What Marketers Should Watch for at the All-Virtual CES 2021

For the first time in the Consumer Electronics Show's (CES) 54-year history, attendees won't gather in person to kick of the calendar year with technological spectacles and innovations. But while that means no post-holidays trip to Vegas for industry professionals in tech, media, marketing and advertising doesn't mean it won't still hold value for attendees—especially given the unusual circumstances under which we're entering into 2021.

It's going to look and feel a lot different, of course. To start with, just under 2,000 exhibitors are participating in the annual trade show—less than half of the more than 4,400 exhibitors that traveled to Vegas for last year's event. As so many other events and conferences have done during the pandemic era, the Consumer Technology Association, which puts on CES, has had to rethink the conference for the Covid era.

Verizon CEO Hans Vestberg will kick off the event with an opening keynote discussing 5G—which is expected to be a major theme of the 2021 conference overall—and the opportunities it creates for access to health care and education.

Over the course of the four-day program, more than 200 sessions will feature top industry execs, brands and tech companies unveiling their latest technological feats and discussing things like how to best incorporate innovations like AI and how data privacy changes will affect advertisers.

Here are a few sessions for marketers to look out for.

How tech giants and platforms aim to build consumer trust in 2021

With big tech under scrutiny from the FTC for data privacy practices and the Department of Justice for antitrust violations, brands such as Apple, Google, Facebook and Amazon are facing more than just legal battles—they're also fighting to retain or regain the trust of their billions of users. On day three at CES 2021, Jan. 13 at 8:20 a.m. ET, chief privacy officers from Google and Twitter and Amazon's director of Amazon Trust will discuss how they're planning on building consumer trust this year.

Marketing trends that accelerated during the pandemic

While our daily lives have looked a lot different over the last year, many of the marketing trends that exploded during the Covid-19 pandemic didn't come from nowhere. Rather than completely upending trends, the year of quarantine and social distancing simply shifted many existing trends into overdrive. On Jan. 12 at 10:10 a.m. ET, The Harris Poll CEO John Gerzema will use his firm's consumer insight polls to anchor a conversation about these trends with marketers executives from brands like Mastercard, Uber Eats, Bank of America and TikTok. (Speaking of TikTok, platform superstar Addison Rae will also be at CES on Tuesday, chatting with the brand's global head of marketing Nick Tran about the "democratization" of entertainment.)

How new tech can build better marketing and reach new audiences

While the buzz around artificial intelligence and augmented reality isn't exactly new, marketers are constantly finding new and innovative ways to leverage these emerging technologies to reach consumers in new ways. During a panel on Jan. 13 at 11:40 a.m. E.T. moderated by Wired's Megan

Greenwell, top marketers from Delta and CVS will join IBM’s svp of cognitive applications, blockchain and ecosystems to discuss how these immersive technologies can help produce ads that are not only more effective, but also more socially conscious and individualized.

In a related panel on Jan. 13 at 10:15 a.m. E.T., CMOs from Snap and budget mobile carrier Visible will join a Medialink sponsored conversation on how they’re leveraging new tech to reach younger generations of consumers.

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