

5 Hot Mobile Trends At CES

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The consumer electronics industry's annual trek to Las Vegas for the biggest trade show in North America is upon us. Press day starts bright and early Monday, January 9, and the exhibit halls at the Las Vegas Convention Center open on January 10. The week is sure to be a whirlwind of press conferences, announcements, demos, and new gear a-plenty.

The mobile industry has become a more prominent part of CES, with exciting new products and services debuting from smartphone and tablet makers, network operators, and application developers. Here are the five mobile products we're most interested in seeing at this year's event.

1. Android 4.0 Phones/Tablets: The first Android 4.0 Ice Cream Sandwich device arrived late last year in the Samsung Galaxy Nexus. It is a capable smartphone and Android 4.0 represents a major leap forward in usability for Google's smartphone operating system. Some smartphone makers have committed to updating their existing smartphone products to the latest software from Google, but those updates are months away. In the meantime, we want to see new gear from electronics makers running Ice Cream Sandwich hit the CES runway.

Companies such as Acer, Huawei, HTC, Motorola, Samsung, Sony Ericsson, and others need to start the year out right with Android 4.0 hardware. I'd go so far as to say that any device maker planning to announce Android 2.3 Gingerbread gear at the Consumer Electronics Show may as well skip the trip to Las Vegas this year. It's not worth consumers' time to buy non-Android 4.0 smartphones/tablets--even if they sell with the promise of an eventual update.

2. Quad-Core Tablets: Dual-core was so 2011. The bulk of tablets that shipped during 2011 had two-core processors in the 1-GHz to 1.5-GHz range. Chip makers have been hard at work expanding the capabilities of their silicon, and quad-core processors are on the horizon (think the Nvidia Tegra 3). Though I don't expect to see many, we should see at least a few quad-core tablets announced.

3. 4G Windows Phones: One of the biggest failings of Microsoft's Windows Phone platform is its lack of support for 4G technologies such as Long Term Evolution. Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer needs to announce forthcoming support for 4G in the Windows Phone platform during his keynote address. Microsoft needs to go beyond mere saying "it's coming." Microsoft needs to say WHEN 4G support is coming to Windows Phone.

Further, Windows Phone 7 hardware makers need to show off new WP7 smartphones that have LTE, HSPA+, or WiMax on board. Without 4G, Windows Phone will never be able to compete with Android. While we're at it, WP7 needs a

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"hero" device that can really stir mass appeal.

4. Nokia Smartphones for the U.S.: Nokia may be kicking off its return to the U.S. smartphone market with the Lumia 710 on T-Mobile's network (goes on sale January 11), but Nokia needs something drastically more high-end to convince Android and iOS device lovers to leave their platforms of choice. Nokia and AT&T have press conferences scheduled to take place on January 9. Perhaps we'll get news of a new partnership from both companies. Beyond that, Nokia needs to do more than offer U.S. buyers a re-skinned version of the Lumia 800. Unique hardware for the high-end U.S. smartphone buyer would be a good sign from Nokia that it is serious about the U.S. market.

5. More LTE 4G Devices: At CES 2011, Verizon announced no fewer than nine new LTE devices for its then-burgeoning 4G network. At CES 2012, LTE 4G should be the hallmark of most smartphones/tablets announced at the show. Verizon won't be the only network operator bringing LTE gear to the show this year. AT&T has an LTE network up and running, too. It's lineup of LTE devices is sure to expand to include more smartphones, tablets, hotspots, and modems.

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