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William Ramsey, Partner, Neal & Harwell
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Our Take on the Consumer Electronics Show 2019

As we write, we are about 30,000 feet above the Grand Canyon. That's right, we are returning from our annual trek out to Las Vegas for the biggest technology show in the world, the Consumer Electronics Show (CES). The show takes over the Las Vegas Convention Center and much of the Strip — as geeks, like us, converge in the desert to ooh and ahh over bleeding-edge technology that is trying to break into the mainstream.

“

What makes CES so exciting for us is seeing the explosion of new consumer products that take advantage of advancing technology to improve our daily lives in and out of the office.”

The scope of this show is so massive that it is impossible to see everything, even if you stay for all four days of the mega event. This year's show had more than 180,000 in attendance and more than 4,400 companies exhibiting in 2.7 million net square feet of exhibit space. We packed our tennis shoes, extra vitamins, and Advil and plunged into the sea of geeks that swarmed Vegas.

If we had to sum up our overall impressions from the show after countless hours on the exhibit floor and thousands of steps on our Fitbit watches, we would say that the following technologies look to be the most exciting, promising and impactful for the future: 5G, autonomous driving vehicles, artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, flexible screens and TVs, gaming (we are not interested), and a massive proliferation of smart devices (most powered by Alexa) for everyday use.

TALKING 5G

5G is the buzzword du jour at CES and everywhere else in tech world these days. So what is 5G? Well, if you have heard of 4G (which is probably what your smartphone is operating on right now), 5G is about 10 to 20 times faster. 5G stands for “fifth-generation wireless” and represents a new standard for sending and receiving data over cellular networks.

All the major cellular carriers are building out their 5G networks in 2019, and consumers are already beginning to see a few 5G-compatible smartphones being advertised. (Unfortunately,

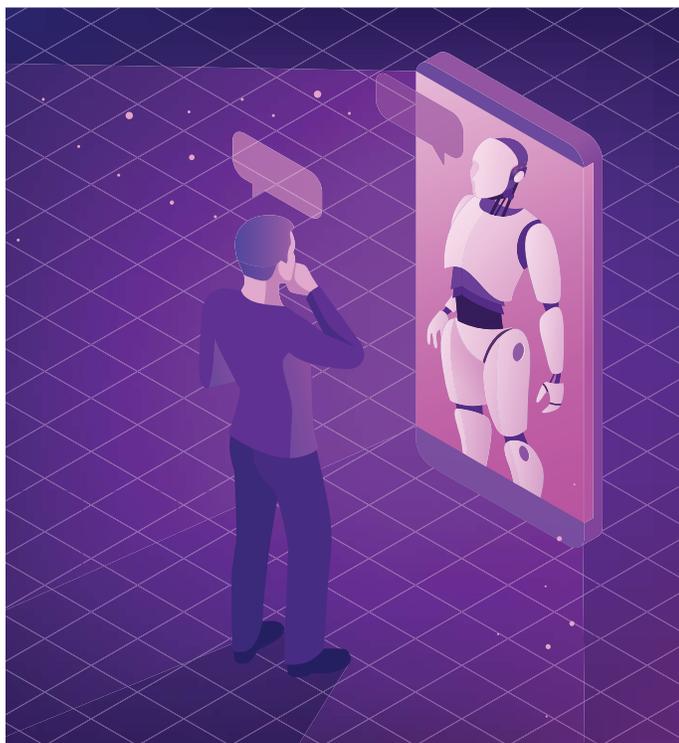
your shiny new iPhone XS, and other new phones you may have purchased recently, will not be compatible with the new 5G network when it comes online.)

So leaving the technical details behind, what does 5G mean for consumers? Industry leaders tell us that, with its greatly increased transmission speeds and low latency, 5G communication will enable users to download a full-length HD movie in mere seconds, enable doctors to perform remote surgeries, and finally make self-driving cars a reality. One can only imagine other applications that will explode as 5G moves into the mainstream in 2019 and 2020.

AI: MAKING LIFE EASIER

We jokingly remark that we are pioneers in the field of “artificial intelligence” as we have been “artificially intelligent” for years. (That is, our intelligence is only artificial.) But AI is no joke and is making a mark in all kinds of consumer products from cars to shoes.

We saw smart suitcases that “magically” follow their owners, and crowd detection camera systems that analyzed our faces in a huge crowd and deduced certain personal characteristics, such as gender, age and weight. We saw robot butlers that can converse with a hotel guest as effortlessly as a human (or maybe more so) and smart walkers that use AI and technology to enable the elderly and disabled to live more independent lives.



CHANGING OUR VIEW OF TVS

The TVs we see at CES always make us drool. This year’s array was no different as the major TV manufacturers showcased their massive 8K displays that looked so realistic you wanted to just walk into the scene they were displaying on the screen.

But probably the most impressive TV we saw was LG’s 65-inch OLED roll-up TV. That’s right — this flexible TV rolls up completely out of sight in its base when not in use. It magically rises from the base when turned on and is wafer thin. This amazing TV is like none we’ve ever seen before, and we’re told it will be coming to retail shelves sometime in mid-2019.

AMAZING NEW TECHNOLOGY

What makes CES so exciting for us is seeing the explosion of new consumer products that take advantage of advancing technology to improve our daily lives in and out of the office. One of the most enjoyable sections of the show is an area known as Eureka Park where startup companies from around the world display their brand-new tech products trying to gain consumer acceptance. Here we saw a devices that in every category imaginable.

There was a “smart backpack” that charged your phone, acted as a global MiFi, had a rear-facing camera, a GPS-location tracker and much more. There was a smart desk that connected everything with only one cable, had three monitors, and had a computer that could be controlled simply by hand gestures. There were drones for every imaginable application, turntables that connected to speakers wirelessly, a plethora of gadgets for pet care, health-monitoring devices designed specifically for the elderly, and so, so much more. Some of the items were so outrageous they made us laugh. Others made us want to buy the prototype immediately.

In our opinion, CES 2019 introduced and showcased more innovative and creative inventions than those on display in years at the annual geekfest. We were impressed and excited. We will discuss some of the items we saw in future articles. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Ramsey, Partner at Neal & Harwell, and **Phil Hampton**, Consulting President of LogicForce, are best known for *The Bill and Phil Show*.



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