

Top trends at IFA 2017

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Could 2017 be smartwatches' turn to be a hit with the general public after years being seen as a gimmick?

With just a few months to go until the high-tech spending bonanza of the Christmas season, Berlin's IFA trade fair is the place to spot the trends that will mark high streets this year.

Here are a few of them:

Ultra-HD TVs

IFA's aisles are wallpapered with OLED screens this year. The technology dispenses with a backlight as each pixel illuminates itself—making for a very sharp image with strong contrasts, even in moving images. And the ultra-thin displays can be made transparent or even flexible.

The images buyers will be screening are also getting an upgrade, as the ultra-high-definition 4K standard becomes more widespread with sets starting at around 2,000 euros (\$2,370). More video is being filmed in the high-resolution format that makes owning such a display worthwhile, with manufacturers betting public interest will follow.

And more and more TVs boast connections to internet video-on-demand services or applications, like Sharp's latest models with an Android interface.

Mobiles get chatty

Manufacturers are still vying to cram as much screen as possible into their smartphones, like LG's LGV30 with its "borderless" 5.7-inch display.

But the action can be found in the guts of the devices, where firms are racing to offer the most intelligent voice-activated digital assistants alongside typical upgrades to storage space or cameras.

This chatty artificial intelligence looks set to implant smartphones even more deeply into daily life, controlling connected gadgets around the home.

Samsung said it would strengthen its work with the Open Connectivity Foundation, aiming to help its voice assistant Bixby to talk more easily to other manufacturers' products. And Chinese giant Huawei said it would join the vocal race with a chip known as Kirin to be built into upcoming smartphones.

Second wind for smart watches

Could 2017 be smartwatches' turn to be a hit with the general public after years being seen as a gimmick? Consultancy Gartner expects more the 67 million of them to be sold worldwide this year, more than doubling the 30 million shifted in 2015.

At IFA, makers of high-tech "wearables" are vaunting their water resistance to appeal to fitness fanatics.

Fitbit is offering a large-faced watch with a plastic strap that's waterproof up to 50 metres, while Samsung tempts potential buyers of its Gear Fit Pro 2 with an offline version of Spotify aimed at runners. The business version can be used to control Powerpoint presentations.

Not neglecting accessories to the accessories, the Korean firm also has colourful earbud headphones with simple touch controls.

AI butlers share the load

This year has seen tech titans Google and Amazon join the battle over intelligent personal assistants—voice-controlled AI helpers built into speakers that sit in the user's home, organising online shopping or domestic chores.

And the IFA is a showcase for connected home devices that allow people

to control appliances and manage energy usage via a smartphone or tablet.

Tying into Amazon's Alexa assistant, Siemens' "home connect" offers interior views of the fridge at home, one-hour delivery of needed groceries, or the ability to turn on the oven from afar—all from the driver's seat of the user's car.

Once dinner guests are gone and the crockery is cleared away, a scanner can judge how dirty the tablecloth is and programme a custom wash into the washing machine.

"Robots are arriving in your house, and they're going to know a lot about you," joked IFA co-organiser Roland Stehle.

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