

Always Connected

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The pace of change in the consumer electronics industry is remarkable, and companies have to be nimble enough to seize opportunities as they arise.

If nothing else, the 2012 Consumer Electronics Show stands as a testament to the innovators and product designers behind some of the most forward-looking devices yet to hit the market. However, it's also a yearly reminder that a part of the consumer electronics (CE) market will never move beyond dirt-merchant copycats slinging bargain rate products and unapproved accessories.

After you manage to navigate through the shoulder-to-shoulder herds of gadget fiends, and around the towering spectacles that court them, you experience a global arms race to make sure that it's easier for individuals to get connected, and then stay connected.

Staying connected in an interoperable and harmonious environment was the focus of the supersession, The Next Big in Thing CE, presented by CNET. The session discussed the tech trends that will define CE in 2012. As defined by the moderators and panelists, we are entering what has been dubbed the "EcoSystem Era" in which we use our electronic devices as portals to our worlds of information.

According to Tim Baxter, president, consumer electronics division, Samsung Electronics America, the average consumer has 30 CE devices, but very few of them are connected to one another. In the coming EcoSystem Era, Samsung and competing companies will strive to make sure that our devices are always on and always connected to one another.

While a small, controlling, and anal-retentive part of me is excited at the prospect of being able to control, manage, and view the status of every device in my home, office, and vehicle, I fear absolute reliance on devices that only play nice with one another in theory. As Blake Krikorian, co-founder of Sling Media pointed out, he was elated to find that he could control all three of his new Samsung televisions with his smart phone. He hit a roadblock when a glaring fatal flaw became known, he couldn't use the phone to turn on the television. Sure, once the set was on, an application allowed you to change channels and adjust the volume, but since the television was in sleep mode while it was turned off, the phone couldn't communicate with the set.

Many industry affiliates walking the show floor are of the same mind as those who line up outside of Apple stores after a major new release, but I lurk. I wait for three testimonials from trusted friends and catastrophic device failure before I rush to the store for an upgrade. Call me a cynic, but before I entrust my home electrical and HVAC systems to the whim of a smart phone, I'm going to be sure that a buggy app can't cook my pets while I'm on the road.

The EcoSystem may be the tech trend of 2012, but given the expense of such luxury, I'm on pace to have final installation on my system in no less than 20 years. Landfills are full enough. I'm not going to start hucking bowling balls through appliances in order to manufacture a new product need.

Baxter did raise one point during the supersession that many companies could stand to follow. The pace of change in the CE industry is remarkable, he said. Companies have to be nimble to be able to seize opportunities as they arise. Samsung, a company that seems to churn out three new Android devices a week, appears to have this style of Jazz perfected, if not finely tuned. Companies in CE, and other industries alike, could stand to benefit from similar open-minded mantras.

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