

Tech Savvy: CES

For technology, January is dominated by CES, the annual Consumer Electronics Show. This is the chance for companies large and small to demonstrate their next generation of things they think that we won't be able to live without. What makes this show different is that the products featured have release dates. We will actually see these products within our lifespans, perhaps even this year.

TV enhancements that made waves this year featured integration with other media sources. Twitter, facebook, MySpace, Skype, and other social media, RSS feeds, and online movies can now stream on these new TVs. Just bought a TV without this capability? Fear not. You can adapt an older TV through a variety of interface boxes available this year.

Panasonic and other companies showed big screen TVs that were capable of displaying a 3D image. While glasses are required, they're not the dorky red and blue lens ones we got from the theater to watch Jaws in 3D nearly 30 years ago. The new glasses reproduce the colors accurately and seem to have a smoke tint to them which is the effect of the LCD shutter technology. The only drawbacks are the cost of the glasses and the lack of 3D media currently available.

Another item that has come back for another try is Tablet PCs. Yet another form a computer can take, the tablet PC is dominated by a display, and you interact with it by touching the screen, and with multitouch, the interaction is quite intuitive. When a tablet PC is back at home or the office, it connects to a base which allows it to be used just like a normal computer.

Ebook readers were a surprisingly big hit. Much of today's advanced laptop technology was made in an effort to make Netbooks small, light, cheap, and slim. We will see similar advances made in the effort to develop ebook readers. The latest offerings are thinner, lighter, tougher, and more energy efficient than ever before. Some even can flex without affecting function or readability. Even if we never use these ebook readers, the technology that these spawn will find their way into everything.

Ford received an award at CES. Yes, the car company. They have recently demonstrated technology that makes your car a wireless hotspot, allowing you to use a laptop and other devices to access the Internet through your car. Further they have pioneered a new interface which allows you to interact with the vehicle's bells and whistles without distracting you from the primary task... driving. Unlike most advances in automotive technology demonstrated at shows, this new interface, MyFord is expected to be integrated into the company's products starting next year.

Other gadgets included a memory card for digital cameras with built in wireless networking. It allows a computer to pull the pictures from a camera without cords. Today's fast laptops dissipate heat to the case as well as out the vent as hot air. Unfortunately, this means that sitting one of these on your lap may become uncomfortable. Logitech has made a lap desk which both cools the laptops while insulating your legs, and has built in high fidelity speakers, fixing the anemic sound typical on compact devices.