handle a future filled with cameras, sensors and supercomputers on the way toward autonomous driving.

"It is an upgradable platform for new technology," CEO Mary Barra said Wednesday as she introduced the car's production version, which boasts a 200-mile battery range, at the CES gadget show.

The five-passenger Bolt, priced about \$37,500 excluding a \$7,500 federal tax credit, has a 10.2-inch touch screen and can be recharged to 80 percent of its battery capacity in an hour on a 240-volt charger, she said. It will go on sale late this year as a 2017 model.

The Bolt should help GM in its alliance to provide cars and eventually

self-driving vehicles to ride-sharing service Lyft. The company announced a \$500 million investment in Lyft on Monday.

GM says the Bolt's higher driving range, which competes with upstart Tesla Motors at a lower price, should draw buyers even with low gas prices. Research has shown that limited range is a big barrier to many drivers, the company said. "This takes that excuse away," said GM product development chief Mark Reuss.

— Tom Krisher, AP Auto Writer, Las Vegas

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3:00 p.m.

Celebrities with new Netflix shows owe much of their current success to technology, and as a result are, well, big fans of Netflix. But they're a bit warier about the rest of the gadget world.

Krysten Ritter, who stars in the Netflix series "Jessica Jones," has a few ideas for new gadgets: a device that deactivates phones inside cars, and maybe a hoverboard "that doesn't blow up."

Comedian Chelsea Handler, meanwhile, says she runs her house from her iPad, but that if she tries to turn on the TV, "the microwave goes off. It's a mess." Take that, Internet of Things!

Actors Will Arnett ("Flaked") and Wagner Moura ("Narcos") are sanguine about the opportunities created by entertainment tech. Both expect TV watching to grow ever more immersive, with technologies like augmented and virtual reality putting viewers in the same room with actors.

But only up to a point. Moura says he just hopes "we're not going to be replaced by robots or anything."

— Kimberly Pierceall, AP Writer, Las Vegas

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2:30 p.m.

They aren't Marty McFly's self-lacing sneakers from "Back to the Future," but Digitsole's shoes promise to tighten and loosen with a touch of a smartphone app.

The French company says the pair on display at this week's CES gadget show in Las Vegas will sell for \$450 starting around October.

Another French company says it has solved the problem of matching one's shoes to one's outfit.

Shoe retailer Eram, teamed up with tech firm BlueGriot to invent Choose, a shoe that the company says changes colors based on photos a person snaps—including images taken of a person's other attire.

— Kimberly Pierceall, AP Writer, Las Vegas

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2:00 p.m.

Sony unveiled a prototype TV capable of showing 4K programming with a brightness level it claims is four times as bright as its competitors.

Using a technology it called Backlight Master Drive, the company said

its prototype TV could emit 4,000 nits of brightness, which is four times as high as the 1,000 nits boasted by competitors LG and Samsung on their liquid crystal display TVs. It's about 10 times brighter than most sets today.

The company said the technology was unique to Sony. It also said it would launch an app called Ultra so users could buy and stream 4K movies that were also encoded for a new standard called high dynamic range (HDR). Titles to be made available include Sony Pictures films like "Elysium," "Chappie" and "Fury."

Sony also showed off a flagship TV it calls the X93D it will launch later this year to show 4K HDR movies and shows. It said it would brand all its new TVs that are capable of playing the new format with the "4K HDR" label, not the "Ultra HD Premium" label that is sanctioned by the UHD Alliance, a group of electronics makers and studios of which Sony is a member.

— Ryan Nakashima, AP Business Writer, Las Vegas

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1:45 p.m.

The government says companies shouldn't use "big data" to discriminate.

The Federal Trade Commission on Wednesday released a report with recommendations on how companies should use big data, or huge sets of information, when they incorporate it into decisions like hiring or lending. Chairwoman Edith Ramirez said during a talk at CES that it's important for companies to realize that using such data sets could exclude or hurt minorities.

The FTC's recommendations are not binding on businesses, but if they aren't followed, the FTC may scrutinize their practices.

The agency also says it will continue monitoring to see if companies' practices violate existing laws and "bring enforcement actions where appropriate."

— Tali Arbel, AP Technology Writer, New York

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1:30 p.m.

For one week in Las Vegas, the likes of Samsung, Snapchat and a mobile game called Boom Beach are as visible as Britney, Cirque du Soleil and Donny and Marie.

You can't walk 10 paces down the Strip without buses telling you how to send digital cash, the monorail swooshing by leaving traces of cartoonish troops and tanks in its wake, or the walls of the city's monument-sized casino-hotels informing your choice of instant-messaging app.

Few are as omnipresent as ads for Boom Beach. As early as New Year's Eve, massive animated ads for the combat-strategy game were playing on rotation across the side of Planet Hollywood.

A representative for the company that owns the game, Supercell, didn't answer an emailed question asking how much the company spent on the CES-week promotions, saying the company's executives had been inundated with interest and couldn't be reached.

— Kimberly Pierceall, AP Writer, Las Vegas

1:00 p.m.

A breathalyzer for fat-burning? The folks at Seattle-based Levl claim to have come up with just that.

Blow into a small container for about five seconds then put it in a sensor-laden machine, and out pops a report that purports to tell you how much acetone you're producing. A number around 4 on a 5-point scale suggests you're incinerating the lipids. Below that and you might want to cut back on the carbs and get some exercise.

A few days of changed behavior can make a difference, the company says. The app is designed to encourage users who can manage a long streak of fat-burning; it estimates how many calories they'll burn in fat per day. But there's one big gotcha: drinking alcohol could throw off the reading and make it seem like you're burning more fat than you are.

The company aims to sell the product this year but hasn't determined a price.

— Ryan Nakashima, AP Business Writer, Las Vegas

12:30 p.m.

The Federal Aviation Administration says it has developed a smartphone app to show drone operators where it's OK to fly and what areas are off limits.

FAA Administrator Michael Huerta also announced at a news

conference at the CES gadget show in Las Vegas that by early Wednesday, 181,061 operators had registered their drones as new rules require.

The FAA launched online registration Dec. 21. Officials say they hope registration will help them trace drones caught flying too close to manned aircraft or over crowds, and create a "culture of accountability."

The smartphone app, B4UFLY, uses maps that identify the operator's current location and restricted areas in a radius around the operator. It's available now for Apple devices from the App Store and for Android devices from the Google Play Store.

— Joan Lowy, AP Writer, Washington

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12:15 p.m.

Kids tossing around a football probably hope to throw a perfect spiral in a big game one day. Technology is about to help them out.

Sports equipment maker Wilson is preparing to release this year a smart football equipped with accelerometers that measures stats like spiral efficiency, spin rate, speed and distance. It can even tell if it was caught or dropped.

Developed by a trained aerospace engineer, the ball knows to wake up its Bluetooth transmitter with a specific snap motion, says Bob Thurman, Wilson's vice president of innovation. And because it can ignore the toss back by the receiver, a future Hall of Famer can drive down the field under time pressure without actually going anywhere. Talk about fantasy football.

Wilson is already selling a smart basketball for \$199 that can tell whether you've swished or missed and keeps track of your lifetime stats. It wakes up by being spun in the air. Thurman says the ball is 97 percent accurate at reading misses or makes. That's probably better than your free throw percentage.

— Ryan Nakashima, AP Business Writer, Las Vegas

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11:30 a.m.

Chinese drone maker Ehang Inc. is unveiling what it calls the world's first drone capable of carrying a human passenger.

Ehang's booth in the Las Vegas Convention Center features a prototype of the Ehang 184—covered with a cloth for a planned noon unveiling. In the meantime, the company played a video of the vehicle flying over cityscapes. It looks like a small helicopter but with four doubled propellers spinning parallel to the ground like other drones.

According to the company, the electric-powered drone can carry up to 100 kilograms of weight (220 pounds) and fly for 23 minutes at sea level. With propellers folded up, it's designed to fit in a single parking spot. The cabin fits one person and a small backpack and even has air conditioning and a reading light, Ehang said.

Some of the company's claims border on the heroic. The company said the drone can be fully charged in 2 hours, adding that after setting a flight plan, passengers only need to give two commands, "take off" and "land," each controlled by a single click.

U.S. authorities are just starting to lay out guidelines for drone use, and a

human-passenger drone seems certain to face strict scrutiny.

— Ryan Nakashima, AP Technology Writer, Las Vegas

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11:15 a.m.

The beginning of life itself? Now there's an app for that.

Pregnancy-test maker First Response is introducing a new Bluetooth-enabled stick that still requires nature's call. But it'll also distract a would-be mom with in-app videos or quizzes from BuzzFeed while she waits three minutes before she gets her answer.

Pregnancy tests have evolved rapidly from sticks with one or two lines, to digital readouts that say "yes" or "no," to tests that can detect a likely pregnancy several days before a missed period. Competitor Clear Blue also offers a digital test that it says can estimate the number of weeks a woman has been pregnant prior to taking the tests.

Having the test talk to your phone may be a new development. The app is designed to stick around as a resource for expectant mothers; it offers a calendar aid for calculating the likely due date and assistance for reaching out to a doctor and for letting others in on the news via texts and email.

First Response says the tests will ship to stores in the spring and should cost \$14.99 or \$21.99 depending on where they're sold. That's a bit more than the company's other digital and analog versions that offer two for \$9.99 or \$14.99.

— Kimberly Pierceall, AP Writer, Las Vegas

10:30 a.m.

Netflix subscribers watched 12 billion hours of programming on the Internet video service during the final three months of 2015, a nearly 50 percent increase from the previous year.

CEO Reed Hastings disclosed the growth during a Wednesday presentation in Las Vegas at CES, a high-profile showcase for gadgets and technology services.

Netflix entered the fourth quarter with 69 million subscribers compared to the previous year's 53 million, a group that watched 8.25 billion hours of programming. That means Netflix subscribers watched a weekly average of 13 hours of programming in the 2015 period versus 12 hours in 2014.

The company's periodic revelations about the behavior of its subscribers are one of the few ways outsiders can gauge the popularity of its series and movies.

Netflix's stock rose \$2.40 to \$110.07 in early afternoon trading.

— Michael Liedtke, AP Technology Writer, San Francisco

10:00 a.m.

The much-hyped Oculus Rift virtual reality headset will cost \$599 and ship to 20 countries beginning on March 28, the company said Wednesday.

Bundles that include a powerful computer needed to use the device will be available for pre-order in February starting at \$1499.

The pricing details and shipping information had been long awaited. Oculus, which Facebook bought in 2014 for \$2 billion, began accepting pre-orders for the device at 11 a.m. E.T. on Wednesday.

It will also be available in some undisclosed retail locations starting in April.

The Rift comes with a built-in headphones and mic, sensor and an Xbox One controller. It also comes with a remote to help navigate virtual worlds.

PiperJaffray analyst Gene Munster said the cost of the Rift is higher than the \$449 he expected, but said he still expects a few hundred thousand units to sell during 2016.

— Mae Anderson, AP Technology Writer, New York

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8:15 a.m.

The CES gadget show, which officially opens at 10:00 a.m. today in Las Vegas, has begun catering more heavily to startups hoping to break through the noise. The sprawling show has sections for wearable fitness gadgets, drones, autonomous vehicles, education, virtual reality, video games, robots, 3-D printers and smart homes.

The startups will help fill a gap left by many of technology's biggest names, who have been no-shows for some time. That roster includes Apple Inc., which has skipped the show since the 1990s, Microsoft

Corp., which abandoned its keynote slot after 2012, Google's parent company Alphabet Inc. and Amazon.com Inc.

The Consumer Technology Association that runs CES is aiming for attendance this year at or below last year's record 176,000.

Shawn DuBravac, the CTA's chief economist, argues the show's maturity is a good thing because its focus has shifted over two decades from the "technologically possible" to the "technologically meaningful." In other words, it's no longer about a robot that can walk up steps. It's about robots that actually mow your lawn.

CES is first and foremost a venue for promoting the tech industry, and sometimes the hype falls flat. 3-D screen technology unveiled at CES in 2010 went from the next big thing to a mostly unused feature. Netbooks introduced in 2009 took a back seat to the iPad released a year later. And concepts such as the smart home have taken a really long time to materialize.

— Ryan Nakashima, AP Technology Writer, Las Vegas

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Citation: The latest in gadgets: Making apps and robots that think (Update) (2016, January 6) retrieved 1 April 2023 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-01-startups-limelight-ces-gadget.html>

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