

CES 2018: 3 trends for marketers to watch

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What should marketers look out for at CES 2018? Liam Brennan shares his thoughts.

Technology has always played an important role as a utility in our lives – whether that be functional, for entertainment, or as just plain novelty. But the success of voice assistants (especially the Amazon Echo Dot, which was the highest-selling product over Christmas) is an early indicator of the shifting nature of consumer technology.

People are now just as interested in functional tech as they are in tech for entertainment.

CES 2018 will no doubt see the launch of more functional devices and marketers should be walking the halls (literally or via press coverage) for insights into how new technologies will shape how consumers interact with media, research and transact.

As CES opens its doors for 2018, here are three tech-influenced trends that marketers should be on the lookout for:

1) New ways to shop

The concept of pure 'online' shopping seems to be losing favour. Amazon made its first forays into bricks and mortar in 2017 with the acquisition of Whole Foods, and successful 'traditional' retailers such as Walmart, John Lewis and Tesco have seen continued success through a long-term omnichannel approach.

While CES is not specifically a showcase for 'commerce', the increasingly connected nature of home devices is helping evolve D-Commerce – the fancy new term that combines e-commerce and m-commerce – from being online, to omnichannel to on-demand – shopping where you want, when you want and with minimal friction.

Voice-enabled devices, a perfect example of this form of D-Commerce, will be a big focus at CES 2018. Google will be one of the largest exhibitors at the show, showcasing Google Assistant-powered devices. We'll also see AR-enabled mobile devices for virtual showrooming and a variety of Internet of Things devices that can enable a retail experience from a small screen or button.

Takeaway: Brands must adapt to the evolving nature of the shopping experience and evolve the 'store' – rather than create tech-specific strategies as this can bind you to the tech rather than the consumer.

2) Screens in new places

The TV set continues to be the dominant household screen. It's increasing in size and resolution, and is increasingly connected. In 2018, it will remain the centrepiece of home-based entertainment and the biggest-selling internet of things device. It may well soon become the home's 'interactive' starting point.

However, it's the newer screens – smaller and often in odd sizes – that we should be paying attention to. Such screens are permeating new spaces, and on, or within close reach of commonly used existing household devices.

A decade or so ago, a fridge with a digital screen would be seen as an expensive novelty. But a connected fridge is now a (somewhat) affordable reality. Pair it with a connected home operating system like Alexa or Assistant and it is transformed from a simple storage device to shopping assistant.

New digital screens in areas of the house with less lean-back and more lean-in behaviours also bring greater potential for interaction. Screens might include a panel on a kitchen bench for food, a connected mirror in the bathroom for dental or beauty, or a screen in the car for in-store pickup.

Takeaway: New digital screens may well allow interruptive messages, but in reality they are another new interactive touchpoint – and require marketers to understand how they will impact future consumer behaviour.

3) The increasing influence of software

New hardware will certainly be on show at CES 2018, but the software that sits behind it is what will enable some of the largest advances in tech. Many of the headlines from CES 2018 will be tech featuring artificial intelligence (AI) – tools such as image recognition and voice-powered devices or devices that feature elements of automation.

Don't simply look at AI and machine learning as just new ways to get the 'right message to the right person at the right time'. The reality is that AI is ushering in an era of predictive selection and restricted choice for consumers. Combined with new media devices that have minimal interaction or lack a screen, it becomes increasingly difficult to interrupt the consumer or harness an impulse moment.

Takeaway: Brands must understand of the impact of AI and other types of software

developments – particularly the impact of Google, Apple and Amazon and their respective ecosystems, including commerce offerings – on how consumers make decisions.

Marketers need to understand how new devices impact consumer behaviour, content consumption and commerce conversion. Technology is no longer just a delivery mechanism for communications.

CES shouldn't just be a destination for digital or tech leads, it should interest anyone with an understanding of their brand, business and its goals, its customers, as well as those who understand technology and how to collaborate with the key players.

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