

CES WRAP-UP:

THE 2021 DIGITAL EVENT,
FROM ALL ANGLES

FAST FORWARD
IN WELLNESS
INNOVATION

U.S.-EUROPE RETAILING:
COVID AS THE GREAT
EQUALIZER

ECOMMERCE
GOES
HOME

February 2021 | Vol. 63 No. 02 | www.dealerscope.com

DEALERSCOPE

An abstract background featuring a vibrant explosion of blue and green powder against a dark, almost black, backdrop. The powder is captured in mid-air, creating a dynamic, cloud-like effect with fine particles and larger clumps. The colors transition from deep blue on the left to a bright, lime green on the right, with some yellowish-green highlights. The overall effect is energetic and visually striking.

**EXCEPTIONAL TECH:
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AWARDS | 2021

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Publisher of *Dealerscope*, and *Connected Design*
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PULSE | A WORD FROM OUR PUBLISHER



CES Had Great Content – and Our Awards Made an IMPACT

The All-Digital CES has passed, and as we move into 2021, with a vaccination schedule in place, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Just like you, I am hopeful that our industry will get to the point where we can all expect a more "normal" day-to-day business environment soon.

In the meantime, our wonderful editorial staff was busy covering all the **fabulous new technology** at the virtual show. I was very impressed with many things – among them, **a home robot that will do your housework**, and **a contact lens that will assist with your vision problems** and will even play content. No doubt about it, the future is here. Please make sure you see all our great content, to check out what you may have missed.

I also want to congratulate **all the Dealerscope 2021 IMPACT Award winners** this year. These are some of the best products that are at retail or will soon be.

In this issue, we also have in-depth coverage on all manner of related categories, including **IoT, connected car tech, TV, health & wellness innovations, and much more**. Our contributing editors are covering subjects such as **how ecommerce call centers are moving to home call centers** during the pandemic. This month, **our international perspective turns toward looking at how we do business in the U.S. compared with Europe**. We have also covered two other shows that occurred last month: **the NRF (National Retail Federation) event and Retail Innovation Week**.

In addition, in this issue, we are launching a new column, **"Retail on the Run,"** where we visit a retailer and conduct an informative interview on how that dealer's business model is unique, and how they achieve success. This month, we sent our contributing editor to **HiDEF Lifestyle in Harrisburg, Pa.** Check out this great segment that we will be offering to our readers monthly. **The February Unboxed column features an assessment of the LG Stick CordZero Vacuum**, which was put to the test in a real-world environment. In addition, we have added a Summary Box feature to our articles, so you can review the main points of our stories in thumbnails before delving deeper into the content.

As ever, please send us your feedback. We want to hear from you.

Tony Monteleone, Publisher

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DEALERSCOPE
IMPACT AWARDS

The cream of the crop in product innovations is showcased in this annual program, whose honorees were determined by an esteemed panel of industry tech experts who brought their unique expertise to the voting process.



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Dealerscope, February, Volume 63, Number 02, (US ISSN 1534-4711) (USPS 0447-690) is published nine times a year by CT Lab Global Media LLC, PO Box 3920 Cherry Hill NJ 08034, 718-216-2046. Periodicals postage paid at Cherry Hill, NJ and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CT Lab Global Media LLC, PO BOX 1322, Lowell, MA 01853-1322. SUBSCRIPTIONS: Free to qualified recipients. All others, U.S. 1 year \$85, Canada/Mexico one year \$115. All other countries, one-year air mail \$140. Back issues and single copies when available, mailed by publisher for \$10 Each. Authorization to photocopy articles for internal corporate, personal, or instructional use may be obtained from Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) or call 978-646-2600. Articles may not be reprinted without publisher's permission. For Reprint information, contact Tony Monteleone, tmonteleone@ctlab.media. All rights are strictly reserved, and reproduction in whole or in part is expressly prohibited without prior written permission from the publisher. Copyright 2021. Printed in the U.S.A. Byline contributor's views should not be construed as representing the opinion of the publisher.

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FOLLOW BREAKING INDUSTRY NEWS
EVERY DAY AT **DEALERSCOPE.COM**



What lies ahead for CES 2022?
CTA President & CEO Gary Shapiro and Karen Chupka, Executive VP of CES and CTA, welcome everyone to the All-Digital 2021 CES.

It's all about the accessories. Austere CEO Deena Ghazarian describes how the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the brand's development as consumers look for ways to improve content streaming and power management in style.



Make it work for everyone's work situation. Epson has unwrapped three new models of business projectors: the Pro EX10000, Pro EX9240 and EX3280, suitable for rooms ranging from hybrid workplaces to entertainment spaces.



Nationwide ramps up luxury and premium appliance efforts, led by new senior merchant, John O'Halloran. In particular, the group has focused on improving the customer experience through expanded digital offerings.



Dealerscope Podcast: In its 50th year, Elo looks back on how far touchscreen innovations have come in the way of retail and how COVID has reshaped and even accelerated some of its adoption.



KONKA isn't just a TV brand anymore... it's the latest in a comprehensive lineup of smart home products. The 16 models that make up the KONKASmart line were revealed at CES 2021 and will make their way to the market this spring.



BrandSource is back. With new midweek scheduling, the show will return to the web with a lineup of product intros, industry updates, vendor trainings, education sessions, and virtual social hours – thematically 'Doubled Down' on multichannel initiatives.



Doing better business (in the bathroom, that is). Kohler's high-tech bathroom experiences include the Innate Intelligent Toilet seat, touchless bathroom faucets, the Stillness bath with water, light, fog, and aroma features, and more.



Meet the new cleaning staff: A fleet of robots. At CES, LG showed off the CLOi UV-C robot that is tasked for jobs such as disinfecting hotel rooms and offering contactless room service to guests.



Perceived high costs are scaring away some smart home adopters. Lack of a clear value proposition and data/privacy concerns are also two main inhibitors to smart home adoption, Parks Associates reports.



Out of sight but most definitely in mind. French audio master, Focal, just presented its 1000 Series offering a discreet alternative to traditional hi-fi and home cinema setups, with no performance compromise.



Web Categories: Speakers Headphones/Earbuds Soundbars Receivers Voice Control Telecommunications	Connected TV Projectors Streaming Media Monitors Accessories Appliances Digital Health & Wellness	eGaming Travel Electronics Robotics Mobile/Connected Car Tech Smartphones Smart Apparel iHealth	Wearables Digital Cameras Personal Computers Technology/Services Artificial Intelligence Augmented Reality Virtual Reality	Digital Signage Kiosks Training Consumer Marketing Omnichannel Marketing
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doesn’t exist.”

Jimmy Wales



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DIGITAL CES’S SUCCESS — AND WHAT IT MEANS

When the reality that COVID-19 and the havoc it was wreaking to lives, families, and livelihoods started sinking in around the end of last February, it became increasingly clear to the management personnel of trade shows of all sizes and stripes in the consumer technology arena that some fast thinking was in order. However, fast thinking, it turned out, couldn’t outrun the rapidly morphing circumstances affecting the rules of safe congregation and air travel. Those kept changing by the week, the day and the minute. Count the Consumer Technology Association (CTA), producer of the annual January International CES, as having been fortunate enough to start some ultra-early research into transitional moves relating to the “virtualization” of the January 2021 CES.

“We began in February and March look at digital, looked at every off-the-shelf package, and decided we had to do something special,” said Gary Shapiro, CTA president and CEO, in June, when the new format was unveiled. He added that the goal was to preserve “the serendipity, the joy of learning” that characterizes the traditional face-to-face CES. So CTA pulled the trigger in July, deciding to forego hopes of doing a physical show, “letting us focus on making this happen.”

Having just experienced the result – achieved with the partnership of Microsoft, the engine whose software infrastructure powered the show’s events and pacing, we have to tip our hat to a challenge that was well met. No, it wasn’t Vegas. There was no elbow-rubbing at receptions, and none of the annual “catching-up-with” schmoozing that characterizes the considerable social aspects of a typical CES.

What it did have going for it was a relatively seamless platform by which business-doers and vendors could connect. And that is saying a lot. As for next year, the world will move forward with the hope that 2022 will see the end of this horrific pandemic.

However, COVID-19 and the ruptures in the fabric of people’s lives have also inalterably “changed the pace and arc” of technology, he pointed out – and would also have its affect on future CESes. With a new Convention Center building added to help welcome back CES visitors in the flesh in 2022, should that be possible, Shapiro stated, “Vegas is ready for us.” That said, Shapiro added that the 2022 CES would likely shape up as both “a physical event and a hybrid event, both digital and physical,” combining elements of “hugs and handshakes – and masks.”

And that is the stuff you still can’t do yet over a computer screen.

Nancy Klosek

SPOTLIGHTING IoT AT CES 2021

BY STEPHEN SILVER



Samsung's Galaxy Upcycling program, employed on the company's smartphone

The Internet of Things (IoT) has been a frequent topic at CES for many years, going back to the time when such technology was more theoretical than real. Back in 2015, The New York Times reported that IoT tech had “hit home,” but the phrase existed, at least as a buzzword, even before that. At 2021's virtual CES, held the second week of January, “5G and the Internet of Things” was listed as one of 11 major “topics” for the event, with four things — 5G, resilient smart cities, and sustainability — listed as subtopics.

Three dedicated IoT products received CES Innovation Awards. Hyundai Telecom's Smart Home product was described as “a home IoT lighting bell that is installed on the surface of the wall of the house and is developed to easily communicate the status of the situation to users through visual information of color lighting.” Also honored was the open IoT platform from Security and Safety Things, which “does for security cameras what Android has done for smartphones.” And the third honoree was the SARA-R5 LTE-M modules with IoT Security-as-a-Service, from u-blox.

One of the biggest names at CES, Samsung, in its CES keynote announced an update to its Galaxy Upcycling program, called Galaxy Upcycling at Home. The new program, Samsung said, “reimagines the lifecycle of an older Galaxy phone and offers consumers options on how they might be able to repurpose their device to create a variety of convenient IoT tools.” The software to make that possible will arrive later this year.

Bosch, in its presentation by CTO Michael Bolle, introduced a concept that they called AIoT, the marrying of AI and the Internet of Things. “To improve people's health and to protect our planet, Bosch is counting on AIoT, taking advantage of the possibilities offered by data, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things to benefit people and the environment with technical solutions,” the company said in a statement.

Another company that illustrated IoT solutions at CES was a nontraditional one: The tractor manufacturer John Deere. Appearing at CES for the third time, Deere & Company's chief technology officer, Jahmy Hindman, took part in a session called “Feeding The World With Precision Tech.” In an interview with Michael Josh Villanueva of Gadget Match, Hindman said: “Agriculture is a high-tech industry,” noting that Deere has had a version of self-driving equipment for nearly 20 years. “Let's start with connectivity,” he added. “Both of these two machines [trac-

tor and planter] behind me are connected to the cloud, they're connected with a cellular connection so they're pushing data into the cloud, into what we call the John Deere Operations Center, where each grower can have access to that information.”

In addition to 4G LTE and GPS connections, Hindman said, “We also have connectivity between machines,” and the different machines are connected by Wi-Fi. He added that they are “super-excited about 5G.”

Another IoT product that got a positive reception at CES was Lutron's Outdoor Smart Plug, which in addition to offering other features typical of smart plug — including compatibility with Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant, and Apple HomeKit — is also weatherproof.

BOB: Hey New Age, I need a smart home solution.

NAE: Okay, let's get started!

BOB: I'd love a solution that will automate my lifestyle.

NAE: No problem. We have lots of options to choose from!

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BY PHILIP SCHMALZL

UNBOXED

PRODUCT INSIGHTS FOR BETTER RECOMMENDATIONS

Multiple Cleaning Options with Extra Power

LG CordZero A9 Kompressor Stick Vacuum with Power Mop

In these unusual times of home schooling and home office work, household appliances are being tasked to perform above and beyond their normal use cycles to meet changing consumer requirements. Quick cleanups, in between all that needs to be taken care of in these times, is rather impractical with a corded vacuum cleaner. A great solution: A cord-free vacuum to bridge the gap between a portable handheld and traditional tethered vacuums. The LG CordZero A9 Kompressor is an ambitious offering, with its great convenience, usability, and easy maintenance. But let's have a look at the details.

Multiple Cleaning Options with Extra Power
One main advantage of the LG CordZero A9 Kompressor is its versatility through its various accessories, a freestanding charging base and the extra battery. This model covers all the bases as a carpet, hardwood and furniture cleaner. The freestanding charging and accessory-storing base makes the LG outstanding. You don't have to wall-mount it. Not only does it charge the vacuum while it is attached; it also charges the extra battery. This makes available an extra round of vacuuming without interruption for charging, in normal mode, as

a stick vacuum – up to 60 minutes each battery. You can see that LG spent time on the charging base design, given all the attention it has paid to details. For example, there are the clamps to better manage the charging cable – it simply looks better.

Good Suction, Large Dust Bin
The Universal Nozzle can be used for hardwoods and carpet. With its three suction levels (Normal, Power, Turbo) the LG CordZero A9 Kompressor is doing a great job with smaller and finer pieces of dirt. Only for larger pieces I had to lift the vacuum because it doesn't

have a wide opening. The Kompressor in its name means that you can compress the dustbin simply by using the lever, which results in a capacity of 33.8 ounces and makes it easier to empty.

Easy Maintenance and Maneuverability
Throughout and including its washable components and filters, the LG CordZero A9 Kompressor is designed for minimal upkeep. It offers more maneuverability than most upright vacuums and more flexibility when used as a handheld. On top of that, the LG CordZero is lightweight and runs easily around tight spaces, corners and furniture.


Power Mop
Hard floors get their finishing touch with the Power Mop. Simply fill tap water into the integrated tank in the mop attachment and floors can be mopped with two different humidity settings. No chemicals are needed.

Universal power nozzle:
spiral brushroll for carpet or hard surface flooring



A great cleaning performance with a versatile set of attachments – attention paid to handling large debris



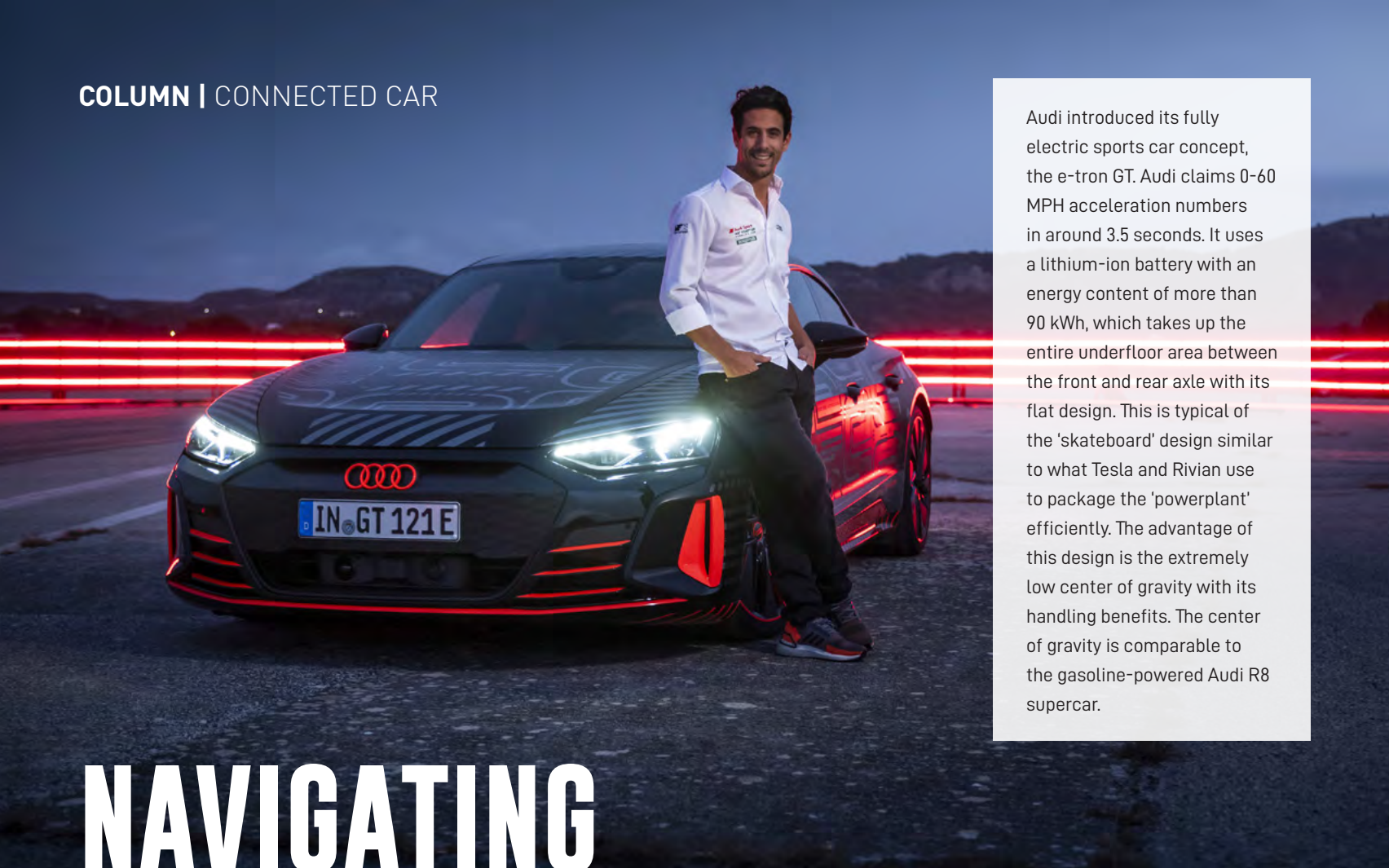


The LG CordZero A9 Kompressor is a **standout cordless vacuum cleaner at the high-end level**. It is a clear recommendation as a solution for home cleaning during these home schooling-home working times, if your customer is looking for:

- A large dustbin through compressing
- A great cleaning performance with a versatile set of attachments – attention paid to handling large debris
- Interchangeable batteries for an uninterrupted cleaning experience
- Easy maintenance – washable filters, washable cyclone, slide-out brushroll and multi-use docking station

The contents of the box are as follows:

- LG CordZero A9 Kompressor stick vacuum
- Telescopic wand
- 2 rechargeable batteries: 60-minute run time per battery
- Washable parts: easy clean filters and cyclone
- Docking station: can be wall-mounted or standalone upright
- Universal power nozzle: spiral brushroll for carpet or hard surface flooring
- Combination tool: bristles, to gently dust surfaces or a wide-mouth crevice tool
- Crevice tool: for tight spaces
- Power Mop Nozzle, 2 sets of reusable mop pads, water fill cup, detachable stand for mop nozzle and pad storage



Audi introduced its fully electric sports car concept, the e-tron GT. Audi claims 0-60 MPH acceleration numbers in around 3.5 seconds. It uses a lithium-ion battery with an energy content of more than 90 kWh, which takes up the entire underfloor area between the front and rear axle with its flat design. This is typical of the 'skateboard' design similar to what Tesla and Rivian use to package the 'powerplant' efficiently. The advantage of this design is the extremely low center of gravity with its handling benefits. The center of gravity is comparable to the gasoline-powered Audi R8 supercar.

NAVIGATING AROUND DIGITAL CES



BY BRETT SOLOMON

Brett Solomon is the lead reporter and writer on 12V products and retailers for Dealerscope. He has been covering the mobile electronics industry for over 20 years.

We all long for the days of a "normal" CES where most of us would fly into McCarran Airport, and then possibly take an Uber or shuttle to their hotel. For those in the surrounding area of Nevada, Arizona, California and Utah, taking a road trip to CES made perfect sense – especially for tech-savvy individuals who have the latest ADAS (Advanced Driver Assistance Systems) to help ease the trip. Tesla's Autopilot, GM's SuperCruise, and Ford's upcoming Active Drive Assist allow consumers to take their hands off the wheel, but they still need to keep an eye on the road without being burdened

with full-on attentiveness. One industry worried about semi-autonomous vehicles is regional airline travel. When someone can enjoy the comforts and infotainment of a modern vehicle, and have most of the driving left to semi-autonomous systems, who would want to deal with the headaches of long delays and the TSA? We all will return to CES in person, and the semi-autonomous technology being introduced in 2021 will help 'drive' the radius of people commuting to the show by car even farther. At its keynote, GM was very bullish on electrification of vehicles. It will take a lot of time

for the technology to matriculate to the lower end of the fleet, but for amazing vehicles such as the Hummer HV with its Watts To Freedom (WTF!) acceleration launch mode, it makes electric exciting. The company even tied in the Bose audio system to bring the soundtrack of 'power' during the Watts to Freedom mode. GM is working on new battery technology in-house with partner LG to try and get 60 percent more power out of its packs compared to today's technology. The company's plan is to have 30 new electric vehicle introductions globally over the next five years. Some of that technol-

ogy will go to GM's new BrightDrop subsidiary focused on electric delivery vans. FedEx will be GM's first customer for the vans, which are designed to carry complementary motorized electric pallets called EP1s. Discrete audio for different passengers is becoming a reality with the power of sophisticated DSP and headliner/seat mounted transducers. During the conference session Vehicle Tech Innovations Consumers Want, Andrew Poliak, CTO of Panasonic, mentioned upcoming technology that can help keep the sanity of all vehicle occupants. "Audio bubbles could soon become a reality in vehicle interiors. Private-zoned audio environments are not

an instrument cluster and infotainment center stack, with the introduction of the 2018 A-Class model. That was revolutionary because for American consumers it introduced the most technologically advanced infotainment system in the lowest-price model. That strategy will hopefully pay off for luring younger tech-savvy customers who will stay with the brand. Now Mercedes is taking the concept of a flowing mega-screen even further with the introduction of the Mercedes MBUX Hyperscreen that will debut on the flagship electric EQS sedan. It stretches from A-pillar to A-pillar with a gentle curvature along the way (just like the new Cadillac Escalade unit). The passen-

erating offering before the occupant even has to click or scroll anywhere." He continues, "the MBUX hyperscreen is connected to all components of the vehicle and communicates with them. This allows for a new form of interactivity and individuality. This is because the customer is at the center of development. We analyzed the customer feedback of the first [A-Class] MBUX generation and asked ourselves: 'What do people need and how do they interact in the car? Especially in an electric car?' The goal was a concept without distraction of the driver or complicated operation. And it had to be able to learn thanks to artificial intelligence: The MBUX Hyperscreen gets to know the customer better and better, providing a customized, personalized infotainment and operating offer before the passenger has to click anything. We didn't want to build the biggest screen ever in a car. Instead, we have developed special screens with a perfect ratio of size and functionality for maximum user-friendliness. This is customer orientation and digital thinking 2021!"



"The MBUX Hyperscreen continually gets to know the customer better and delivers a tailored, personalized offering before the occupant even has to click or scroll anywhere."

just for private-zoned audio. Companies have demonstrated we can create a listening environment that the person sitting next to you does not hear. But I think you can take it to extra lengths that will be interesting, such as 'whisper agent' where you can have navigation prompts directed to the driver and the rest of the car will not be able to hear it. My kids have the problem with TikTok... when the navigation prompt interrupts them just as they are trying to get famous!"

Mercedes MBUX Hyperscreen Infotainment System

Mercedes redefined what could be done with

ger also gets a display and can get into the infotainment action. With newly developed AI, the Mercedes is trying to do away with traditional menu layers, making it easier to change the radio station or enter a navigation address. Instead, the most important applications are always offered in a situational and contextual way at the top level in view. This way, numerous operating steps are taken away from the EQS driver, making it easier and safer. According to Mercedes CTO Sajjad Khan, "The MBUX Hyperscreen is both the brain and nervous system of the car. The MBUX Hyperscreen continually gets to know the customer better and delivers a tailored, personalized infotainment and op-

Pioneering Installations

Pioneer showed off its new product lineup, and there were two standouts. First off was an exceedingly Lilliputian powered subwoofer designed for tight spaces including the passenger footwell. We think it will be a hit with hybrid vehicles owners who are unwilling to give up any additional trunk space. The TS-WX010A compact powered subwoofer features a Class D amplifier, as expected, and comes in at under four pounds. It features a rectangular-shaped internal woofer, and can be hooked up with RCA or speaker-level inputs. Ted Cardenas, VP of marketing, notes "With the introduction of the TS-WX010A, Pioneer introduces a unique solution designed to enhance the listening experience with deep, powerful bass while seamlessly integrating physically, electrically and most importantly acoustically into the vehicle. Electric and hybrid vehicles are increasing in both popularity and availability but upgrading the audio in these vehicles presents challenges for traditionally large and heavy powered subwoofers." Car Audio audiophiles are

always looking to achieve the “bass up front” effect – and perhaps one of the easiest ways to achieve natural bass up front is to put the subwoofers in the front! The other Pioneer product is a head unit designed to make installations easier and flexible for oddly configured dashboards. The DMH-WC5700NEX is the latest Pioneer modular in-dash receiver that expands its lineup of products designed to provide vehicles with limited or restricted dash space an in-dash upgrade solution. The DMH-WC5700NEX includes Alexa Built-in, Android Auto, and Apple CarPlay. But the icing on the cake for installers is the availability of two extension cables (a shorter one and a longer version) so you can mount the ‘brain’ of the package separate from the faceplate. A lot of newer vehicles just don’t have the ability to swallow a double-DIN headunit in the cavity of the factory radio. Cardenas says, “With the DMH-WC5700NEX, Pioneer provides an automotive upgrade solution for many different vehicles that typically have been extremely restrictive or even impossible with regard to the installation of an aftermarket in-dash receiver, including several popular late model Chevrolet vehicles such as the Silverado and Camaro. With this solution, owners of these vehicles now have an option for adding Amazon Alexa, Android Auto, Apple CarPlay and more to enhance and upgrade their driving experience.” It is scheduled to hit the streets this summer – just in time for hot rod installations.

Alpine Also Going Slim


Alpine also introduced a slim head unit to help counteract the installation challenges of shallow dashboard cavities. The Alpine iLX-407 features Android Auto, Apple CarPlay and Bluetooth in the small mech-less unit. One notable feature is the ability of the unit to easily hook up to Alpine’s Power Stack small amplifiers that can power a small subwoofer system. These little amps bolt right up to the back of the iLX-407 head unit if the install has room for a traditional double-DIN. Mike Anderson, VP of Alpine notes, “Following the success of the tremendously popular iLX-W650, we sought to create a solution that captured everything the customer loved about the iLX-W650, with even more features. The features, along with the price point, will solidify the iLX-407 as one of the most impactful audio upgrades on the market.”

Operation Ground & Pound with Kicker

Even as autonomous and infotainment technology grows, there is still a desire for old-school car audio and fidelity. It is great to see new designs for subwoofers. At CES, Kicker showed off its Innovation Awards subwoofer: The Solo X L7X. It was a ground-up reimagination of the original and radical Solo X square-shaped woofer. Kicker wanted to set world-class levels of mechanical excursion and musicality. Steve Irby, president and founder

of Kicker, notes, “We’re very happy to win the Innovations award. This is a radically improved version of the original Solo X, and to be recognized for the amount of work and creativity we’ve put into making it a reality feels really good.” It will be offered in 10-, 12- and 15-inch versions for those who want to strike fear into the hearts of innocent pedestrians. “The concept of the new Solo X is to take it to the next level,” Irby said. “It is designed with very tight tolerances. It has more power, more stroke, more Xmax, and still has a field-replaceable cone. The new design allows the Solo X to be extremely loud, but also be extremely musical.” The no-glue reckoning system uses a unique surround compression system and bolt-on spider landing, and is designed specifically to make speaker repair possible in only a few minutes time. This system comes from Kicker’s participation in SPL sound-off events where woofers are pushed to the limit, and the ability to repair them in between rounds can be essential to win competitions.

Even though we were not able to connect in person at CES 2021, it remained a viable launch pad for new OEM and aftermarket vehicle technologies. Perhaps in time for CES 2022 we will have an electric vehicle with self-driving capabilities shuttle us to Vegas. All we need is some aftermarket infotainment and audio upgrades for the ultimate ride back to the show.



- **CES 2021** may have been virtual, but there was exciting news. GM is looking to electrify more of its fleet, Audi is introducing an electric sports car, and private-zoned audio is being explored by Panasonic.
- The Mercedes MBUX Hyperscreen Infotainment system (shown at left) stretches both the expanse of the dashboard as well as the limits of artificial intelligence for a good user experience.
- Pioneer flexed a very small powered subwoofer system that can even be installed in the passenger footwell, in addition to a head unit that combines a large touchscreen display with a hideaway control unit that are connected via a cable.
- Kicker showed off its extensively engineered and designed super-woofer, the Solo X L7X that is both musical and loud.

DIGITAL IMAGING @CES 2021

This year’s CES event lacked the reach-out-and-touch-it-ness of years prior; having everything at your disposal from a web browser made it easier to navigate. Perhaps next year, if we return to an in-person visit to Vegas, a hybrid model of booths and this extensive online presence would be a nice touch.

Most of the major imaging exhibitors were absent. Nikon, Canon, and Panasonic/Lumix had plenty to offer, but Hasselblad, Leica, and third-party lens manufacturers like Sigma, Tamron, and Tokina were absent. Though there weren’t a lot of new product announcements in the imaging arena, the four majors – Sony, Panasonic, Nikon, and Canon – had robust overviews of their current offerings, along with some exciting video content.

If anything, the main theme here was the convergence of video and still camera hardware, with a solid emphasis on the video capabilities of current cameras.

Nikon builds on their Z series mirrorless cameras with the slightly dated Z50 and a pair of kit DX zoom lenses offering a stunning range of capture from 16-50mm to 50-250mm for just under \$1,300, with the body only coming in at \$860. The smaller, 20MP DX format sensor body is still compatible with the remainder of the Nikkor-Z range of lenses, as well as the legacy F series Nikkors. There was plenty of info on hand about the recently updated II versions of the Z6 and Z7, which offer higher maximum frame rates than the original models, thanks to dual EXPEED 6 processors.

Nikon was making more of a push on new lenses, concentrating on their new 50mm f/1.2 and 14-24mm f/2.8 lenses for the Z cameras. Again, following a trend of more fast glass, suited to low light video production, though still photographers will definitely benefit from the cool factor of these new lenses optimized for wide open aperture performance. www.nikon.usa.com Canon did not have any new hardware to show, but their virtual room was featuring an extremely cool video from NASA astronauts Marsha Ivins and Terry Virts. They go into great depth on the wide range of Canon cameras used on Space Shuttle missions along with some incredible footage.



A Nikon NIKKOR lens for its Z cameras

Both astronauts shared their early love for photography and offered some great tips and tricks to getting stable shots in a zero-gravity environment.

www.usa.canon.com

Sony was concentrating more on integrating creative platforms, and mention of their latest Xperia 5II phone, released in fall of 2020, featuring Zeiss optics with a maximum aperture of f1.7. As of this time, Verizon is hinting that you can get one on their network, but this Android-based phone is more popular in the rest of the world (which makes me want one all the more). www.sony.com

Perhaps the most exciting imaging product at the show was the new Panasonic Lumix BGH1 “cinema box camera,” aimed at video content creators. It features a 10 MP sensor and an architecture designed from the ground up to be a video camera first and a still camera as an afterthought. Thanks to the Lumix Tether App, multiple BGH1s can be connected and controlled via an Ethernet network, putting major production values at your fingertips for a fraction of what it used to cost. Using the micro 4/3rds lens system puts a plethora of new and legacy glass at your disposal for a wide range of cinematic effects. And, at an affordable price of \$1,999.99. shop.panasonic.com With all this capturing going on, you’ll need a way to get it all to your workstation, and Kingston’s new Workflow Station offers four bays that can be customized to the memory cards of your choice. These removable adaptors all plug into the Workflow Station, and attach to your computer via a single USB-C cable. Thanks to using the current USB 3.2 spec, Kingston claims that you can download from four readers in the dock simultaneously, providing a tremendous boost to what is usually a workflow bottleneck. The Workflow Station by itself is \$135.20 and the card reader modules are \$36.40 each. www.kingston.com.

5 TRENDS THAT DEFINED DIGITAL HEALTH, CONNECTED HEALTH & WELLNESS AT CES

BY SUSAN SCHREINER, C4Trends.com



Samsung JetBot-90-AI powered robotic vacuum

CES 2021 has come and gone, and while this year it was virtual, it was still the most exciting place to see more and newer technologies and their conceptual and real-life implementations than at any other show. As we 'walked' this virtual show, it did not disappoint. We're always on the lookout for the 'next big thing' – for what is groundbreaking innovation, what's a fad, or for what portends a new trend with unlimited fresh and dynamic new channel business/revenue opportunities.



Sharp's Alexa enabled Countertop Microwave Oven

The 'hero' of CES 2021 was digital health – and it is the 'next big thing.' HealthTech is becoming consumerized and offers retail channels new opportunities. Many of these HealthTech products with services are looking to be sold through mainstream channels. Just check out Best Buy, Target, Walmart, CVS and others

that are leading the way. The novel coronavirus pandemic upended our world in so many ways, and technology became ever more integrated into individuals' lives and into society – and as overwhelmed healthcare systems quickly shifted to digital alternatives for outpatient care and engagement.

The convergence between COVID-19 with other conditions, and an ongoing aging population, is accelerating the market expansion for the HealthTech category. Home healthcare and connected digital health devices became the 'last mile,' or touchpoint, between the physician, provider, caretaker and consumer. It transformed our assumptions about how and where healthcare should be delivered. In most cases, visits to the doctor's office were replaced by telehealth to avoid further overwhelming health facilities and to avoid contagion. It also became the new normal way to safely manage one's health at home, including acute and chronic conditions.

Overall, HealthTech will become a 'big' market. This was recently underscored by Grand View Research; it is projecting that the digital health market is expected to grow to \$509.2 billion, with a CAGR of 27.7% by 2025.

Tech at the Center

As we started to see at CES 2021, AI and IoT are going to be embedded in everything, and the data generated is expected to more accurately predict one's wellness. It will also increase the demand for a growing range of appliances, consumer electronics, devices and wearables. In addition, the reality of 5G is coming closer to realization, and it is going to enable most of these applications to happen.

Additional opportunities for the channels abound as HealthTech is also changing the wellness and fitness paradigm, with adjacent categories gaining momentum. This includes new applications for a range of robotics, air filtration systems, new categories of IoT wearables, and other devices with software that personalize the experience – and so much more.



HD Medical announced the HealthyU – a cardiac monitoring device that can track seven biometrics at home.

CES 2021 Product Roundup: Manifestation of 5 Trends

This past year changed everything – but it is also propelling a massive market expansion, and tremendous channel opportunities. In this new climate, channels need to start to think out of the box and along multiple dimensions – as overlapping marketplaces are demanding similar products. Consider what your local or regional opportunities are within this context (e.g., some mainstream verticals include assisted living facilities, gerontology practices, businesses that self-insure. etc.).

1.

Consumers are spending more time at home – and consumer tech devices have become necessities. More than any other CES, the 2021 event reflected the influence of the pandemic on our lifestyle, how we work and how our children learn – since we are spending more time at home. HealthTech innovations from brand names as well as HealthTech entrepreneurs and startups abounded, with several companies on the lookout for distribution partners. People were homebound. Demand surged for broadband connected entertainment, including gaming devices, and for larger screens for streaming and TV. At CES 2021, we saw lines of beautiful upgraded TVs with new technologies and form factors coming in 4K and 8K. Also, products with services for the smart home are getting particularly attractive, with meaningful functions.

2.

Staying Fit and Well, and the Digital Consumer – During these tumultuous times, personal wellbeing took on a whole new meaning. Overnight, consumers were ordering new devices, appliances and ingredients to bake and cook as never before. While gyms were closed, people brought the gym home – resulting in an uptick in sales of Peloton, Echelon and other stationary exercise bikes and home fitness equipment. **Samsung** introduced its new Smart Trainer feature on the Health platform for its 2021 TV models. The feature transforms the home into a personal gym and tracks and analyzes posture in real time, like a personal trainer. It also provides feedback on form, counts reps and estimates calories burned during exercise. The feature can be voice controlled. **Sharp** offers a full product lineup across various relevant sectors – but countertop convection microwave ovens are still big business, as people spend much more time at home – including working from home – and want to quickly warm up water for tea or steam veggies for a healthy snack. Among new models are the company's Alexa-enabled countertop ovens.

3.

A Focus on Health and Home Cleanliness – The pandemic heightened consumer awareness of home cleanliness and the air we breathe. The show was filled with lots of new devices, gadgets and disinfecting robots along those lines. **Samsung** demonstrated an artificial intelligence (AI)-powered robotic vacuum cleaner that uses sensors, including Lidar, to clean around toys, pets and other items. **Clean Air Zone (CAZ)** introduced its air purification system using advanced microbionic and enzyme green technology to capture and destroy airborne contaminants including COVID-19, viruses, mold, odors, chemical fumes and gases – without the use of filters or harmful by-products. It earned two awards at the show, and captured the 2021 CES Editors' Choice Award from Renewed, USA Today's consumer product reviews division under the Cleaning category. CAZ also earned a Techlicious Top Picks of CES 2021 Award in the Health & Beauty category. Look for it to be available later this year for \$1,495. **LG** announced new products featuring "air-management technology," including portable air purifiers and purifiers with new HEPA filters. In addition, the brand's washing machines have a new allergen-cycle feature, which LG claims removes 95 percent of household allergens. LG also announced a robot that uses UV light to sanitize hotel rooms. Other products due for introduction include disinfecting robots, UV sanitizers, and more.

4.

CareClever introduced Cutii – an autonomous voice-command mobile robot companion for seniors. Cutii uses AI to learn the user's behaviors and preferences – and as the user speaks, Cutii responds and moves as needed.



Technology Continues to Improve Everyday Health & Wellness – Mindful self-awareness is a growing category, and a growing range of products were shown at CES and elsewhere. Touchpoint devices fall into this category. Also, robotic caretakers is going to be a category expected to grow in popularity, particularly as people choose to age-in-place safely, ensuring they are less isolated and cared for happily since they are connected to their family, friends, caretakers and to ongoing external activities – all in the convenience of their homes.

CareClever introduced Cutii – an autonomous voice-command mobile robot companion for seniors. Cutii uses AI to learn the user's behaviors and preferences – and as the user speaks, Cutii responds and moves as needed. Consumers can also use its voice commands, for example, to ask Cutii to come to them or to dictate and send a message to a friend. The robot can remind users of appointments or other events, such as family birthdays, according to CareClever. Users can enjoy virtual visits with family and friends. Caregivers can use their cell phones to communicate with seniors, by video, voice, or message via Cutii. Loved ones can make video calls and can even ask Cutii to move to better accommodate

users in their homes – something a tablet or smart speaker can't do. The robot can also call emergency contact numbers. Simply by saying "Cutii, help!" the senior will be attended to without needing to struggle to find a button. And with Cutii, entertaining brain exercises are just a command away. Cutii offers a calendar of real-world activities such as cooking or yoga classes, museum tours, and quizzes that seniors can participate in from the comfort of their homes. In addition, Cutii allows remote patient monitoring (RPM) through telehealth consultations which can be scheduled and conducted from the home. It also includes privacy safeguards and does not rely on major technology companies' services such as Amazon Alexa. No personal data will be sold to marketers or other third parties, said the company. Cutii is currently available and has been deployed in homes as well as in senior living communities.

HD Medical announced the HealthyU – a cardiac monitoring device that can track seven biometrics at home. The COVID-19 pandemic stripped hospitals of resources and kept many medically vulnerable patients at home. But even in healthier times, patients that lived far away from specialists traveled long distances to visit their doctors for frequent follow-up appointments. This especially applies to patients with cardiovascular disease. If symptoms come and go, it's very easy for a clinician to miss them. Constant monitoring is key. HealthyU has a seven-lead ECG and can also monitor blood pressure, respiratory rate, lung sounds, heart sounds, heart rate, SpO2, and temperature. HD Medical expects FDA clearance by Q2 2021. Last July, the FDA cleared HD Medical's flagship product, the HD Stethoelectronic smart stethoscope. HealthyU is already being used in clinical evaluations, and the company is currently in talks with partners in the wellness and professional sports fields. Now you won't have to wake up five hours in advance of an appointment, just to have a doctor listen for a few minutes and declare that "all is well."

What else is coming? New 'brains' to drive transformation, and new products for you to sell! Ordinary wearables may soon track blood pressure and other vital signs. While you might not recognize **Valencell** as a brand name, it's likely that you are familiar with its sensor technology, if you've worn a Scosche armband, Jabra or Bose headphones, or a Suunto sport watch. The North Carolina-based company is introducing its expanded blood pressure sensor kit for wrist-based wearables and those worn on the finger. This goes beyond its 2020 introduction of sensors that were designed primarily for ear-based devices. This enhanced capability is based on its new blood pressure sensors that measure heart rate and oxygen uptake. There's also a software component that allows for personalization based on a person's height, weight, age, and gender to enable accurate estimations of blood pressure, and

5.

more. The company expects FDA clearance in early 2021. Watch for new fitness trackers, smartwatches, and smart rings that may soon monitor EKG, blood oxygen levels, and blood pressure — making them increasingly more worthy of their "smart" moniker. Here are some highlights of other companies making news. **Oticon** introduced the first Internet-connected hearing aids. **Philips** introduced a range of healthcare and especially telehealth, virtual care, remote patient monitoring and mobile and flexible care solutions that all have seen a tremendous acceleration due in large part to the COVID-19 pandemic. **P&G** introduced upgrades to its Oral Care products, a category garnering particular attention during these times. Stay tuned! There's more to come.

Concern About Being in Public Spaces. Masks Everywhere – In the age of COVID-19, face coverings are going 'tech.' They have become not only a medical gadget but also the latest wearable fashion accessory. And there was no shortage at CES 2021.

Razer, a company most known for its gamer products, made a somewhat unusual product introduction with its "Project Hazel" – a smart mask that's transparent and features active ventilation to circulate and filter the air. It also contains a built-in microphone and amp to make speech clearer. Plus, it lights up in 16.8 million different colors.

AirPop announced a face wearable called the Active+. It's a cloth mask with a unique sensor that monitors breathing patterns from inside the mask – and it provides information on air quality from outside the mask. It was expected to start shipping in mid-February at \$149; it will be selling via Amazon, and is looking for distribution.

Nexvoo, a HealthTech company, announced a face mask called Breeze (\$79) that's transparent to show off the wearer's smile. It has two silent fans that both circulate and filter the air, and a UV light to automatically disinfect the mask while it's charging.



An AirPop cloth mask with a unique sensor that monitors breathing patterns from inside the mask

THE BOTTOM LINE

If we learned anything in 2020, it's that consumers play a pivotal role in their own health and wellness. In 2019, Satya Nadella, Microsoft CEO, said: "With the state of the world, every company is a software company." In that vein, at CES 2021, we observed the trend that many CE and tech companies are now also HealthTech companies. The pandemic has been a catalyst for change – changing the way people work, socialize and unwind. Consequently, consumer reactions, habits, work, lifestyle and other needs are fueling spending and demand for HealthTech products. HealthTech is growing into a big business – with tremendous potential for sector and channel growth. Retailers' job is to identify the products and/or categories best suited for their customers, and that will also offer new business development opportunities in the mainstream as well as in other vertical regional or local business segments, including with employers that self-insure, or senior facilities.

How will you be a beneficiary of this new transformation? What's your strategy? What's your game plan? Many companies stepped up to deliver new product offerings that are here, emerging or are looking to enter our marketplace. We will be tracking these developments in upcoming columns. Stay tuned!

To continue the conversation, Schreiner may be reached at susan@C4trends.com.



BY STEPHEN SILVER

An online conference was held the week of Jan. 11-15 that offered many key lessons for CE retailers to note in 2021 – and it wasn't International CES. Retail Innovation Week, hosted by the "retail think tank" known as PSFK and its founder, Piers Fawkes, was held for the third time. The conference normally takes place in New York, but this time it happened virtually, on a platform called Hopin. Fawkes, in a video previewing the show, said that "we've researched the main themes and the most important ideas that are developing in retail and along the customer experience journey, and we've invited some of the world's most progressive experts to come share their ideas and share tips and talk to our community about how we should respond to this moment and how we should build business going forward."

Themed Days

Each day of the conference had a specific theme. Day 1 was "Next-Gen Digital Commerce," the second day was "The New Role of the Store," the third was "Retailing with Purpose," and the fourth was "Winning the Modern Marketplace." Each day's events began with talk-show style interviews and panels, mostly

hosted by Fawkes himself, leading into break-out sessions. There was also virtual networking, taking place on the margins of the discussions as well as before they began. There was a continuing thematic thread for the show – one that was frequently discussed during CES as well: Industries have had to adapt on the fly to the changes brought about by the pandemic, and now that the end of the pan-



PSFK founder Piers Fawkes

demic may be in sight, it's time to take stock of which of those changes will be permanent. "2020 was our year for e-commerce – to see the real adoption of digital e-commerce," Megan Higgins, vice president and general manager, eCommerce and Marketplaces at Avalara — a sales tax compliance business — said in a first-day panel. She added that while those changes had been in the works for quite

some time, "this is the inflection year." "As a small retailer, you have to embrace technology. It is so important," Higgins added. As part of the event, the conference released a series of reports, one of which was connected to the Day 2 presentation on "The New Role of the Store." "To better balance safety and convenience and offer greater personalization and flexibility, retailers are integrating technology and data into their physical stores, empowering both shoppers and associates with mobile-activated experiences and expanding access to value-add services like in-store appointments and BOPIS [Buy Online Pickup In Store]," Fawkes wrote in the introduction to that report. That report contained such advice as "folding fulfillment capabilities spanning in-store warehousing, ship from store and curbside pickup into their physical footprint, further blending the online-to-offline shopping experience." This trend includes everything from turning closed retail locations into fulfillment centers, to shifting the store's "purpose" to serving multichannel customers. The report also cited data from Shopify showing that more than half of consumers are "more comfortable making in-store purchases with digital or contactless payments." "Physical retail will always be important, but it's changing. Part of the reason department stores have struggled is because a lot of them just put product out on the shelf and hope it sells. That's not the future of physical retail. It's about personalization and building connections with customers," Ophelia Chen, founder of New York-based online retail company Bobblehaus, said in the report.

Rethinking the Retail Space

One panel, titled "Recalibrating Your Physical Retail Presence to be Faster, Smaller and Nearer," offered advice on rethinking the retail space. It was conducted by the three co-founders of the consumer engagement firm YourStudio. The panelists asked "hypothetical ques-

tions" about how retail will work: For "faster," the question was, "How can retail become a live feedback loop to listen and evolve?" For "smaller," it was, "What are the most powerful new formats as retail footprints condense?" And for "nearer," it was, "How do we use store locations to reach out to and support neighborhoods?" "It's no longer enough to respond to the pace of change of the brand," YourStudio's Danny Newman said. "At YourStudio, we talk about moving at the pace of culture, and that really helps build resilience into your retail experience, to ensure we're not just keeping up with the consumer, but we're also staying ahead." Another report issued as part of Retail Innovation Week, created in partnership with Avalara, was titled "Marketplace and the Next-Gen Digital Experience: Developing an Omnichannel Digital Experience," and tied in with the fourth day of the event. That report included six key strategies: SEO discovery and research; product page experience; checkout and payments; merchandising and fulfillment; backend optimization; and analytics and reporting. One of the people participating in Retail Innovation Week actually has some experience in CE retail. Ron Thurston formerly ran a series of Apple Stores in the Houston area, and went on to author a book called "Retail Pride: The Guide to Celebrating Your Accidental Career," which was released last October.

Interviewed by Fawkes, Thurston said he wrote the book because he was "defensive of my industry," and he wrote the book "to celebrate this industry, and people who work in it, and to be proud of it." Thurston's book lists three of what he calls "pillars of retail success," which apply across all retail industries: "Empathy, curiosity, and focus. Those things, working side by side, can set people up for success in this industry, and I think many others," he said.

Lessons Learned

Even when there were technical difficulties on the show's second day, and the start of the main live stream was delayed by more than a half hour, the organizers drew lessons from it. "Speaking of tech challenges, this is one of the things we continually talk about at PSFK," Scott Lachut, a partner at PSFK, said in a chat window, as participants waited for the program to continue. "So much is discussed around bringing tech into the store experience, but if it doesn't work or add value, it can negatively impact the customer experience... As we troubleshoot, this reminds me of the challenge of customer service for so many companies today." Most of the key sessions held at Retail Innovation Week have been archived at the event's YouTube channel.

SUMMARY:



- Retail Innovation Week, an online conference held the same week as CES in early January, looked back at lessons from the pandemic – and whatretailers can learn from them going forward.
- The event, held for the third time, was presented by the retail think tank known as PSFK, and featured talks with a couple of dozen retail industry leaders.
- The consumer electronics field wasn't particularly well-represented, but the event nevertheless offered lessons for CE retailers.



A year ago, we told you about the arrival of the survey that showed just how different consumer retail behavior was between North America and Europe. A report late in 2019 by the retail management solutions firm iV-end Retail by CitiXsys found that a gap had formed between North American and European shoppers when it came to whether they preferred shopping online or in person.

The 2019 survey revealed that 71 percent of North American consumers found online shopping more convenient than shopping in brick-and-mortar stores, while only 50 percent of those in Europe felt the same way. Also in that survey, 72 percent of European responders said they did all or most of their shopping in physical stores, while only 57 percent of North Americans said the same thing. And North American shoppers were more likely to say they had researched a product online before going to a store, with 73 percent of American shoppers engaging in that practice, while just 68 percent of European shoppers said the same thing. There were many reasons for the changes, including North America being more geographically dispersed, and that European countries are more densely populated. But, like everything else in the last year, those trends have been changed by the pandemic.

What a Difference a Year Makes

A study from McKinsey, released in August, found a massive flight to online purchases among U.S. customers after the start of the coronavirus

pandemic. "A few months into COVID-19, consumer shopping online has increased significantly across many categories," that report, which covered the U.S. market, said. "Consumer intent to shop online continues to increase, especially in essentials and home entertainment categories. More interestingly, these habits seem like they're going to stick, as U.S. consumers report an intent to shop online even after the COVID-19 crisis." McKinsey asked U.S. consumers about a wide variety of purchasing categories, and whether they were more likely to make such purchases online. In nearly every category, the online purchase intention increased by double digits, with customers 44 percent more likely to purchase OTC medicine, 41 percent more likely to buy groceries online, and 30 percent more likely to acquire furnishings and appliances that way.

For consumer electronics, American consumers were only 10 percent more likely to buy online, although 66 percent of those surveyed were buying online prior to the pandemic. As for Europe, a report by InternetRetailing.net, released shortly after the start of the pandemic last spring, found that coronavirus "will speed up the shift from physical retail to e-commerce, which is now happening at a faster pace than previous forecasts."

Behaviors that Promise to Persist, Post-Pandemic

That report found that the share of consumers doing more than half of their business online "has increased dramatically on all three of Europe's

biggest e-commerce markets. Six out of 10 consumers say that they will continue to buy as much online as they do today after the pandemic has passed." That report cited data from Kantar and Detail Online, of Europe's three largest markets for e-commerce, France, Germany and the U.K., which found that "the share of consumers that do more than half of their total purchases online has increased between 25 and 80 percent since the outbreak of COVID-19."

Detail Online Founder Joakim Gavelin said in that report: "During lockdown, focus is on the main essentials, but this report indicates that all the major e-commerce categories will bounce back to even higher levels when the epidemic has passed. And when they do it's essential that brand owners have the bare essentials in place to meet the demand. 'Are my products visible when consumers search for them at online retailers?' is a question all brands should ask themselves right now."

Another report, from mid-2020, by Ecommerce News, predicted that e-commerce on the continent would be worth 717 billion euros by the end of 2020 – a 12.7 percent increase over the year before. That report also said that while Western Europe is the most developed e-commerce market in Europe, Romania and Bulgaria have shown strength of late.

The Lithuanian tech company Searchnode, meanwhile, released a survey in January of nearly 100 eCommerce decision-makers from Europe and North America, which found that over 90 percent of e-commerce businesses saw an increase of revenues over the course of the spring lockdown period.

What Can We Expect for Retail in the New Year?

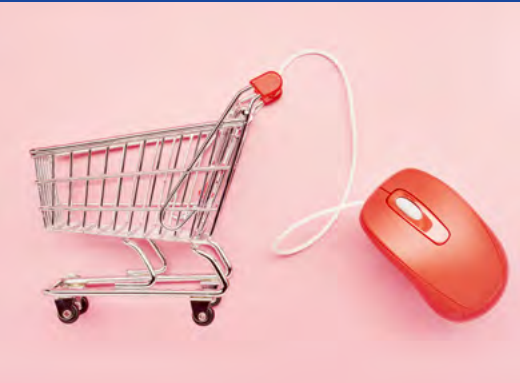
In the U.S., according to a forecast issued last fall by eMarketer and Insider Intelligence, retail sales will rise 2.3 percent in 2021 to a total of \$5.630 trillion. Following a pandemic-driven increase of 32.4 percent growth in e-commerce sales in 2020, that sales category is seen growing by just

6.1 percent, while brick-and-mortar sales are forecast to rise 1.6 percent, after falling 3.2 percent in 2020. That report added that important trends in brick-and-mortar retail will include "click and collect, cashierless checkout, contactless payment, and digital signage."

As for Europe, an early-December report from Moody's Investor Service predicted a "stable" European retail sector for 2021. The report also said that in Europe, "digitalization trends will accelerate changes across the retail sector. The rising share of online sales is cannibalizing in-store sales, eroding margins for bricks-and-mortar-focused retailers.



"Our outlook for the retail sector across Europe for next year aligns with our expectations for continued sector sales volume and profit recovery, although they will still stay below 2019 levels," Francesco Bozzano, vice president – senior analyst, at Moody's Investors Service, said in that report's release. "That said, recovery will be much slower for retailers exposed to sectors like tourism and travel."



Prior to 2020, there were clear differences between how North American and European consumers behaved, with North American consumers more interested in e-commerce than their European counterparts.

The coronavirus pandemic, like most things, changed that calculus, with e-commerce usage surging significantly in both regions.

Forecasts for 2021 see e-commerce sales continuing to rise in both North America and Europe.



Q&A
FEATURE

A STORE VISIT WITH
AARON SHOLTIS,
PRESIDENT, HIDEF
LIFESTYLE

INTERVIEW BY PHILIP SCHMALZL



How and when did your retail store start? How many stores do you have? You also have an online store. What is the main difference between your online shop and your local showroom?

Aaron Sholtis: The first store was started in 2004 as an online store. Then we started the retail showroom. The online store has the exact type of client as the showroom client: one who appreciates and has knowledge about audio. In the retail store, we have various clients, and over the years we have cultivated a staff trained to develop and maintain customer relationships and answer their every need.

What makes your retail business unique from others?

Sholtis: One asset is our showroom size and location. We are two-and-a-half hours from D.C. and three hours from Pittsburgh. We are a relatively short driving distance from the Mid-Atlantic metropolitan cities. And, as you have seen from the size of our showroom, if we were within these cities, there would be no way for us to have a 26,000-square-foot building. So we are able to showcase many more brands and technologies vs. some of our competitors. We call it a destination showroom, because we pull from all these metropolitan areas and we are able to attract customers to make the trip and drive to us to see everything in our location.

One of our biggest benefits has always been our online business. We have been a serious player in the online world for almost 17 years now. We started online vs. most of our competitors, who started in the reverse order. Outside of that, we have developed a social media presence, and we produce content for YouTube. All these things drive traffic due to our website, but also locally in the market as well.

What are the top three things that you have done that have contributed most to your success?

Sholtis: We started in a reverse way from most of our competitors; we started online before breaking into customer retailing, and that's certainly unique. It always made us more integrated than some of our competitors.

Secondarily, I think the biggest triumph for us has been the relationships that we cultivated over the last 17 years. Relationships and your reputation are the most valuable things a company can have. We treat those with the upmost importance, whether it is a customer or a vendor or even our shipping suppliers.

And then, one of my favorite sayings is that the minute you stop growing, the minute you start dying. You cannot plan that somebody else is not going to come along and do what you do better than yourself. We never, ever are satisfied with how we go to market, or with what we offer to customers – we are always looking to do what is next.

What are your goals this year?

Sholtis: COVID has certainly changed how we are thinking about retail. We are looking to redesign to be more service- and technology-showcasing vs. product showcasing. We are looking to set up a system where our showrooms are event-based, meaning every 30 to 60 days we will have a new event to promote to clients so they can see new technology from one of our vendors or from many of our vendors. We want there to be a reason for recurring traffic to come in. I think this is going to be important for us and for others in the future – to do more education-based selling. On top of that, we have invested in opening our West Coast shipping location, where hopefully a retail showroom will open as well. Getting products quickly, when customers are shopping online – having access quickly – is extremely important. For us, expanding our capabilities this way is extremely important.

Are you looking to expand in any way or sell other categories? Which categories?

Sholtis: We are also looking to continue our growth in our Canadian online operations. It has been very healthy and growing for us there. In addition, we are always looking for new categories – you know, all the new healthcare and air quality control systems are very interesting to us, and something we might look into, as well as continuing to explore lighting categories as well.

Is there anything in the building of your business that might have not gone the way you liked, and you learned from?

Sholtis: We spent 2019 recovering from a theft from a financial controller that I hired and not only was there a theft; there was a total disruption of our financial records. So, you know, every day, you learn lessons in business and life, and that was a huge lesson for us to learn from. So we have been able to get everything back in line, and have checks and balances to better protect ourselves. That, on top of COVID, made 2020 a very challenging year for us. But with that, we have grown as a team and as a company, and our abilities have grown. So we are looking at 2021 to be a very, very big year for us.



What is your favorite corner of the store? Can you show me?

Sholtis: Well, honestly no – look, we sell product categories for cars, to audio, to TVs, to other technology. It is all so much fun, and changing so fast, I think that the rate of change is really what drives me, whether it is in the cars we build out, or the audio we design; constantly reinventing those things is really what our passion is about.

What have you done to overcome the obstacles of the pandemic in the customer experience?

The store is closed, and available by appointment only.

Sholtis: It has been difficult and challenging, with the showroom being affected. We have all seen over the last year that demand from customers has increased, with everyone staying at home, in home office, work from home, things like networking – new audio products have been extremely hard to keep in stock and to deliver. So while people do not want to go out and spend time in a showroom as much as they did, they do want the technology and they do want the knowledge. It increased the importance of social media and it increased the drive for installation and design services as well. And we are starting to see the showrooms start to turn around as well. We expect that will continue in 2021.

How does Dealerscope help you in your everyday business?

Sholtis: Well obviously, we need to stay abreast of what is going on in the industry, and we have lots of great relationships with manufacturers. But there are lots of things that happen that we do not know about, so staying in touch with all that is key, and our relationship with Dealerscope, for many, many years now, has been wonderful, and helps keep our name out there in the industry as well.



CHIPing Away at the Fragmented Smart Home Market

BY PATRICK MCCARTHY

There’s an interesting oxymoron unfolding in the “smart” home arena, and it is underscored by, simply put, dumb devices. The market for smart devices is saturated. Everything from toasters to toilets can earn its badge and be marketed as ‘the device of the future.’ However, the same venture into the smart space feels much like the odd trend of adding “I” in front of every device, allowing manufacturers to reproduce a consumer’s emotional response to Apple-branded products. Tuned to the same key, adding “smart” to a device only further fragments an industry currently navigating through its own identity crisis. So that begs the question: How should we define the smart home? If you were to ask technology giants Google, Apple, Amazon and Zigbee, they would tell you the future is CHIP, or “Connected Home over IP.” In my opinion, three main attributes should qualify a device as smart – interoperability, functionality, and privacy. Essentially it’s about asking, can the device play well with others, can the device solve an actual issue,

and can the device keep your data private. But before we dive into those concerns, let’s start from the humble beginnings of a smart home that anchor around the birth of the digital assistant.

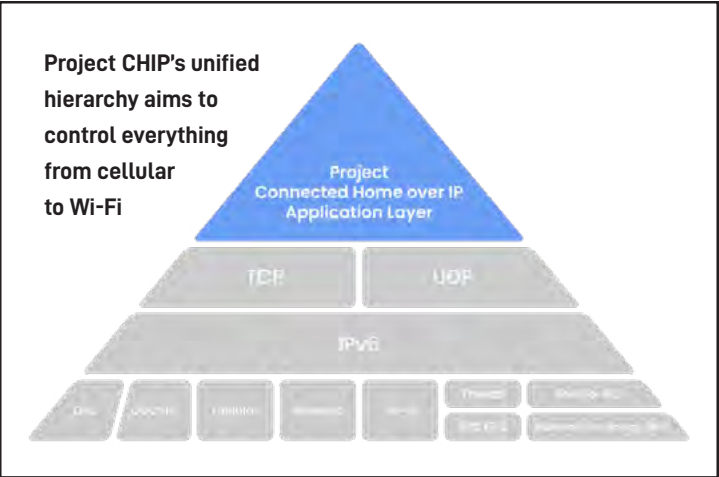
Work Smarter, Not Harder

In 2011, Apple launched its first iteration of Siri alongside the iPhone 4s. Although you can point to other companies launching virtual assistants (RIP Clippy), Siri ushered in a new paradigm of human-to-computer interaction. Unbeknownst to the packed house of journalists at the unveiling, this was the first glimpse of a smarter future. The digital assistant arms-race exploded over the next few years, with Amazon and Google quickly pushing their product to the market. Today, it is nearly impossible to find a device that won’t wake up to the noise of, “Hey, Alexa.” And while it may be fun to keep score of who is winning

between the big three, the most prominent issue has shifted from “Who is the best?” to “What have you done for me lately?” For just a moment, reflect on your personal use of smart assistants. What was the last task you asked it to perform? Where were you? What was the result? A 2018 report from PricewaterhouseCoopers [1] indicates that “of the 90 percent who [are aware of voice technology], the majority have used a voice assistant (72 percent),” but the most common task was to search for an answer that they would normally type out, followed by asking a question, checking the weather, and playing music. The least common? Controlling other smart devices. To be fair, that was the future spelled out at the 2011 Cupertino keynote. Siri was slated as a digital notetaker and method of information relay, to speed up a consumer’s life. But that mission has left the smart home space stagnant with products being badged smart and not bringing any innovation to the table. However, CHIP has set the foundation to change that misnomer.

A CHIP on the Smart Home Shoulder

Project CHIP is one of the most complex projects in the smart home industry. Google, Amazon, Apple, and Zigbee want to tackle how devices work with each other and elevate the smart home offering for all consumers. Launched in late 2019, the connectedhomeip.com website states that “the goal of the Connected Home over IP project is to simplify development for manufacturers and increase compatibility for consumers.” It slates the project as a “shared belief that smart home devices should be secure, reliable, and seamless to use.” What makes this straightforward message complicated is the burden of getting everyone to use their standard. It certainly helps this effort with high-profile companies finally agreeing to the same standards, but historically, these companies have had no interest in working with each other. From hardware to software, quickly sending information can feel like trying to navigate yourself through a foreign country if you aren’t familiar with the walled gardens they have produced. Eight months after the December 2019 launch of Project CHIP, the Zigbee Alliance dropped a glimmer of hope that the project was still on track and growing “by an order of magnitude, from a few dozen participating companies to more than 145 active member companies.” [2] Additionally, the list of growing use cases now covers “lighting and electrical (e.g., light bulbs, luminaires, controls, plugs, outlets), HVAC controls (e.g., thermostats, AC units), access control (e.g., door locks, garage doors), safety and security (e.g., sensors, detectors, security systems), window coverings/shades, TVs, access points, bridges” and “other consumer electronics products.” The expansive list is exciting. We are finally sifting through the noise to produce a full image of what the smart home should be. The picture being painted of window shades opening in the morning, lights turning off at night, and front doors locking behind you finally has a fully capable artist palette.



However, Project CHIP still has a long way to go to undo its own mistakes. Suppose you use the recently concluded virtually held Consumer Electronics Show as a benchmark to the future. In that case, the average consumer is still looking at smart locks and speakers as the future, as noted in the show producers’ “Emerging Tech That Is Shaping the Industry” article. [3] Taking a step back, the view starts to come together on what a smart home should be, and just how we got to this position. Interoperability, functionality, and privacy still sit as the critical components for what should drive my vision of the smart home market - with project CHIP only solving one piece of that puzzle. If they spend all their time building a highway for devices to talk to each other but still lack genuine capabilities to create innovation, it may feel like one step forward and two steps backward.

SUMMARY:

- Amazon, Google, and Apple headline Project CHIP and look to undo the mistakes they influenced
- A fragmented smart home market is saturated with limited innovation
- Defining smart devices beyond just setting timers and checking the weather

Sources:
[1] <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/library/consumer-intelligence-series/voice-assistants.html>
[2] https://zigbeealliance.org/news_and_articles/project-development-to-reality/
[3] <https://www.ces.tech/Articles/2020/The-Emerging-Tech-That-Is-Shaping-the-Industry.aspx>

PRESENTING THE IMPACT

AWARDS | 2021 DEALERSCOPE

Dealerscope's annual IMPACT Awards were designed to recognize exceptional products in the consumer electronics industry that are innovative, practical and helping to drive sales on the showroom floor and online. Instead of deciding solely amongst ourselves, the Dealerscope team decided to put the power of this year's IMPACT Awards in the hands of three highly esteemed professionals: **Steve Greenberg**, award-winning author, TV personality and expert on innovation and technology; **Robin Raskin**, American writer, author, publisher, TV personality and conference and events creator; and **Josh Christian**, CEO of the Home Technology Association. The trio brought unique perspectives to the voting process. The editorial team also reviewed the products up for recognition this year to arrive at three Editors' Choices. With that in mind, we proudly present to you the 2021 IMPACT Award winners.

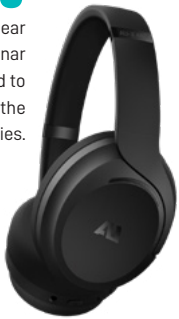


01 August Wi-Fi Smart Lock

Sporting a retrofit design, August's Wi-Fi Smart Lock is the smallest, most advanced retrofit smart lock on the market and offers homeowners and renters alike the ability to remotely control their door and have convenient, secure access to their home.

03 Ausounds AU-X ANC

The Ausounds AU-X ANC over-ear headphones incorporate planar magnetic technology, designed to provide superior resolution at the mid and upper frequencies.



04 Denon Home 350

The new Denon Home 350 plays music wirelessly in stereo with the reference quality expected from Denon products. Listeners can group other products with HEOS Built-in such as A/V receivers, sound bars and speakers to fill their homes with detailed, expansive sound.



02 Crestron Home

Crestron Home has been engineered as a powerful and responsive smart home platform that seamlessly manages all devices in the technology-driven homes of today.

05 Equator 30" Built-in Induction Cooktop 4 Burner - BIC 304

This elegant cooktop will instantly add to the luxury of any kitchen. The controls were inspired by the newest models of European sports cars.



06 LG 48CX OLED TV - OLED w/NVIDIA

LG Electronics brings the picture quality of LG OLED to an all-new screen size - 48 inches - with a focus on customers who want a mid-size TV that best fits their living space, or are looking for a second TV without compromising picture quality.



07 LG 75NANO99 8K TV

LG's 75NANO99 is the premier model in LG's 2020 LCD TV lineup, featuring the best technology and delivering the ultimate usability and design through a combination of 8K resolution, AI-based picture and audio processing technology, and AI TV functionality with voice recognition.

08 LG gram 17 (2020)

As a CES 2020 Innovation Award winner, the flagship LG gram 17 is the ultimate solution for anyone looking for maximum productivity in a portable form factor.



09 LG Indoor Garden

LG Indoor Garden, a freestanding indoor gardening appliance, employs advanced light, temperature and water control, convenient all-in-one seed packages and a growth-monitoring app to help users easily cultivate nutrient-rich and flavorful greens inside their own homes.



10 LG InstaView Electric Range with Air Sous Vide & Fry

The InstaView feature in this range lets the user check the oven's interior as they cook by giving them a clear view of the inside, when they give its glass door two quick knocks.



11 LG InstaView Door-in-Door Refrigerator

The LG InstaView Door-in-Door Refrigerator features door panels that can be replaced to match any design taste. With the iconic InstaView panel, users can knock twice on the window to illuminate the interior to view what's inside, decreasing energy usage.



12 LG PuriCare Wearable Air Purifier

The LG PuriCare Wearable Air Purifier resolves the inconsistencies of conventional face masks, air leakage around the nose and chin, uncomfortable fit, breathing difficulties, fogged-up glasses, and the environmental pollution associated with mask disposal.

13 LG UltraGear 27GN950

LG's 27-inch UltraGear 4K monitor is the world's first IPS 1 millisecond Gray-to-Gray gaming monitor. The UltraGear delivers a 1ms Nano IPS display with a refresh rate of 144Hz - the ultimate game-winning combination.



14 LG WING 5G

LG WING 5G, the first device of the LG Explorer Project, features a first-of-its-kind form factor - the entire front of the phone can swivel clockwise, rotating 90 degrees to reveal a second 3.9-inch screen, allowing users to seamlessly switch between two usability modes: Basic Mode and Swivel Mode.

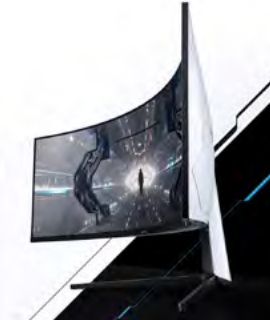


15 Samsung 110" MicroLED TV

With standardized MicroLED modules and a black matrix-free bezel design, Samsung's 110" MicroLED TV delivers never-before-seen picture quality on an ultra-large TV through innovative technologies.



16 Samsung 2021 Frame TV
The 2021 version of The Frame builds on its innovative legacy of design and technology, offering a more customizable experience in a slimmer form factor. At just 24.9mm thick, The Frame is thinner than ever — mirroring the depth of a traditional picture frame.



21 Samsung QLED 8K Q950TS
The flagship Q950TS is Samsung's first TV to combine premium 8K picture quality with powerful surround-sound audio, packaged in an ultra-thin form factor. Featuring the Next Generation Quantum Processor 8K, the Q950TS's AI upscaling capabilities automatically upscale non-8K content to pristine 8K resolution.



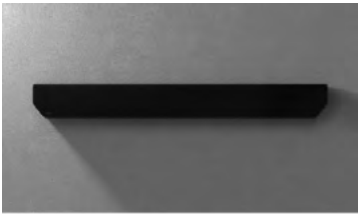
23 Samsung The Premiere LSP9T 4K Smart Triple Laser Projector
With precise color accuracy and incredible contrast on a maximum 130-inch screen space, the Premiere is the world's first HDR10+ certified projector for realistic, vibrant viewing.

17 Samsung Neo QLED Q900
Samsung's 85" Q900 Neo QLED TV combines the company's advancements in picture technology with its new quantum processor to deliver exemplary picture quality, smart features and design.



19 Samsung Odyssey G9
Samsung's Odyssey G9 is the first monitor to offer a fast and fluid 240Hz refresh rate and 1ms response time on a super-ultrawide 32:9 VA-panel and the most immersive display curve (1000R) ever experienced. The Dual Quad-HD 49" display (DQHD; 5120x1440 resolution) offers a 32:9 aspect ratio for a wider field of view.

20 Samsung Q950A Soundbar
The Q950A is Samsung's first soundbar to produce true Dolby Atmos 11.1.4 channel sound, creating a three-dimensional audio experience that fills any space. SpaceFit Sound builds on Adaptive Sound, detecting the TV's surroundings to optimize audio accordingly.



18 Samsung Odyssey G7
Samsung's Odyssey G7 monitor gives gamers a vivid, immersive experience, with tons of horsepower in an eye-catching package. Offering exceptional performance and thoughtful design, G7 is a first-of-its-kind 240Hz 1ms Quad high-definition 16:9 gaming monitor that includes a new rear glowing core design and the most immersive display curve available (1000R).



22 Samsung T7 Touch SSD
Samsung's T7 Touch portable SSD, an external storage drive, delivers industry-leading transfer speeds and, for the first time, a built-in fingerprint sensor for improved security.



24 Samsung The Terrace TV
The Terrace features enhanced brightness and specs that are optimized to make outdoor viewing as immersive as the indoor experience. It comes equipped with Samsung's 4K QLED picture quality, offering the full array of features available with Samsung's indoor TVs, including HDR10+, screen mirroring, 4K AI Upscaling, and brilliant viewing with Adaptive Picture.



25 SANUS In-Wall Power Kit for Soundbar + Mounted TV
The SANUS In-Wall Power Kit for Soundbar + Mounted TV allows installers to safely extend power to soundbars and accompanying displays — in addition to devices such as cable boxes, digital TV adapters, or streaming media players — while neatly concealing power and A/V cables inside the wall for a clean and professional look.

26 SANUS Soundbar TV Mount & Extendable Wall Mount for the Sonos Arc
Compatible with most displays from 50 inches to 90 inches, the SANUS Soundbar TV Mount for the Sonos Arc attaches directly to TV mounts, allowing the sound of the Arc to move with the display in any direction.



29 WISA SoundSend
SoundSend works with all smart TVs with HDMI ARC/eARC or optical connections to transmit up to eight channels of high-fidelity audio to WISA Certified speakers from global brands like Klipsch, Harman, Savant, Dynaudio, B&O, Enclave Audio and more.



27 Signature Kitchen Suite Double Wall Oven with Steam Sous Vide
Signature Kitchen Suite has taken the innovative, trailblazing sous vide cooking technology it is known for and expanded it to its new wall oven series. The steam sous vide cooking mode allows users to enjoy sous vide results right in the oven without the need for preheating.

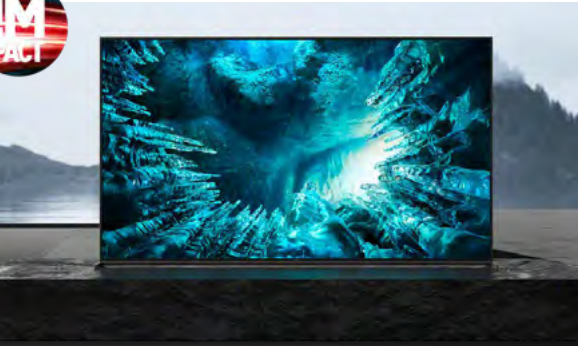
28 Sony WH-1000XM4
These fourth-generation headphones from Sony's award-winning 1000X family offer smart features that personalize and control music; they provide industry-leading noise cancellation and adjust ambient sound automatically based on user preferences.



30 Yale Assure Lever
Available with Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, the Assure Lever can be controlled from anywhere using the Yale Access or August App. Users can grant access to people they trust, lock and unlock the door and monitor activity no matter where they are.



How we enjoy content is changing, and products like Sony's VPL-VW-915ES 4K laser projector are paving the way for the next generation of at-home entertainment. The presence of 2,000 lumens creates a spectacular contrast and makes 4K HDR images even clearer and brighter than before. The VPL-VW-915ES's X1 processor uses advanced algorithms to cut noise and boost detail with high-precision frame analysis. This particular projector also comes in at an aggressive price point considering its capabilities. But image quality and affordability aside, the Sony VPL-VW-915ES creates an entirely different atmosphere for shows, movies, and gaming that you just don't get from a television.



Speck Presidio Clickflip
Standing out in Speck's Presidio Clickflip for AirPods Pro is the locking mechanism that helps keep AirPods in place in addition to the matte material and grippy texture. Also a highlight is the carabiner, so the AirPods can attach to any bag or loop. A plus (and must!) is the convenience of both wireless and wired charging.

Sony VPL-VW-915ES



Sony Z8H
Sony's 8K Model Z8H Smart LED TV provides the discriminating viewer the cachet of 8K television ownership — and much more. This set, which draws from Sony's X1 Ultimate picture processor, delivers the full package of pristine, future-forward image quality, along with audio that measures up to the display in every way. Noteworthy among its many benefits is Ambient Optimization technology, which dials up or down picture settings so that the set performs at its peak within the area the TV is situated. It also features Sony's signature TRILUMINOS Display, and supports both Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos. The Z8H is also 4K 120fps-compatible, making it ideal for gamers' needs. And its two-position stand, part of the chassis design, gives it great placement flexibility.

THE ALL-DIGITAL CES 2021, CLOSE UP



The first-ever, all-digital CES, which took place Jan. 11-14, attracted nearly 2,000 companies that showcased on attendees' computer screens a slew of next-generation product launches. It also provided a forum for keynotes from global industry leaders, live entertainment from Hollywood and more than 100 hours of conference programming. "The all-digital CES 2021 engaged the global tech community to experience innovation, make connections and conduct business. CES showed how the pandemic accelerated the arc of innovation and illustrated the resilience and innovative spirit of our industry," offered Gary Shapiro, president and CEO of the Consumer Technology Association (CTA), the show's producer. Featured were the latest innovations focused on the home, along with views of the industry's advances in 5G, vehicle technology, AI and digital health. The show also included almost 700 startups from 37 countries. Here, Dealerscope's editorial team presents a window into some of what was shown. For more, check out our website, www.dealerscope.com. CTA is also leaving content accessible on demand to those who attended the show, through Feb. 15, 2021. And plans are afoot as of now to hold CES 2022 in person in Las Vegas, and digitally, Jan. 5-8, 2022.

HISENSE TOUTS U.S. TRICHROMA LASER TV INNOVATIONS

Hisense announced more improvements and an even deeper commitment to its laser TV technology. Fisher Yu, VP of Hisense and president of Hisense Visual Technology, said the company would launch a full range of **TriChroma laser TVs** with varying ultra-large screen sizes starting at 75 inches. The 2020 pandemic and its fostering of stay-at-home habits, he offered, has created a wave of "people of the screen" consumers who will be on the hunt for larger screen sizes. He reinforced this assertion, saying that Hisense sold over 25 million terminal display products globally in 2020, and maintained what he said was a #1 position in the Chinese market.



Dr. Xinrong Liu, chief scientist of Hisense Laser TV, said the laser TV technology packs and controls separate lasers for purer display colors, with a 128 percent improvement over original RGB color performance in earlier iterations. TriChroma also achieves a 20 percent brightness enhancement at the pixel level, and 430-nit picture brightness, which Hisense says better than a conventional TV. Liu remarked that during the pandemic year, laser TV was the only category that showed growth in the Chinese market, moving from niche to mass-market status, and he projected "explosive growth" to come in that category of television, noting that the continual addition of more brand players entering the global the laser TV market. The latest Hisense laser TV on display during the press event comes with a 100-inch screen, provides a wide viewing angle, and an eye-comfort level that is 20 percent improved over earlier versions, he said. He added that it features an AI smart camera to support karaoke and fitness video immersive interactivity. "We have high hopes and expectations for the future of this display technology," he said. Besides focusing on laser TV, Hisense will also pay attention to the **ULED TV** side of its business, releasing new models in 2021 with higher refresh rates and dynamic range.

SONY HIGHLIGHTS 'CREATIVE ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY' CREDENTIALS

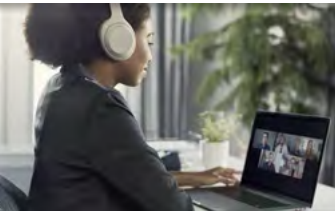
Sony offered up to virtual viewers a well-rounded portfolio of products, technologies and market positioning at the all-digital CES, showcasing its evolution in this, its 50th year as a CES exhibitor, as a "creative entertainment company with a solid foundation of technology," as Mike Fasulo, president and COO of Sony Electronics of North America, said.



Sony's 360 Reality Audio tech can now be enjoyed via headphones and speakers

Dealerscope had already covered some of the earlier announced products, such as the new **BRAVIA XR TV series – 4K, OLED and 8K TVs** featuring Cognitive Processing technology – as well as Sony's Crystal LED super-large modular displays, but there was even more. Sony also announced an expansion of its **360 Reality Audio services** and product offerings, including new video streaming capabilities and con-

tent creation tools. This technology, introduced in 2019, makes it possible for artists and creators to produce music by mapping sound sources such as vocals, chorus and instruments with positional information, and placing them within a spherical space. The technology can be experienced through **Sony headphone models** such as the WH-1000XM4, which sports dual noise-sensor technology as well as being 360 Reality Audio-ready, and beginning in the Spring, via **360 Reality Audio-com-**



patible speakers **SRS-RA5000 and SRS-RA3000** which will be available then for purchase, the company says. Some gaming news was also shared by Jim Ryan, head of Sony Interactive Entertainment, who touted the company's market dominance, stating that Sony's next-generation **PlayStation 5 console**, which hit retail shelves in November, was in fact "the biggest console launch of all time."

SAMSUNG AIMS AT 'A BETTER NORMAL' FOR CONSUMERS



Sebastian Seung, with the Bot Handy robot assistant

Among the bevy of Samsung 2021 innovations in its product ranges, certain design hallmarks will be manifest, says the company: namely, flexibility, personalization and connectivity – and many of these are anchored in Artificial Intelligence (AI) designed to make technology both "personal and productive," said the presenter, Sebastian Seung, president of

Samsung Research. The company's presentation was loaded with highlights. Among them: Samsung's new **Bespoke 4-door Flex refrigerator**, featuring changeable panels and a new filtered water dispensation system that will auto-fill a pitcher (Spring availability). The Bespoke also comes with a Dual Auto Ice Maker which makes not only regular cubed ice but also smaller 'ice bites' to suit different preferences for cold beverages. The company's new **110-inch MicroLED display**, which uses self-lit inorganic LED technology (March availability); it also features 4Vue (Quad View) allowing four-way viewing on the single screen. Also, more than 160 free channels are available on the display through **Samsung TV Plus**. An interactive **"HealthSmart Trainer"** personal fitness function that will endow all 2021 Samsung TVs; it analyzes posture in real time and provides feedback on exercise form. **The JetBot 90 AI+**, which offers a fresh twist on robotic vacuums, using a camera combined with object-recognition technology to select the best and most efficient cleaning path via its LiDAR sensors (first-half 2021 availability); A **SmartThings Cooking**



The JetBot 90 AI+ robotic vacuum uses object-recognition technology to select the most efficient cleaning path

service that will expand the personalized meal planning function that now exists within Samsung's Family Hub to other consumers via the company's SmartThings App. The **Bot Handy mobile robot** was shown to give virtual attendees a glimpse of AI's role in future robotics. It is capable of performing mundane tasks like setting a table and putting away groceries.

LG OLED EVO TV AMONG INTROS

LG focused its tech innovations in the contexts of safety, convenience and an improved entertainment experience. Its **ThinQ platform** has evolved "into



a lifestyle platform. We're bringing a whole range of services to help you get even more out of our products," offered Jin-hong Kim, senior VP of global marketing. "How we live our lives has changed," said VP and Head of U.S. Brand Marketing Peggy Ang. "We aspire to multi-occasional spaces to live multi-dimensional lives. Living rooms have become classrooms and creative spaces. We have prioritized what health and wellness mean." These changes she added, helped to inform LG's 2021 products lineup. On the entertainment side of business, LG's Tim Alessi, senior director, U.S. home entertainment marketing, noted the sharp rise in TV usage over the last year, and how LG has responded with new panel technologies, AI capabilities and a re-designed WebOS experience. A highlight of products introduced to viewers of the virtual event was the **83-inch LG OLED evo TV**, offering high brightness and using the Alpha 9 Gen 4 AI processor. It sports better-sounding audio via a 5.1.2-channel audio upmix feature to

improve the TV's sound using only the TV's speakers. A new content discovery method, a refreshed Magic Remote and NFC Magic Tap for screen sharing and mirroring are other features. And prior to the show, the company released information about a new iteration of its webOS smart TV platform. The webOS 6.0 platform will grace **LG's 2021 OLED, QNED Mini LED, NanoCell and UHD smart TVs**. Paired with the new **Magic Remote**, the latest version of the company's platform will offer viewers a more enjoyable and intuitive content discovery experience. The **upgraded LG ThinQ AI** in webOS 6.0 sup-



LG's webOS 6.0 adds new features

ports new voice commands for both Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa, making TV management and searching across streaming services, internet and broadcast channels easier. LG also showed off its prowess in robotics, including a **CL0i UV-C robot** that is tasked for jobs such as disinfecting hotel rooms and offering contactless room service to guests. Among the company's appliance offerings this year are the **LG WashTower**, a washer/dryer combination that is stacked to take up half the floor space of a side-by-side configuration.

TCL GOES ALL IN WITH SUPER-SIZED TVS

TCL is training its focus on the ultra-large TV screen – not a coincidence, since that is where the focus of COVID-19-homebound consumers is also fixed as the industry moves into 2021. TCL had also held an earlier global press event where it espoused its overarching **AIxIoT "connection, display, interaction" strategy** to "encourage adoption of intelligent lifestyles" with the TV as the hub at the center, said Tiago Abreu, head of TCL's X-Lab Industrial Design Center.



The pointed press presentation on product plans for the North American market the next day, however, zoned in on certain categories including air purification, audio, and other products that "focus on giving joy and simplicity in people's lives through the thoughtful execution of technology," said Chris Larson, TCL North America's senior VP. But much of the news related to the TV category. Aaron Dew, director of product development for TCL North America, noted overall industrywide growth in the U.S. in big-screen TVs of 15 percent over 2019. However, sales of TVs 70-plus inches in size, he said, were up 80 percent year over year in 2020 – and grew more than 150 percent in Q4 2020 over the previous identical period in 2019. With those stats to back him up, Dew added, "We believe 2021 will be an even bigger year for big screens." To satisfy that growing consumer demand, TCL is offering a total of three **85-inch TVs** at varying price points with diverse feature sets: the **XL Collection** (shown in photo above). The **85-inch 4K 4-Series Roku TV** will come out first within Q1 (\$1,599); stepping up from that model is the 4-Series **QLED HDR Roku TV**, and topping out the offerings will be the **8K 85-inch QLED HDR Roku TV** with mini-LED control zone technology. Also evolving for 2021, he said, is TCL's 6-Series, all new models of which will feature 8K resolution and the company's AiPQ upscaler to handle non-8K content; the current 4K 6-Series model range will still be available, he stated. And for 2021, the newest Gen-3 mini-LED backlight technology will be a prime feature in ultra-slim TVs launching later in the year. What makes those TVs "ultra-slim" is an engineering achievement that TCL has dubbed OD Zero (with the OD standing for Optical Depth), and in those ultra-slim TVs, the distance between the backlight and the LCD display layer is said by the company to be 0mm.



BOSCH'S FOCUS: SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

The first-ever virtual CES gave Bosch the opportunity to showcase a mission it believes it has always followed: using technology to improve people's well being — the core of its strategy, "Invented for Life." Michael Bolle, CTO/CDO, detailed the company's initiatives, which focused on two main sects: Climate Action and AloT (where AI meets the Internet of Things). Following the tagline "Sustainable #LikeABosch," the company presented sustainable solutions for health and wellness, living and mobility. Having achieved carbon-neutral status at the end of last year, Bosch cited climate change as a great motivator. It is now focusing on the emissions of its entire value chain, from the goods purchased to the disposal of the products sold, across all business areas. The company



The e-bike Nyon control panel offers on-board navigation, fitness tracking, digital locking and topography-based range estimates.

highlighted its consumer products that help people reduce their environmental footprint: These included: **Heating systems** that can help individual households save 2.5 tons of CO2 annually in Germany alone; dishwashers equipped with **Zeolith technology** that offer an energy savings of up to 20 percent; washing machines that help with water conservation; and power tools featuring intelligent power management technology that increases their lifespans — and that help people reduce electronic waste. "In our core mobility business, our wide variety of solutions and services help people reduce their carbon footprint. Here, we're working toward a vision of mobility products that, when employed, can have no neg-

ative impact on the global climate and urban air quality," says Bolle. "To pursue our vision, we're developing a full range of powertrain solutions — from **combustion** engines to **battery-electric powertrains to fuel cells**, powering everything from **e-bikes** to trucks." In the e-Bike Division, the **Nyon control panel** offers on-board navigation, fitness tracking, digital locking and topography-based range estimates. In the AloT realm, Bolle explains: "We're pursuing development along a path we call 'industrial AI.' For many other tech companies, artificial intelligence is primarily about creating models of human behavior, focusing especially on purchasing preferences. "Our approach, by contrast, focuses on the world of objects and their interaction with their environment. Whether in an automotive emergency braking assistant or when identifying faulty parts in production — in these cases, artificial intelligence is not telling machines what people are doing, but explaining the physical world to machines." Top of mind in current times, of course, is COVID-19. "The solution we're most proud of in this regard is our rapid test for coronavirus. Using our mobile Vivalytic medical analysis device, we developed the **PCR test** in six short weeks and launched it in March of last year. Offering an initial time-to-result of two-and-a-half

hours, we have since shaved this down to less than 30 minutes for positive samples," Bolle said. **Bosch security cameras** can be useful in fighting the virus as well. A new camera solution with integrated intelligent video analysis measures body temperature without contact, and anonymously, with a maximum deviation of half a degree. Using a software solution for the open camera platform of the Bosch startup Security and Safety Things, these cameras can detect whether the number of people in a shop or showroom complies with the prevailing coronavirus restrictions. In addition to the COVID-related innovations, Bosch has extended its focus on wellness with its **self-learning AI sensor** for devices such as wearable fitness trackers. This sensor, developed by **Bosch Sensortec**, adds artificial intelligence to portable devices. It helps them recognize and record any type of fitness activity that is based on repetitive, cyclical patterns. It utilizes edge AI, where AI runs on the sensor itself. Latency and power consumption are minimized, and user data remains fully private because it does not need a cloud connection or tethered smartphone to work. While we all continue to practice safety, Bosch is introducing its **air-quality sensor** for private households. "Along with conventional indicators, including temperature, humidity and air purity, this new sensor can also measure the amount of exhaled air and aerosols present in a room. Based on these readings, it can alert you when ventilation is needed, as both can be a risk factor in COVID transmission," explains Bolle. The new sensor is being built into two of the company's existing smart-home products: the **Twinguard intelligent smoke detector** and the **Spexor mobile alarm device**. Bosch is also working on AloT solutions for connected and automated driving, "which can help eliminate gridlock and ensure smooth traffic flows in cities, while also significantly reducing both consumption and emissions." Additionally, the company has been developing its automated valet parking solution. "Last year, we teamed up with Ford and the real-estate developer Bedrock to demonstrate **fully automated parking** in Detroit. It was the first U.S. infrastructure-based solution for automated valet parking inside a parking garage."



OMRON EMPHASIZES HEART HEALTH AT CES 2021

OMRON Healthcare unveiled its first remote patient monitoring service at CES 2021, along with new digital health tools to boost patient-to-physician communication and empower more active management of hypertension. Within the last three years it has introduced the first wearable blood pressure monitor and the first blood pressure monitor with built-in EKG, and is continuing to transform the global heart health marketplace and advance the company's mission of **"Going for Zero"** heart attacks and strokes. "We've applied over 40 years of category leadership, research, development, consumer feedback, and physician insights to the innovations OMRON has introduced here



at CES that have redefined what a blood pressure monitor can do and how it can function. As we focus on our Going for Zero mission, we're seeking to help those struggling to manage hypertension and its risks, especially with co-morbidities and complications associated with this COVID-19 pandemic," said Ranndy Kellogg, president and CEO of OMRON Healthcare. **"VitalSight**, our first remote patient monitoring service, and our new **OMRON Connect 2.0 app** are designed to give consumers more power in managing their hypertension, give physicians more insights to evolve treatment, and to strengthen the patient-physician relationship via remote monitoring," said Kellogg. According to the American Heart Association national blood pressure guidelines, 116 million U.S. adults are in the hypertensive range and the CDC reports that 37 million of them have uncontrolled Stage 2 hypertension with a higher risk of heart attack and stroke. For those at the higher end of the hypertension scale, that risk is even higher during the pandemic as the health care system is overwhelmed in some areas and hypertension is an underlying health condition carrying greater risk of complications from COVID-19. OMRON created VitalSight specifically for hypertension management. It is designed as an easy-to-use service that a physician can offer to patients with high risk levels of hypertension. Patients receive a kit delivered to their home that includes an OMRON connected blood pressure monitor and data hub that

BEST BUY'S CORIE BARRY DETAILS HER COVID-19 STRATEGIES

In her first year as CEO of Best Buy, Corie Barry was tasked with navigating some extremely uncharted waters. During her conversation with CEO of Fortune Media, Alan Murray, at CES 2021, Barry explained the ways her team adapted and how she personally adjusted her leadership strategies in the face of COVID-19.



Corie Barry, CEO of Best Buy

"Overnight, everything began riding on the back of technology," Barry explains. And on top of that, the way in which customers wanted to purchase their products changed as well. Best Buy stores were forced to switch to curbside pickup only in March and opened back up to foot traffic in June, but a big chunk of the country was still working, learning and entertaining from home. Like many

stores, Barry admits there were supply and demand imbalances that were simply beyond their control. As people got more comfortable in this new digital world, they began tacking on additional purchases that they didn't know they needed. In the beginning, webcams were flying off of the shelves, which snowballed into consumers purchasing microphones, speakers, ring lights, and more. As comfort level with technology grew, it opened up the doorway to an entirely new segment of customers. But this comfort level also came with a new set of expectations, she explains. "If you have a good pickup experience at Best Buy, you're going to expect that same experience everywhere, and vice versa," says Barry. Even after stores opened, it remained important to keep the customer in control and provide an exceptional experience whether they were making purchases from their couch, curbside or in a store. This also meant that employees had to become more adaptable. Rather than having them hyper-focus on one particular segment of the store, they had to become familiar with several different categories and product types. Barry commended the flexibility of her team and mentioned the sense of unity that was felt amongst them as a positive result of the pandemic. During the discussion, Barry also touched on the topic of diversity and inclusion throughout Best Buy. With over 1,000 stores in all different parts of the country, the need for Best Buy stores to reflect the communities they are located in became increasingly evident, she says. Along with her team, Barry instituted a

are pre-set to securely share measurements with the patient's physician and care team. VitalSight can be integrated with the clinician's Electronic Medical Record (EMR) system or through the OMRON Doctor Dashboard for easy data analysis, which provides automatic notifications to signal when a patient has readings that require action to be taken. OMRON also previewed the new OMRON Connect 2.0 mobile app, which will sync with every connected blood pressure monitor from the brand and will serve as a personal heart health coach with expanded insights based on blood pressure readings and incentives for heart-healthy behavior change. Current OMRON apps, HeartAdvisor and OMRON Connect, will merge into OMRON Connect 2.0 which will represent a range of features from the current apps, vastly increasing the value of every OMRON connected blood pressure monitor. All OMRON connected devices, including HeartGuide, Complete and OMRON's recently redesigned line of blood pressure monitors, will pair with OMRON Connect 2.0. It will be available to download on the Apple iTunes and Google Play stores in Spring 2021." Kellogg emphasized, "Going for Zero is our corporate mission to eliminate heart attack and stroke. It's at the heart of everything we do, every announcement we make, every partnership we form, and every product we develop. We invite all who believe in this mission to take the pledge and join us."

number of changes directly related to diversity. These "bold commitments" state that 1 out of 3 non-hourly corporate positions will be filled by a BIPOC employee; 1 out of every 3 non-hourly field roles will be filled by a female employee. Externally, Best Buy is reaching 30,000 teenagers through 100 teen tech centers, they are committing \$44 million to expand college prep opportunities, and adding scholarship opportunities for HBCUs.

As she looks ahead, Barry said she remains committed to incorporating inclusive leadership behaviors of vulnerability, empathy, courage, and grace into Best Buy. She feels that this authentic approach to leadership and the shakeups brought on in 2020 will inform a slightly different leadership team of the future.

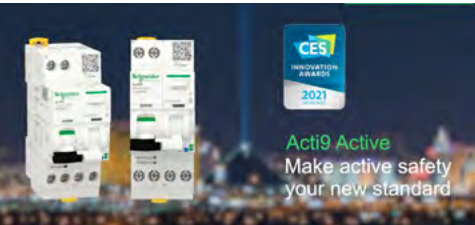




SCHNEIDER ELECTRIC’S AIM: CREATING SMART, SUSTAINABLE HOMES

Schneider Electric’s purpose is rooted in sustainability and energy efficiency. Its goal is to enable energy access and efficiency for all, everywhere, said Manish Pant, CEO and executive vice president for Home and Distribution Business, at the company’s virtual address at CES 2021 with Richard Korthauer, vice president, Home And Distribution Business. “Our vision is to ensure that homes are not only smart, but sustainable,” Pant continued. “We help homeowners maximize energy to save money on bills and reduce carbon emissions.” While Pant asserts that the concept of the smart home is far from nascent, he urges that energy management solutions are a global priority, considering the increased amount of time the world’s population is staying at home, consuming more energy than ever. Our homes have four main challenges Pant explained: Sustainability, Resilience, Efficiency and Personalization. Energy consumption has skyrocketed during the pandemic with homes becoming work and entertainment hubs. Add to that, the increased popularity of electric vehicles, and the stresses on the grid

only worsen. “Our homes are expected to become the single largest greenhouse gas emitters over the next decade,” said Pant. “As consumers equip their homes with more connected devices, the ability to control and manage home energy consumption will be non-negotiable. A secure, interoperable power manage-



ment system is key to ensuring consumers live sustainably even at home, by keeping energy cost and CO2 emissions to a minimum. Our new product empowers consumers to make better energy choices, and to take active control over their energy needs.” The Square D

Energy Center, as part of the Wiser ecosystem of solutions, helps homes become more than smart — smart AND sustainable. By connecting a smart thermostat, a smart meter, a backup generator and a solar inverter with an AI-driven energy management system, the Square D Energy Center addresses pain points of resilience and effective energy management in the home. Korthauer explained that the Square D Energy Center is crucial because it provides total control of energy



production and consumption; it will help maintain power during outages because it allows you to decide what products would remain on and what can be off. It will also save the homeowner footprint on the wall with its ergonomic design. With control from an app, homeowners can consolidate energy sources. Schneider Electric also introduced the Square D connected light switches and outlets, the X and XD Series. The XD Series gives a nod to the style-conscious consumer with its fully flush design, matte finishes, metallic color choices, and quick-changing design. Other features include side pressure plates; quick wire ground screw, large rear cutout for wire snips on receptacle; and self-grounding clip. Energy monitoring is available on all Wi-Fi and Z-Wave connected devices. Schneider Electric was also honored with a CES Innovation Award for its Acti9 Active, which helps homeowners prevent electrical mishaps and power disruption.

PHILIPS TALKS HEALTH & WELLNESS

Philips offered a “fireside chat”-style conversation during CES 2021 that touched on a topic that is especially germane during COVID-19: the company’s myriad solutions in the health-and-wellness arena, where it plays a dominant role that includes but also extends well beyond consumer-related products. The discussion was chaired by Jim Stolze, with Philips’ Deeptha Khanna, consumer & patient care chief, and Jeroen Tas, chief innovation and strategy officer, as participants. “It has been a tragic year,” reflected Tas about the pandemic, “but we have seen the best innovations used at scale to change healthcare systems for the better.” It has been a challenging year, even for those who are healthy,” added Khanna, “as well as an acceleration of ‘online for everything’ from education to gym lessons. Health is at the forefront of consciousness.” Citing Philips’



The Philips panel, l. to r.: Tas, Khanna, Stolze

leading stance in telehealth care innovations, Tas noted the growth in importance in virtual communication with doctors “with cameras at the bedside” to help guide frontline medical workers in their tasks. He also noted the rise in medical information-sharing and how that has helped in collaborative treatment of multiple health issues among consumers. Khanna spoke of the recent rise in a corollary technology to telehealth: teledentistry. She pointed to a Philips “smart” product innovation that the company believes can aid consumers in managing their dental care in these times: the Sonicare 9900 Prestige, which was just introduced at CES. Through Artificial Intelligence, it helps consumers adjust their dental care by providing a “coached,” personalized cleaning experience, detecting the user’s brushing style and adapting to that during the brushing session using SenseIQ technology. SenseIQ tracks and detects the pressure applied, the cleaning motions used and the coverage achieved; the sensors also monitor how long and how often the user brushes. Khanna also referenced Philips’ initiatives in the area of prenatal care, through its Pregnancy+ and Baby+ development and tracking apps, which she said are used on a regular basis by 1.5 million consumers. She also cited the Philips partnership with GSK that has endowed those two apps with data for consumers about vaccine-preventable diseases

and available vaccines. Tas added that wearables, which nowadays loom large in the health-and-wellness sector, is another area where Philips has made a mark, particularly in chronic-disease management of conditions such as diabetes and sleep apnea. Healthcare, added Tas, “is an ecosystem with data at the center of it, and solutions have become smart.” As to the future, added Khanna, “consumers are more aware and want to curate their own healthcare needs, and to be supported through every stage of the life journey – and we already have hundreds of millions of consumer relationships in place.”

PANASONIC TACKLES COVID, CONTACTLESS RETAIL, & MORE



HOME CHEF 4-in-1 Countertop Multi-Oven in the hands of Keith Habersberger, Ned Fulmer and Eugene Lee Yang, otherwise known as The Try Guys, for the ultimate test

Panasonic at the 2021 CES addressed the unusual nature of this year’s show and the desire to return to a sense of normalcy. Despite the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, Panasonic was able to create a plethora of new product offerings – many of which provide solutions for preventing the spread of the virus – and give back to the community in a number of ways. The press event covered several different topics ranging from the 2020 Olympics (scheduled for July 2021 in Tokyo), the connected car, contactless solutions for retail, and more. The year 2020 marked the first time since 1944 that the Olympics were cancelled, which also meant the first time in over 30 years that Panasonic was not helping to power the games. But rest assured, they are making their return this summer in Tokyo and Panasonic will be playing a major part in their return with their audio and visual elements throughout The Olympic Stadium. The four athletes that were introduced at CES 2020 as part of Team Panasonic have been working towards creating opportunities for the next generation of athletes and giving back to their communities. Swimmer Katie Ledecky has been passionate advocate for students inspiring new generations to pursue STEAM and STEM careers. Rising karate star Sakura Kokumai has offered free virtual karate lessons during the pandemic while many gyms and training facilities were closed. Team captain and swimmer Michael Phelps was the co-executive producer for the film, The Weight of Gold, which touched on the mental health struggles that many Olympic athletes face. Blind Paralympic long-jumper Lex Gillette has worked closely with Panasonic to spread his inspiring message: “Adapting. Giving back. And continuously moving forward.” The company also detailed its ClearConnect Restaurant Technology, which minimizes contact with customers while maximizing speed and efficiency of service. ClearConnect offers point-of-sale devices, self-ordering kiosks and drive-through systems to help restaurants continue serving customers under new regulations. Panasonic’s smart lockers create a safe alternative to food pickup that also allows food to remain hot or cold in a locked encasing. Customers receive a QR code that they scan upon arrival, the locker opens, and they’re good to go. Panasonic has spread its talents across a number of entertainment categories from gaming to cooking. Panasonic announced the SoundSlayer Gaming Speaker (SC-HTB01) that provides full audio immersion into a player’s favorite games. Panasonic’s Lumix cameras offer versatility to capture a range of different moments like drone shots and gimbals as well as live streaming content. The Technics True Wireless headphones let users enjoy premium sound and best-in-class noise cancellation in the home and on the go. Our cars have become our second homes during COVID-19 and like the adaptations we’ve made to our homes for safety and entertainment, vehicles deserve the same attention. On the safety front, Panasonic has introduced Augmented Reality (AR) Head Up Display (HUD) that combines AI technology from the SPYDR cockpit domain controller to render near-field and far-field content for vehicle information including speed, object and pedestrian detection, and mapping and route guidance. On the entertainment side, Panasonic has partnered with major audio brands, Klipsch and Dolby Atmos Music, to bring an immersive technology-driven sound performance on the road.

CTA RESEARCH UNEARTHSA BURGEONING DIGITAL HEALTH MARKET

BY NANCY KLOSEK



(Photo: Anna Shvets/Pexels)

It’s unsurprising, particularly in this age of the COVID-19 pandemic, that the category of Digital Health technology is front and center among consumers. The Consumer Technology Association (CTA), which in the interests of preserving attendees’ health produced an All-Digital CES this January, provided the press a review of its research on trends in the category, revealing that sales of health-related products are expected to continue their skyrocketing rise which began in 2020 in 2021 and beyond. Quite simply, “the 2020 universe of digital health expanded with unique tools – pandemic-accelerated innovations” that impacted everyday lifestyles, stated CTA Director of Research Lesley Rohrbach in citing the research data. CTA, she said, tracked connected-health-monitoring devices shipments as being valued at \$632 million – up a staggering 73 percent from the \$365 million figure for 2019. Growth projections for 2021 say shipments will reach \$845 million in value, and the category could, by 2024, top the \$1.2 billion mark. Telehealth services, also tracked by CTA, have tripled since the pandemic onset; 33 percent of respondents said they had used these services as compared with just 10 percent before the COVID-19 period. Corollary categories related to health maintenance have also seen significant sales upticks. Notable among them are health & fitness devices. U.S. unit sales to dealers, at almost six million in 2019, rose 75 percent for 2020 to almost 10.5 million. Also notable, she added, is the arrival on the market scene of wearable health-related devices that span beyond the smartwatch. One such device she cited as an example, the single-use BioButton system from BioIntelliSense, is an FDA-cleared wearable that provides continuous vital sign monitoring (i.e., temperature, respiratory rate and heart rate) for up to 90 days. The company’s website presents the device as a cost-effective method of COVID-19 symptom monitoring. As mentioned, the pandemic has served to accelerate acceptance among consumers for digital health technologies – but the acceptance is also extending to the medical provider and insurance communities, the CTA research shows. Insurance payers, clinicians and health care administrators surveyed at mid-year indicated that they felt that technology has had a positive impact on various aspects of care. Ninety-one percent cited information management and sharing as having been significantly impacted by technology, while 83 percent said quality of care has been positively impacted. During the All-Digital CES, a presentation that expanded on this topic entitled “The Road to DIY Consumer Health” was also offered virtually.

RETAIL EVOLUTION: THRIVING VIRTUALLY ANYWHERE

BY STEPHANIE ADAMOW

Sometimes it takes a catastrophe to realize what we should have been doing all along — to see changes we should have implemented long before. This was the reflection from Kate Ancketill, CEO and founder, GDR Creative Intelligence, at the recent NRF2021 Retail's Big Show. In the case of today's retail environment, this observation surely applies. While there were great losses through the pandemic, we also saw tremendous resilience and reinvention through these unprecedented times. Andy Szanger, director of Corporate Sales for CDW, recollected a sentiment that was shared at last year's NRF show, which stated that retailers need to make sure their stores are places where customers want to come. This could not be more true today, Szanger admitted. "As consumers remain fearful to go out, we need to look for new ways to service them." He continued, "Now that the panic is over, retailers need to go back and review the processes that they implemented out of necessity and make sure they are secure and optimized – like mastering curbside pickup, for example."

Transforming Brick & Mortar

Stores certainly have evolved, but in order to ensure longevity, they will need to address the three Ps, says Ancketill:

People: Improving fulfillment, bringing convenience and conversation

Planet: Reversing damage and developing sustainable systems

Profit: Maintaining sales while right-sizing real estate

5 fixes you can implement now



Implement the endless aisle



Automated fulfillment



Integrate social media and payment solutions



Fast home delivery, Click and collect, Curbside pickup



Less inventory, more services

gdr

With the surge in online shopping, retailers need to balance their physical locations as well as provide e-commerce. In fact, research shows a growth in online sales for non-essentials like clothing and consumer electronics, reported Melanie Noronha, senior editor, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). A physical store today is more of a window to online sales, a research center and a community center — a location in 5G territory, where virtual tours will be key to being part of the community. "You will spend money on a physical space where you will leverage virtual experiences," advises Ancketill. "In the next six months, retailers will need to be dynamic in their decisions," said David Dobson, director of Retail Hospitality and Consumer Goods for Intel. "They will need to leverage their physical stores to become e-commerce fulfillment locations and create an exciting environment for social spaces at these destination locations."

Mastering the Present & Preparing for the Future

Integrated commerce will be used to improve fulfillment. It is predicted that e-commerce will reach 50 percent of sales by 2025. In order for legacy stores to thrive, they must:

- Close the loop with sustainable practices
- Automate the basic missions
- Become a performative space
- Transform into a city-center logistics hub: offering a combination of buying options, birthing a new model of "buy online in-store and collect at home"
- Use the store as a social currency stock exchange: using social media and offer perks for customers who interact online.

What can retailers do right now to future-proof their businesses?

Ancketill recommends:

- Implementing the endless aisle
- Automating fulfillment
- Integrating social media and payment solutions
- Offering fast home delivery, curbside pickup and click and collect
- Reverting to less inventory and more services

SUMMARY:

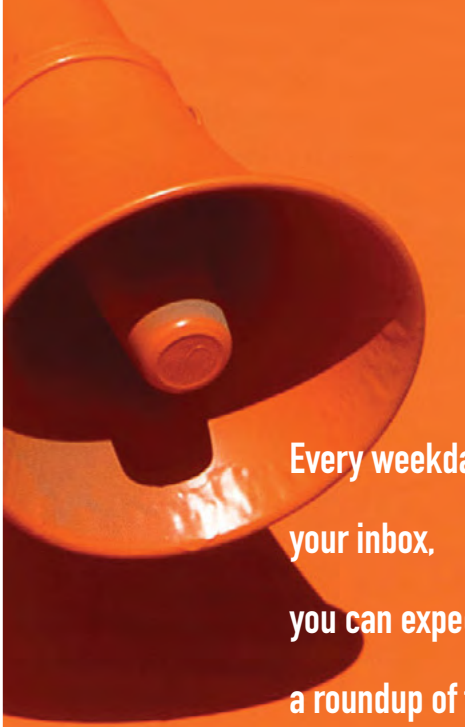
One big takeaway from this virtual event for retailers: while there were great losses through the pandemic, there was also tremendous resilience and reinvention.

While stores have been swift to adapt to COVID's challenges, they must pay attention to improving fulfillment, developing sustainable systems and right-sizing their real estate.

Once restrictions ease, online shopping will continue for Millennials and Gen Z, but will reduce for Baby Boomers and Get X, as they place higher value on the ability to assess look and feel as well as the option of bringing items home right away, EIU's Noronha explained. Balancing this omnichannel presence, providing seamless experiences both online and offline, will have a profound impact on brands and retailers. Adapting quickly to omnichannel methods is a must for business to thrive going forward, in addition to mastering the "last mile" in the purchasing process, explains Kerry Lin, EVP, Strategic Innovation, for Kinaxis. This last mile, where goods are transported from the retailer/manufacturer/distributor to the consumers' hands, is crucial. If handled poorly, consumers will find other places to shop.

Automation & 5G's Impact

The future lies in the smart city. The conversion of 5G and AI will encapsulate this smart city, and then it will move to the smart home. "IoT utilities in home will lead to an explosion in auto-replenishment of consumables," predicts Ancketill. "Driverless personal mobility combined with smart grid 'come-to-me' retail can work in both cities and rural communities." The impact of the smart city will give retailers the opportunity to offer 3D virtual stores. AR and VR will mean that visits to a physical store are not necessary, and people will continue to work at home, but together. Furthermore, drone deliveries will improve last-mile fulfillment without clogging the streets. Brick-and-mortar stores will remain, but they will serve as a remote viewing centers; direct-to-consumer auto replenishment will explode; and AI will be key for smarter and greener logistics.



Every weekday in your inbox, you can expect a roundup of the latest headlines in the consumer electronics re-tailing space. We are committed to keeping you up to date on what's happening and where you can (virtually) go next.



DEALERSCOPE TODAY

WHAT E-COMMERCE'S RISE MEANS FOR CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Unprecedented volume requires a new business model



BY LANCE ROSENZWEIG

Lance Rosenzweig is President & CEO of Support.com (www.support.com), a leader in customer and technical support solutions delivered by home-based employees. Previously, he has been CEO of three leading business process outsourcing companies, including Startek, Aegis, and PeopleSupport. Rosenzweig is also an entrepreneur and board member, with a track record of building great companies and generating substantial shareholder returns.

E-commerce has faced unprecedented disruptive growth during the bumpy span of the pandemic, and the surges are here to stay – beyond a vaccine and the return of brick-and-mortar retail. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts e-commerce will continue to steadily gain an average 1% share of the total retail market per year. This pattern has held for several years, reflecting a gradual and predictable shift in overall buying habits.

Last year, however, was an outlier and accelerant. In Q2 of 2020 alone, e-commerce's share of overall retail sales increased by 6% – six years' worth of growth in just three months. And as groceries, medical supplies, beauty goods, and home entertainment products are more frequently purchased online, the World Economic Forum predicts

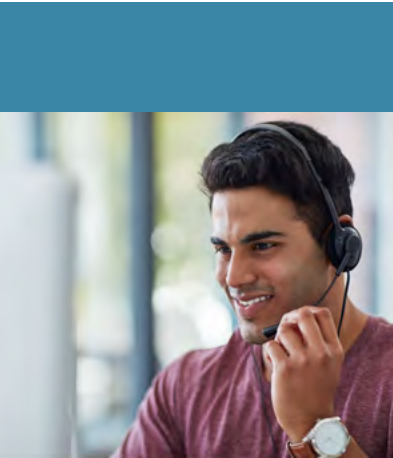
that, when the numbers are finalized, 2020 will ultimately show growth of nearly 20% in e-commerce, while department stores are expected to decline by over 60%. That represents a large-scale transformation of buying habits that will not easily revert.

Complications & Challenges Facing the Customer Support Industry

COVID-19 created a sudden and profound growth in the demand for customer support – much greater in magnitude than the seasonal increases to which customer support teams are accustomed. Teams know to anticipate temporary seasonal surges and typically prepare by expanding support hours with more outsourced agents. There is no precedent for the way customer support needs grew during the pandemic, and

looking forward, no clear model for how and when they will ebb.

The customer support industry has faced operational challenges and limitations when trying to accommodate the increased demand. During the onset of COVID-19, many U.S.-based and international brick-and-mortar call centers were forced to temporarily close altogether, disrupting customer service continuity for many businesses when they needed it most. Other centers found ways to continue operating by implementing social distancing policies and managing alternating shifts for on-site employees. Some centers opted to send a portion of their agents to work-from-home (WFH) and attempted to adjust operations accordingly, with varying levels of success.



SUMMARY:

The pandemic has permanently shifted consumer buying habits toward ecommerce, causing unprecedented demand for flexible customer support services

Traditional call centers lack the capacity to deal with the pace of change – innovative new models are needed

Homesourced customer support solves not only surge and long-term business continuity problems, but results in superior customer experiences delivered by people, processes, and platforms tailored to the home-based environment.

All of these methods resulted in lost or reduced call center capacity at the worst-possible time. At first glance, a hybrid approach, with support personnel both working from home and in call centers, seems like a viable solution. However, the challenges that accompany transitioning to and managing a WFH workforce are significant and not easily solved overnight. Transitioning a team to be home-based requires transforming every aspect of a company's operations, from recruitment and training, to managing teams for productivity, to establishing system requirements, security protocols, and technology platforms. The company's overall business processes, policies, and company culture need to be adapted for remote work to be successful.

However, this is not what usually happens. Instead, companies that choose to adopt a hybrid model retain processes, expensive infrastructure, and real estate that are designed and optimized for brick-and-mortar environments and are sub-optimal, and in some cases irrelevant, for home-based work. These legacy processes and systems make it difficult to optimize internal technology platforms as well as the recruitment, training, and engagement of home-based employees.

Homesourcing: A Better Solution to E-commerce Demands

The temporary measures forced by the pandemic were not sufficient to address customer support needs in 2020, and businesses are challenged to find a more sustainable solution to these ongoing e-commerce trends. In the first stages of the crisis, lapses in customer support levels were frustrating, but understandable. Now, it is past time to move towards a long-term model that can provide continuous customer support. One solution that retailers should consider is homesourcing – both disaster-proof and realistic. Homesourcing requires that all of a company's processes, platforms, tools, and culture are redesigned to support work delivered from home. The homesourcing model enables outsourced work to be delivered by remote employees anywhere in the world, while maintaining or even improving productivity and performance.

Even as the vaccine rolls out, the cultural and behavioral shifts of the pandemic will linger; the need for e-commerce customer support will remain high. By leveraging a homesourced model, retailers can activate the customer support resources they need at any time – up to three times faster than hybrid or traditional call centers. The globally dispersed nature of a homesourced workforce enables flexible scheduling based on call arrival patterns and large-scale ramping during seasonal spikes. This gives customer support providers the ability to easily pivot as a retailer's needs change, increasing or decreasing staffing as people adjust to a reopening society.

The homesourcing model dynamically captures financial and operational efficiencies for retailers, while delivering superior customer experiences from a team that thrives in a fully remote environment. A mature homesourced organization hires agents with the personality, work style, and time management skills suited for remote work. Without the typical geographic constraints faced by traditional call centers, a homesourced customer support vendor can rapidly recruit and onboard custom-profiled experts to meet a retailer's specific skill set, experience, or efficiency requirements. Homesourcing enables hiring exactly the right people quickly, wherever they are. Hiring is only the first step in supporting a homesourced model – all training and resources must also be optimized for the remote environment. By investing in ongoing virtual learning, homesourced customer support providers can diversify their employees' areas of expertise and increase overall speed to competency, providing agents with everything they need to resolve even complex issues swiftly and competently, with minimal holds and transfers, regardless of industry or specialty.

The homesourcing model is uniquely positioned to meet ongoing e-commerce customer service demands in 2021 and beyond, efficiently addressing modern customer support challenges across vertical markets that are likely to remain in a post-COVID world.

COOL PRODUCTS AT CES

Some of the notable items that caught our editors' attention at the digital show



CUZEN

If you haven't tried a whipped coffee or some sort of matcha drink, did you even live through 2020? Matcha is said to offer longer-lasting energy without the "crash" that often comes along with coffee. Cuzen's Matcha Starter Kit allows you to make this trendy green tea drink at home. The \$369 machine reduces tea leaves to a fine matcha powder that can then be whisked into water to be enjoyed straight or as a latte, mocktail or cocktail.



PHILIPS

The Philips Sonicare 9900 Prestige "smart" toothbrush, through AI, helps consumers adjust their dental care by providing a "coached," personalized cleaning experience, detecting the user's brushing style and adapting to that during the brushing session using SenselQ technology to track and detect pressure applied, cleaning motions and coverage achieved.



SKYWORTH

Skyworth unveiled five upcoming series of TVs: TC6200, UC6200, UC7500, UC8500, and XC9300, powered by the Android TV OS. Features include 700,000+ movies and shows from across streaming services; Google voice control functionality to control the TV, get recommendations of what to watch and dim the lights; and Chromecast built in to provide the ability to cast photos, videos, and music from smart devices to your TV.



SONO MOTORS

Solar EV is a new vehicle category seeking to shake up and revolutionize the way consumers drive and think of car ownership. Sono Motors is aiming at a leadership position on this field's stage, with its prototype community-led next-generation vehicle: Sion. The Sion boasts a beautiful, sleek yet simple design that is meant to catch the eye. Of special note is the fact that a smartphone operates as a key. The Sion also allows for power-sharing. It can serve a mobile charging station that provides energy for electronic devices and even other EVs, with up to 11KW of power.

LG

The past few years, it was all about the foldable phone, but this year, LG introduced us to the concept of the rollable phone. While both foldable and rollable phones are similar in the sense that they can go from the size of a smartphone to a tablet, the rollable phone doesn't have a finicky "hinge," and instead unrolls into a tablet. At this point, we don't have much else to go by in terms of a release date, price, or even a final name, but some early analysts suggest that the rollable phone could be released later in 2021 with a final cost around \$1,300 to \$2,000.



RAZER

We saw a lot in the way of pandemic tech at CES 2021, but one of the most interesting products came from gaming company, Razer. Their high-tech N95 face mask, coined Project Hazel, features a clear shield, active ventilation, and a charger that also acts as a disinfectant through UV sanitization. This mask solves two major problems that a standard, disposable mask poses: it eliminates waste and caters to a large population of people who rely on reading lips to communicate.



BOSCH

Last year, Bosch teamed with Ford and the real-estate developer Bedrock to demonstrate a fully automated valet parking solution in Detroit. It was the first U.S. infrastructure-based solution for automated valet parking inside a parking garage.



AMPERE

Ampere's new Bluetooth shower speaker, the Ampere Shower Power (\$99.95), is powered by the water running through the shower head, so no charging is needed. The device will be available in three colors: black, white and chrome.



KOHLER

Kohler's Escape Bathroom is reminiscent of a Japanese soaking bath. The Stillness Bath features water, light, fog and aromatherapy. The bath's infinity overflow feature sends water into the Hinoki wood moat. Full spectrum lighting surrounds the bath, creating a chromatherapy experience. Fog envelops the surface of the Stillness Bath and essential oils can be added into the bath's experience tower.



LG

LG's InstaView Door-in-Door® refrigerator may be opened via voice control, making trips with groceries a little less inconvenient. The appliance also features a UV light system that sanitizes water as it is being dispensed from the in-door water and ice dispenser.



JBL

Among JBL's headphone CES intros was the Model JBL Live Pro Plus 2 (\$180). These small, in-ear, true wireless devices feature active noise cancelling. They are to be available in March in a few different colors and feature a charging case with 21 hours of charge time.



MASKFONE

MaskFone is introducing a product of the same name to the market - what it says is the world's first face mask with built-in earbuds. It does double duty, enabling music aficionados to stay in tune with their favorite music while on the go - while still being shielded.

SAMSUNG

Samsung showcased its expertise in home robots and AI. In development and presented at CES the Samsung Bot Handy and Samsung Bot Care. The Bot Handy AI is designed to recognize and pick up objects of various sizes, weights and shapes and to help with chores around the house such as laundry or dishes. The Bot Care functions as a digital assistant, using AI to learn its user's schedule and respond to its behavior.



ARCADE1UP

Board games meet modern technology with the Infinity Game Table. Arcade1Up partnered with Hasbro to create this touch-screen gaming table that features 50+ games including household names like Monopoly, Scrabble, Candy Land, Yahtzee as well as puzzles, coloring books, mini-games, and more. The Infinity Game Table can be enjoyed alone or with friends either in person or across the globe. There are no monthly subscription fees and the table can easily be made portable or turned into a game board by removing the legs.



SAMSUNG

Samsung's Health Smart Trainer is a feature on Samsung 2021 TVs that transforms the home into a personal gym; it tracks and analyzes posture in real-time, provides feedback on form, helps count your reps, and estimates calories burned via Bixby voice control.



SONY

The Sony AirPeak takes aerial photography to a heightened level. Compact-sized, it is Sony's first drone and is slated for professional photography and filmmaking use, designed to carry Sony's Alpha full-frame mirrorless cameras; it's due for release sometime in Spring.

Sony's Yoshida, with the AirPeak camera-toting drone



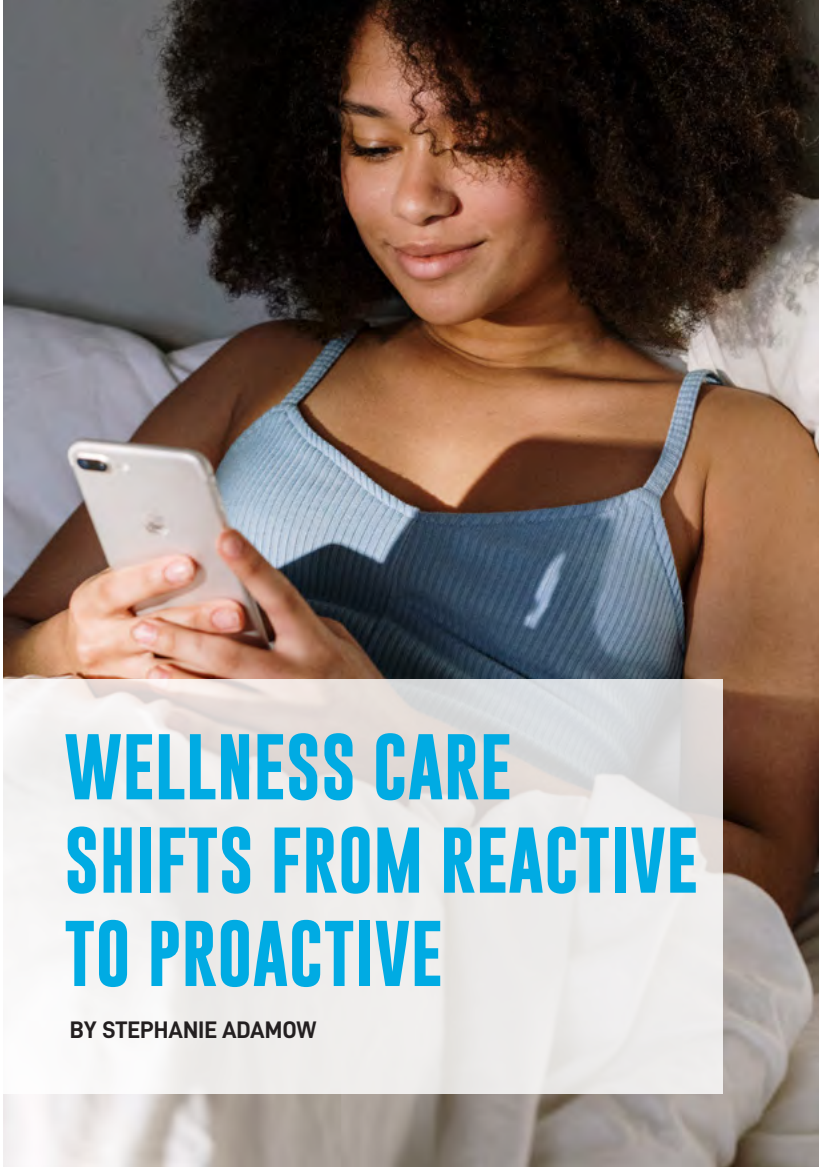
Blame it on the pandemic if you'd like (it surely has played a role), but a major shift in health and wellness is upon us. Today, the population is repositioning its focus from reactive care to preventive care. Wellness is no longer strictly about diet and fitness. Of course, our TVs are equipped with the latest in voice commands and assistants to call up that workout program; but, across the board, individuals are taking a proactive approach to preventive health through various means.

Consumers at the Center of Health

Consumers want to track information once only obtained from a doctor, playing a more interactive role in their health. This want has been addressed in the Apple Watch and Fitbit smartwatch as well as in a plethora of apps now available. "It is about radically interoperable data so that the consumer can own their well-being journey and be better empowered to find systems and solutions," says Lynne Sterrett, National Consulting Leader for Life Sciences & Health Care Practice-Deloitte LLP. We are already seeing these technologies in the world of IoT with smart refrigerators and toilets, says Sterrett. "We need consistent, omnipresent, always-on systems that will gather data and lead to consumer action. "I feel this period of reflection around COVID-19 has shown huge shifts in innovation that happened rapidly and have accelerated the future of health." For example, some of those innovations can be found in wearables that target blood pressure monitoring. Omron has developed HeartGuide, which is, reportedly, the first, clinically accurate, wearable blood pressure monitor.

Sleep as the Fifth Vital Sign

The sleep monitoring portion of wearables is becoming increasingly prevalent. "Sleep affects your immune system," says Dr. Mehmet Oz, of The Dr. Oz Show. "Lack of sleep means you will have a harder time recovering from illness and will not be able to fight new ones. If you sleep less than six hours a night you are four times more likely to develop a cold. Sleeping the right amount every night make you less vulnerable to colds once infected. "A COVID infection that progresses to a more serious state might be detected earlier if someone could monitor their breathing rate, or breaths per minute," Oz explained. Checking this breathing rate, especially when sleeping, could alert you to negative changes in your wellness. And apps like Sleepscore are placing this knowledge in consumers' hands. "People are working harder and sleeping less," agrees Michael Chapp, COO of Oura Health, which produces the Ring. The product has seven sensors as well as a battery embedded inside that monitor heart rate, motion and continuous skin temperature. It delivers personalized sleep and overall health insights through its app.



Because the pulse signal in the finger is 100 times stronger than the wrist, where most wearables are, Chapp says, the Ring can create a clear image of pulse. From that, it can more accurately calculate resting heart rate, heart rate variability (HRV) and respiratory rate. With cardiovascular disease, diabetes and dementia so prevalent in our society, "the future is being able to identify when these diseases occur" before a catastrophic event.

- Consumers want to play a more interactive role in their healthcare.
- Sleep monitoring is near the top of the consumer desires list for health-and-wellness tracking.
- The wish for tracking and monitoring vital signs is being addressed with vigor by vendors.

WELLNESS INNOVATIONS SURGE TO MEET CONSUMER DEMAND

This shift in focus on health and wellness can be seen in most every place in the tech industry, from wearables and apps to the smart home. It all points to consumers' heightened awareness of preventive health. From wearing health monitors to introducing technology into the home, wellness innovations will only surge in the coming years. Here's a look at some.

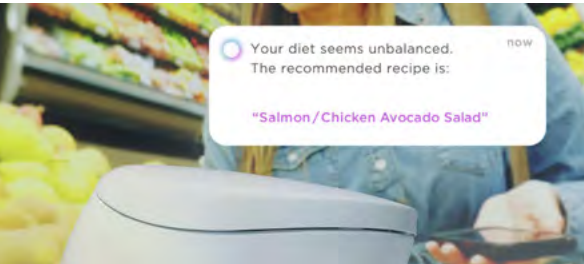


With Omron's HeartGuide blood pressure monitor, users can track heart data and learn how your behaviors impact heart health. With its HeartAdvisor app, users can not only monitor blood pressure, but also activity and sleep quality; track trends over time with color-coded health graphs; access a dashboard, health history, reminders and settings; and get daily actionable insights based on your personalized data.

The SleepScore app uses Sonar Sensor Technology to track your breathing and body movement through each sleep stage. This data, combined with the user's profile and lifestyle information, provides insights into your unique sleep patterns as well as actionable, customized advice that's delivered through the Sleep Guide. In addition, users can access sleep history and receive sleep solutions in the form of product recommendations based on sleep needs.



The Bosch air-quality sensor is designed for private households. Along with conventional indicators, including temperature, humidity and air purity, this new sensor can also measure the amount of exhaled air and aerosols present in a room. Based on these readings, it can alert users when ventilation is needed, as both can be a risk factor in COVID transmission. The new sensor is being built into two of the company's existing smart-home products: the Twinguard intelligent smoke detector and the Spexor mobile alarm device.



TOTO's Wellness Toilet is in the works, to be released in the next few years. It uses multiple sensing technologies to support consumers' wellness by tracking and analyzing their mental and physical status. Each time the individual sits on the Wellness Toilet, it scans their body and its key outputs, then provides recommendations to improve their wellness. Users will see their current wellness status and receive wellness-improvement recommendations on a dashboard in an app on their smartphones.

The Oura Ring delivers personalized sleep and overall health insights daily in its app, which can be linked to Apple Health or Google Fit. During the day, the Ring monitors activity level, calories, steps, inactive times, and naps. Measured during sleep are: Resting Heart Rate; Heart Rate Variability (HRV); Respiratory Rate; Body Temperature; Light, Deep and REM Sleep; Nighttime Movement; Sleep Timing and Quality. The user also receives scores for Readiness, Sleep and Activity.





‘Big Game’ Means Big-Ticket Purchases

The latest consumer spending data from NRF and Prosper Insights & Analytics’ 2021 Super Bowl survey found that 186.6 million U.S. adults say they plan to tune in to the big game, and 86 percent of those viewers are also planning to make purchases to mark the occasion. While food and drinks lead the way as the most popular add-ons, TVs make up 9% of the estimated \$13.9 billion total spend for the U.S.



OTT Services Gaining Steam

According to Parks Associates, more than three quarters of paid-TV subscribers have at least one over-the-top (OTT) media service. Among households that have any OTT services, the average number of services is 3.8.



Health Tech
Improves PTSD
Patient Outcomes

The Veteran’s Health Administration has shown the positive impacts connected health technologies can have on patient outcomes. Its remote patient monitoring program involving more than 43,000 veterans with conditions including hypertension, congestive heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, depression and PTSD resulted in a 25% reduction in days of inpatient care and a 19% reduction in hospital admissions over a three-year period spanning 2019 through 2023.



NPD On Video Game Appeal Uptick

The NPD Group’s 2020 Evolution of Entertainment report shows video game engagement in the U.S. grew significantly in 2020 in terms of participation, time, and spend. The number of consumers playing video games in the U.S. increased 6 points to 79%. Total time spent gaming increased 26% and total spend increased 33%.

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