CES 2013: More Gadgets Mind-Meld With Smartphones

[1]

LG Electronics' ultra-high definition TV on show at CES 2013 with "4K" resolution, or 8 million pixels, costing $19,999

Here at CES 2013, hundreds of consumer electronics companies are getting ready to show off shiny gadgets to more than 200,000 spectators, but a sizeable chunk of companies that have made the trip to Las Vegas probably won't be around in a few years time. Startups in particular will struggle to monetize and find funding. One big reason is that when it comes to hardware, consumers are increasingly interested in buying four different types of products: tablets, smartphones, high-definition televisions, and traditional PCs and laptops.

Researchers at Accenture tracked consumers who were planning to buy multifunction devices in 2012, and found the rate rose to 41% form 27% for those buying smartphones, 23% from 16% for tablet computers, and similar jumps for those buying PCs and and HD televisions. Yet there was nominal interest in single-function gadgets like e-books (growth to 9% from 8%) and GPS devices (from 9% to 11%).

"The consumer electronics market is now predominantly a four-horse race among multi-function devices," said Accenture's Mattias Lewren.

Electronics manufacturers are under pressure to make their devices multi-functioning, whether it's web browsing or media consumption, or communication. "Consumers want 'do-it-all' capabilities in various sizes and user experiences," said Lewren.

But there's a saving grace for devices that don't fall into any of the four categories: integrate with smartphones.

CES 2013 has barely kicked off and smartphone integration is already a running theme, suggesting boundless potential for consumer electronics makers — dozens of firms exhibiting at CES Unveiled on Sunday night relied on the smartphone as a controller or hub that worked with their product. Whether it was a new speaker system, smartphone-controlled drone or weather sensor, many of the products on show were being controlled by a mobile app.

Sphero, the robotic ball that integrates with a smartphone or tablet

Sphero was one example – the robotic ball acts as a gaming system that works with smartphones and tablets. Around 20 apps are available on the iOS and Android platforms that let owners of the $120 colorful ball move it around augmented reality figures or yank it up when it displays a certain colour.

"It's about leveraging the power of a smartphone and its operating system," said one of the Sphero reps as a traced his finger across an iPad mini and a glowing, blue ball moved around the carpet in front of him. The key is to capitalize on a tablet or smartphone's processing power, he added, "otherwise it's just a cheap remote control." [2]

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