Trends Observed at This Year’s CES and How Marketers Can Learn From Them

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As CES wraps up another year of hustle and bustle, it is clear that technology has not only impacted every aspect of our daily lives, but it is also expanding consumer access points beyond traditional media channels for brands to experiment and innovate around.

While some have lamented that CES 2020 offered nothing particularly new to see, a deeper look reveals some hidden trends emerging from the show floor this year that should intrigue brands and marketers alike.

The streaming wars expand beyond TV

The launch of Disney+ and Apple TV+ last fall marked the beginning of a new era for the streaming wars, and its escalation reverberated throughout CES.

Quibi, the upcoming short-form video subscription service, took the keynote stage on Wednesday to make a case for their mobile-native content strategy and video platform. For brands looking to advertising on Quibi, which has sold out its first year of ad inventory, it would be smart to wait and see if Quibi can overcome the adoption hurdle of convincing users to pay $5-$8 a month for premium short-form video, which has so far been widely available for free on platforms like YouTube and TikTok.

In this post-peak TV world, cross-category collaboration can

help content stand out. For example, the team behind Avatar collaborated with Mercedes-Benz to develop a futuristic concept vehicle that embodies the unique aesthetics and eco-conscious message of the movie. The resulting earned media likely directed some Disney+ subscribers to rewatch the movie for the first time in a decade.

The streaming wars are also expanding into non-traditional media channels. We found out that Amazon's Fire TV OS is being integrated into the backseat screen of BMW and FCA vehicles. Delta announced during its keynote they will be upgrading its in-flight entertainment system and will allow travelers to stream Delta-sourced content, which often includes movies before they're available for streaming, from the moment they check into a flight. By extending the content window, Delta can leverage entertainment as a loss leader to drive consideration and capture value elsewhere in its ecosystem, which is a smart strategy that stands out against the ongoing trend of airlines scaling back on in-flight entertainment.

Ambient computing enters the spotlight

Connected devices are getting smarter, and soon they will be able to handle certain things without users having to be given explicit commands. Many connected home and IoT companies at CES experimented with ambient computing, which applies computer vision and predictive analytics powered by AI to anticipate the needs of users and act accordingly. Both Panasonic and Haier demoed smart home concepts that used presence detection technology to determine who is the room and what they may be doing and adjust lighting and room temperature automatically.

Beyond the smart home, hearables (computer-powered headphones) were also well represented at CES 2020. As AirPods continue to gain popularity, expect more lower-market competitors to expand the user base for voice-enabled wireless headphones, setting the stage for audio-based ambient computing on

personal devices and potentially offering brands a new AI-driven access point.

The privacy debate gains nuance

Data privacy and protection continued to be a hot topic at CES. Compared to last year when the privacy discussion first gained momentum among panelists and attendees, this year's conversation was a little quieter yet more nuanced. Ring, maker of home security cameras, came to CES not only to talk about their new products but also to unveil their new privacy dashboard feature. Even Apple, a company that famously avoided CES, sent its privacy chief to a roundtable panel to reaffirm their commitment to protecting user privacy. Privacy is no longer a talking point. It has become an operational necessity for all companies.

The fundamental question here is not if digital advertising is to blame, but rather how our data practices need to evolve in order to ensure it provides value to consumers without exploitation and manipulation. The impending rollout of the CCPA will likely prompt other states to follow suit with similar regulations, if not one at the federal level. At CES, there seemed to be strong motivation across the industry to get a consistent and transparent privacy law in place.

Overall, CES 2020 showed us that the right solution to the unintended consequences of technology is not to swear it off altogether, but to make it more suitable for us. The same user-first principle applies to brand marketing as well. Technologies only become innovations when they are successfully applied to serve your customers and deliver better brand experiences.

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