This year at the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES), there was a shift in the language used by technology companies to reflect a much more human-centric approach—indicating an important evolution in the tech world.
Mercedes-Benz, for example, unveiled an avatar-inspired concept car that is meant to feel more like a living creature than an automobile. “We didn't want to create a car,” Mercedes-Benz chief design officer Gordon Wagener said of the Vision AVTR concept in a keynote speech at CES 2020, “we wanted to create something like a living organism.”

Especially as the negative influences of tech are being put under the microscope, new products are being positioned as wellness solutions and living organisms, conforming tech to the human body and human needs—rather than the other way around.

"The devices you use will understand you as an individual, blurring the boundaries between the digital and physical worlds, and changing the way you interact with your cities and communities," HS Kim, president of Samsung's consumer electronics division, wrote in a statement preceding the conference. “Instead of changing your routine to incorporate more devices, your devices will work seamlessly for you. Just imagine how much more you could accomplish with an intelligent companion that supports you, instantly reacting to your needs.”

While there is undoubtedly still a “cool” factor at play in the industry, it no longer feels like brands are preaching tech for the sake of tech. Rather, they’re taking a much more conscientious, considered and intentional approach to their releases, prioritizing the user experience more than ever before.

"We are not looking to spend our money on things—we are looking to buy convenience, peace of mind and enjoyment," said Kim in his keynote speech. "We are looking to experience life."

**Sex tech**

The spotlight on sex tech at this year’s conference is the perfect example of how technology is taking on an increasingly intimate role in consumers’ lives. Lora DiCarlo, who had a CES 2019 Innovation Award revoked and then re-awarded for her eponymous company’s Ose sex toy, led the charge with two new products meant to mimic the feeling of fingers and mouths. Crave showcased its suite of vibrators under a sign bearing the company’s “Pleasure Manifesto,” which states: "If we can talk about pleasure outside of the sheets, we can bring it out of the shadows." And OhMiBod launched Bluetooth-enabled couples’ toys.

“Sexual health and wellness is health and wellness,” said DiCarlo. “It does way more than just pleasure. It’s immediately connected to stress relief, to better sleep and to empowerment and confidence.”

**Auditory health**

*Heightened awareness of damage caused by excessive noise levels* is driving innovation in hearing health. Several devices and services to manage auditory input were unveiled. Highlights include AudioCardio, a new sound therapy app that’s like “physical therapy for your hearing,” and Nuheara’s IQbuds Max are hearing buds that block ambient noise to help listeners parse sound direction and better focus on conversation.

Chris Ellis, CEO and cofounder of AudioCardio, notes that this attention to audio health is linked to the mental health groundswell. “One of the reasons I started the company was because of my grandfather,”
Ellis tells Wunderman Thompson Intelligence. “I watched his hearing loss go from moderate to severe, and as that happened, he started to isolate himself. He became depressed, he started engaging less with us at restaurants and family dinners and would isolate himself in his own room.”

As their hearing improves, Ellis notes that users have reported a better ability to connect with people—and that they are happier as a result. “The interesting story that we’ve heard from some of our users is that they’re actually happier, because they’re engaging more,” Ellis explains. “They’re going to restaurants, they’re speaking with family, they’re not as frustrated.”

Urban infrastructure

“Our world is changing; rapid urbanization, evolving living spaces and shifting demographics. In the coming decade, you will see the rise of the megacity,” proclaimed Samsung’s HS Kim in his keynote address. “By 2030, there will be 43 megacities all over the world. This means we need to rethink the spaces we have.”

In anticipation of this, brands ranging from electronics to automotive are turning their attention to urban infrastructure, rethinking the fabric of daily life for a rising class of city dwellers.

Emily Becher, SVP and head of the new business and investment arm Samsung Next Global, introduced Samsung’s vision for the city of the future in the company’s keynote. 70% of the world’s population will live in cities by 2050, Becher noted, and “with this massive growth come some unique opportunities, but also some challenges: How do we design buildings as intelligence systems that are going to cater to these needs? How do we move millions and millions of people to work every day? How are we going to foster community in these vast, very diverse populations?” To address these challenges, Samsung laid out their plans for a future smart city, including smart buildings that can call elevators, turn lights on or off, manage deliveries or check for available parking spots with a swipe or voice command, and even detect and repair damage before residents notice a problem.

Hyundai Smart Mobility Solutions

Toyota proposed its vision for the prototype city of the future, which will also function as a living laboratory to study the impact of urban innovation. And Hyundai envisioned community-centric transportation hubs as the future transit system, taking their vision for “human-centered mobility” to new heights.
In line with Kim’s proclamation that the coming decade will represent the **age of experience**, global tech leaders are starting to look beyond products, instead turning their attention to the human experience, innovating better ways of living.

**The play for privacy**

As a sign of the times, ‘privacy’ was the word of the week at CES this year. As CNN proclaimed, “the hottest product at CES 2020 was privacy.” Big names like Google, Apple and Facebook were tripping over themselves to reassure users of their commitment to data privacy, while a slew of products promised everything from heightened home security to online data encryption.

Notably, Apple made their first official appearance at CES since 1993—not to introduce products but to preach privacy. Jane Horvath, Apple's senior director of global privacy, was a panelist for the packed session “Chief Privacy Officer Roundtable: What Do Consumers Want?” She was joined by Erin Egan, Facebook's VP of public policy and chief privacy officer for policy, Susan Shook, global privacy officer of Procter & Gamble (PG), and Rebecca Slaughter, a Federal Trade Commissioner.

Google introduced new voice commands for Google Assistant to help users better control their privacy. Users can say, “Hey Google, that wasn’t for you” to erase a specific utterance from Google Assistant’s memory, or can instruct Google to wipe their data by saying “Hey Google, delete everything I said to you this week.” Google also added an easy way for users to learn more about their privacy options and settings by asking, “Hey Google, are you saving my audio data?”
The Amazon-owned home security company Ring announced the Control Center, an app upgrade that makes it easier for users to manage their privacy preferences. “Across all of our products and services, your privacy and ability to control your security, devices, and personal information is a priority,” the company explained. “The Control Center will give you more visibility into how your data is kept secure and private by Ring.”

Winston was awarded a CES 2020 Innovation Award for their cybersecurity device that acts as a firewall to protect users’ online browsing data. “While technology has given way to important advancements in our society, the hard reality is we now live in a surveillance economy where everyone’s personal information—from their Amazon cart or Spotify playlist to specific locations they visit in their hometown—is for sale,” said Richard Stokes, founder and CEO of Winston Privacy.

While the heightened focus on user protection is admirable—and an important barometer of the current culture of distrust surrounding data privacy—some of the efforts read more as ‘privacy washing’ than a true dedication to consumer protection. To truly earn consumers’ trust, brands will need to tread mindfully.

**Pet tech**
“Today, pets are considered a part of the family,” said HS Kim, President and CEO of Consumer Electronics Division at Samsung Electronics in his keynote address. “67% of US households today own a pet and see themselves as pet parents, not pet owners.”

The fact that this observation made its way into a leading electronics company’s keynote address is telling in and of itself, but attendees needed look no further than the exhibition floor for more proof. A host of products offering everything from health monitoring to mental development for animals made it abundantly clear that pets are increasingly viewed and treated as akin to human children. Go Dogo, for example, is a “mental workout for dogs” that offers virtual training and mental stimulation for dogs left home alone during the day.

The health diagnosis craze is extending to pets thanks to LuluPet. The company was honored with an Innovation Award for its AI litter box, which monitors cats' health data through stool and urine analysis, weight change tracking, and excretory behaviors, notifying the owner for any abnormalities.

**Travel tech**

Travel is the latest sector to adopt hyper-personalized offerings. Delta is turning to technology to redefine the travel experience in an effort to fix the pain points of commercial air travel and ultimately make the experience more enjoyable.
Delta CEO Ed Bastian delivered a keynote address introducing new “human-driven innovations,” making Delta the first major airline to keynote and exhibit at the conference. The airline unveiled plans for “parallel reality” screens which will display personalized travel information tailored to the individual viewer in real time. The display screens will be rolled out this year, starting at the Detroit Metropolitan Airport.

“We’re looking to create a truly trusted and loved consumer brand in our customer’s mind, something that the airlines historically had not been known for,” said Bastian. “Travel is something that, unfortunately, in our country we have come to endure rather than to look forward to. Our goal at Delta is to make certain that travel is something that you look forward to as much as the destination you’re traveling to. And we think technology is going to be a key enabler of that.”

**Entertainment futures**

Quibi introduced the next generation of storytelling with their “quick bite” entertainment platform. When it launches in April 2020, the service will offer a slate of movies, reality TV, unscripted documentaries and news programs released in 5- to 10-minute snackable segments. Pitching itself as premium content optimized for viewing on the go, Quibi will feature content ranging from high-gloss “lighthouse” productions to “daily essentials” news programming. A lineup of A-listers are signed on to produce content, including Steven Spielberg, Guillermo del Toro, Chrissy Teigen, Jennifer Lopez, Idris Elba, Kevin Hart, Kristen Bell and Tyra Banks, as well as networks like NBC News, ESPN and BBC.
Quibi cofounder Jeffrey Katzenberg—who founded DreamWorks Animation in the ’90s after reinvigorating Disney in the ’80s—sees this service as an evolution of social content consumption on platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat.

“HBO came along in the early 1990s, when broadcast TV was at its pinnacle, and said, ‘We’re not TV, we’re HBO,’” explained Katzenberg. “They changed the form and format. They weren’t constrained by standards and practices and spent money that a broadcast network couldn’t compete with. In the same way HBO differentiated from broadcast, we are differentiated from social networks.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j04xv86H2u0

Quibi also announced a new technology to optimize viewing on a smartphone, debuted in a Mountain Dew ad. Called Turnstyle, the technology allows video content to effectively flip between portrait and landscape framing, which requires creators to shoot both frames separately. The technology challenges creatives to rethink their approach to content creation, redefining creativity in the mobile age. “We really did have to rethink our approach to production and find a very unique set of best practices for shooting from both the phone’s perspective and the cinema camera’s perspective,” Zach Wechter, director of the Quibi series Wireless, told the Hollywood Reporter.

AT&T, meanwhile, is rethinking the traditional approach to television advertising with pause ads. Xander, AT&T’s advertising unit, unveiled a new ad format that appears as a screensaver-like overlay that appears when viewers pause the show they’re watching.

As we charted in The Future 100: 2020 (see trend #5, Rethinking time), flexible entertainment formats and non-linear viewing habits are evolving the landscape of content consumption. Premium episodic programming, mobile-first content and pause ads underscore this and point to a future of entertainment that is fluid and adaptable.

Read our other CES 2020 coverage: Mindful tech, Consumer Experience Show, Woven City

**CES 2020: Key trends**

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