

COLUMNS

Wearables and Internet of Things: That's where the smart money is

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Andy Maskin

By [Andy Maskin](#)

There was a time, not too many years ago, when new mobile devices commanded enormous attention at the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas. That focus has since shifted in part to standalone unveiling events from Apple and Samsung and the annual Mobile World Congress event each February.

To be sure, the rise of mobile devices was prominent at the show, most obviously in the presence of cases, charging solutions and other accessories by the thousands.

In the nest

Two of the biggest topics at this year's just-concluded CES were wearables and the Internet of Things. The former most commonly took the form of smartwatches and fitness trackers, while the latter henceforth has been thought of as connected-home technologies such as Nest.

Both spaces have been around for a number of years, but caught fire in the wake of Apple's announcements of the Apple Watch and Apple Home Kit.

In an attempt to beat Apple to market, literally hundreds of companies big and small swarmed this year's show to demonstrate their alternative devices and platforms. The year-over-year expansion of these categories on the show floor cannot be overstated.

In addition to smart watches, there were smart dishwashers, smart scales and smart air quality monitors. But you could also find a smart rubber ducky, a smart yoga mat and even a smart mousetrap that alerts you remotely when it has caught a rodent.

Meanwhile, what seemed to get lost in the buzz about all these devices was that they almost all rely on a smartphone app as their user-interface, notification center, link to the cloud or all of the above.

As the spotlight shone on the gadgets themselves, just off to the side were the applications that made the gadgets worth using.

Typically, the device communicates with a smartphone over a low-energy Bluetooth link (BLE), or is configured to connect directly to the Internet to one's home Wi-Fi.

An app on the user's mobile device can then receive data or issue commands from across the room or across the world.

For example, during CES I heard that it was very cold back home, so I opened my Nest app to see how much my

boiler was being used. I used a FitBit to track my steps during the week, and my phone uploaded this data to the cloud.

Every smart home solution, from Samsung to Belkin to Whirlpool, is a constellation of nannycams and ovens and lighting and door locks, et al, revolving around a smartphone app at the center for control and monitoring.

The sensors and Wi-Fi in these appliances make them smart, but it is mobile devices that make them actually usable. The same goes for most smart fitness products.

Not monkeying around

As these technologies gain traction, what this will mean is increased time-spent and reliance upon mobile devices for daily activities beyond communication and entertainment.

Moreover, the time spent controlling these systems is highly focused time, with the user paying close attention to their screen. For marketers this has the potential to capture user engagement on mobile in new exciting ways. And this goes well beyond trying to run banners in these apps.

For instance, a food brand could partner with the maker of a smart-fridge to influence recipe recommendations based on the food on-hand.

A kid's brand could partner with Edwin the smart ducky to create branded learning games.

A travel brand could partner with a smart thermostat to subtly show the user what the weather is like somewhere warmer.

Media properties could also take advantage of this trend.

In fact, Syfy has patterned with Philips to enable the latter's smartphone-controlled Hue light bulbs to synchronize the lighting in the room with the content of the channel's new show, "12 Monkeys."

AS THIS PAST CES demonstrated, the smarter our appliances and watches become, the more smartphones become the remote control for our lives.

With that, centrality comes an interesting creative opportunity for marketers to influence everything from brand perception to purchase decisions.

[Please click here to download Andy Maskin's collaboration with StoryTech for a recap of CES this month](#)

Andy Maskin is a New York-based [emerging technology consultant](#). Reach him at andy@maskin.net.

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