

CES 2021 in Las Vegas is cancelled; event moves online

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The Consumer Electronics Show (CES) took place just before the coronavirus hit in early 2020, but that won't be the case in 2021. Today, the show's organizer, the Consumer Technology Association (CTA), announced that CES 2021 in Las Vegas is canceled. The show will become an online-only event.

CES 2021 was scheduled to take place in early January, but with the terrible pandemic response in the US, the CTA doesn't think the country will be ready to host international events by next year. CTA president and CEO Gary Shapiro sent out an email with the now all-too-familiar COVID cancellation language. "Amid the pandemic and growing global health concerns about the spread of COVID-19," Shapiro wrote, "it's just not possible to safely convene tens of thousands of people in Las Vegas in early January 2021 to meet and do business in person."

Shapiro said CES 2021 is "shifting to an all-digital platform for 2021" and offering "a unique experience that helps our exhibitors connect with existing and new audiences." On its website, the CTA claims it will offer a rough online equivalent to the three major pillars of CES: "Keynotes and conferences," "Product showcases," and "Meetings and

networking.”

CES started in 1967, in a time before the Internet communication revolution, and today it regularly pulls in 150,000+ attendees from around the world. As a source of tech news, CES has been on the decline in recent years, with many major vendors realizing they can just hold their own events and not share the spotlight with anyone. While whatever big announcements that were planned can easily be handled over the Internet, what will be much harder to replace digitally are the hundreds of business deals that happen at CES between the thousands of companies that attend. A single CES venue can have row after row of booths from hundreds of smaller, unknown companies hocking their wares and hoping to score a major deal with a bigger company. Replicating that online would be difficult.

In 2020, the pandemic has canceled just about every major in-person event and trade show, often replacing it with some online equivalent. Mobile World Congress, Google I/O, WWDC, the Geneva International Motor Show, E3, F8, PAX East, the Game Developer’s Conference, and many other conventions have all shut down due to safety concerns.

CTA vows to return to Las Vegas in 2022, saying that CES will combine “the best elements of a physical and digital show.”

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