

Google to show off smart home gadgets, wearables

25 June 2014, by Barbara Ortutay



A Google employee helps direct people as they register for Google I/O 2014 in San Francisco, Tuesday, June 24, 2014. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

Google is expected to reveal an Android update, smart home devices and other innovations at its two-day developer conference, beginning Wednesday in San Francisco.

As Google's Android operating system stretches into cars, homes and smartwatches, this year's annual confab will expand on its usual focus on smartphones and tablets.

Pacific Crest analyst Evan Wilson believes Google will unveil a new version of its Android operating system—possibly called Lollipop—with a "heavy focus" on extensions for smartwatches and smart home devices.

"We think Google will directly counter Apple's recent announcements of health products (Apple HealthKit) and home automation (Apple HomeKit)," Wilson wrote in a note to investors.

Google's I/O event—a rally of sorts designed to get developers excited about creating apps and

devices for Google's ecosystem—comes at a time of transition for the company, which makes most of its money from advertising thanks to its status as the world's leader in online search. The company is trying to adjust to an ongoing shift to smartphones and tablet computers from desktop and laptop PCs. Though mobile advertising is growing rapidly, advertising aimed at PC users still generates more money.

At the same time, Google is angling to stay at the forefront of innovation by taking gambles on new, sometimes unproven technologies that take years to pay off—if at all. Driverless cars, Google Glass, smartwatches and thinking thermostats are just some of its more far-off bets.



Cecilia Abadie, founder of 33 Labs, uses a pair of Google Glass as she registers for Google I/O 2014 at the Moscone Center in San Francisco, Tuesday, June 24, 2014. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

On the home front, Google's Nest Labs—which makes network-connected thermostats and smoke detectors—announced earlier this week that it has created a program that allows outside developers,

from tiny startups to large companies such as Whirlpool and Mercedes-Benz, to fashion software and "new experiences" for its products.

Integration with Mercedes-Benz, for example, might mean that a car can notify a Nest thermostat when it's getting close to home, so the device can have the home's temperature adjusted to the driver's liking before he or she arrives.

Nest's founder, Tony Fadell, is an Apple veteran who helped design the iPod and the iPhone. Google bought the company earlier this year for \$3.2 billion.

Opening the Nest platform to outside developers will allow Google to move into the emerging market for connected, smart home devices. Experts expect that this so-called "Internet of Things" phenomenon will change the way people use technology in much the same way that smartphones have changed life since the introduction of Apple's iPhone seven years ago.

Google is also likely to unveil some advances in wearable technology. In March, Google released "Android Wear," a version of its operating system tailored to computerized wristwatches and other wearable devices. Although there are already several smartwatches on the market, the devices are more popular with gadget geeks and fitness fanatics than regular consumers. But Google could help change that with Android Wear. Android, after all, is already the world's most popular smartphone operating system.

Google may also have news about Glass, including when the company might launch a new and perhaps less expensive version of the \$1,500 Internet-connected eyewear. Google will likely have to lower the price if it wants Glass to reach a broader audience. But that's just one hurdle. Convincing people that the gadget useful, rather than creepy, is another one.

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