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ACCOUNTING & AUDIT

2019 CES Top Techs and Innovations (Boots on the Ground at CES)

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Roman Kepczyk • Jan. 14, 2019



Each January over 180,000 electronics enthusiasts converge on Las Vegas for the International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) which is the largest technology event in the world. CES is the launchpad for thousands of new products ranging from home, health, and automotive technologies, to computers and office technology which could one day make their way into accounting firms. With 4,500 vendors spread over 2.5 Million square feet of exhibit space it is a daunting task to cover in three days, but we did our best so we could share our top technology and innovation finds to give you a glimpse of the CPA firm products that are available today, as well as those that could be one day in the future.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATES: Our first pass was to look at products that firms can utilize today, which more often than not were upgrades to reliable products that accountants already rely upon.

Laptops: With **Dell** being the #1 computer brand utilized in accounting firms, we started off with finding updates to the iconic **Latitude** series. Dell announced their 14” **7400 2-in-1** hybrid (having both laptop and tablet capabilities) which firms are trending towards hybrids the past two years. In addition to featuring a battery providing up to 24 hours use and Thunderbolt 3 connectivity, this is the first device to incorporate Dell’s Express Sign-in which utilizes Intel’s latest proximity sensor that knows when you are approaching your laptop and pre-starts the boot up process to get you working faster than ever. For ultimate mobility, we have been long time users of XPS-13 Ultrabooks which finally moved the annoying “nose-cam” video camera from the bottom left corner of the screen to the top center with a 2.3mm video camera that retains their famous edge to edge display with minimum bezel. This brings us as close as ever to our vision of mobile laptop perfection, but the competition is not far behind. **Lenovo’s ThinkPad X1 Carbon** which has long been a favorite of other respected technology pundits became the world’s lightest 14” laptop at 2.5 pounds and even thinner at 14.95mm!

Scanners: **Fujitsu ScanSnaps** have long been a staple in the accountant’s arsenal and Fujitsu displayed their latest **iX1500** model that increased the scanning speed from 25 scans per minute to 30 scans per minute in either monochrome or color mode. Fujitsu added an integrated touchscreen that can be customized for different users and locations, while concurrently cleaning up the image making it a great solution for small workgroups as well as satellite offices.

Productivity Furniture: While electronic standing desks have been around for a few years, **Cemtrex SmartDesk** raised the category to a whole new level as it integrates a

high-end PC with the latest i7 Intel processor, 32GB of RAM and three touch displays for 72” of coverage with screens that also react to hand gestures. The desk integrates a keyboard, mouse, phones and even a camera to scan documents laying on the desktop for a truly all-in-one working platform. Another competitor featured at CES ShowStoppers was **Humanscale** that has traditionally supplied reinforced display arms to the profession and is now building standing desks with smart capabilities.

Office Headsets: The **Plantronics Voyager UC** was one of our favorite discoveries at CES a few years ago, which we continued to use as our primary headset today. This year Plantronics rolled out their updated version, the **Voyager 8200 UC** model which incorporates over-the-ear soft headphones with active noise-cancelling capabilities and eliminates the microphone boom with dual-paired microphones (which admittedly I have dipped the microphone boom into my coffee cup a few times. The Voyager still has the capability to quickly answer your cell phone or office “soft” phone and for audiophiles, allows users to listen to their favorite music in between, with the added advantage that it also can be utilized as a noise cancelling headset for airplane flights. For accountants looking for a more streamlined noise cancelling neckband headset; which I was informed was “more suitable for millennials,” we also heard of a preference for the **Voyager 6200** model which utilizes ear buds and a yoke that rests around the user’s neck.

FUTURE TECHS: CES wouldn’t be the same without show-casing some “bleeding edge” technologies. Our second pass is for those over the top products that give us a look into the future and could someday have an impact on the way that accountants will work with clients and their information.

Foldable Smart Phone: The first “bleeding edge” product we had the opportunity to demo was **Royole FlexPai**; the first commercially available “foldable” smart phone that incorporates a super thin flexible display. This device consists of two smartphones with a shared screen that can open to be a 7.6” tablet or closed similar to a wallet. While it is a bit clunky (like the Apple Newton or Compaq Luggable) it creates the next category of mobile devices that we may be using one day, and a visit to the booth found that the ultrathin and bendable display could be incorporated into numerous form factors including hats and purses!

Personal Robot: Robotics and AI where everywhere at CES 2019 with an interesting product called **Temi** being featured at the PepCom Digital Experience. If you can imagine Amazon’s Echo Show built on an autonomous robot that can navigate around your house and act as your personal assistant, you get the idea. While

originally built as a tele-presence assistant for the elderly, the addition of **Amazon Alexa's** capabilities have expanded its capabilities immensely and we can see one following a partner around the office in the future and updating the status of projects with voice commands!

Futuristic Mouse: I'll admit I was an early pioneer of touchpads as I used one with a desktop more than two decade ago and have only used them on laptops since, but one of the CES ShowStopper LaunchIT presenters-**Padrone**, demonstrated their variation called **Ring**, that lets your index finger work the same way, but on any surface, with tap and double tap working similarly. So.... what's the big deal compared to using the touchpad on my laptop? It also can work with a smartphone, along with a laptop virtually and could be the precursor to accountants working in a virtual or augmented reality environment of the future but is definitely on the bleeding edge today.

Augmented Reality: In a perfect world, accountants would be able to meet with clients anywhere and be able to access information (tax returns, financial KPIs, etc.) privately in their glasses instead of looking at a laptop, tablet or smartphone screen. First generation products such as Google Glass and Microsoft Halo created augmented reality devices that could project information on the user's glasses, but they were kludgy to work with. The next generation of augmented reality glasses were touted by multiple vendors at CES 2019 including Innovation Award Winner **Vuzix Blade**. The Blade has a right eye monocle (480×480 resolution) that can display data while you are talking with a client and move around with hand gestures or head motions and gets my vote for the most bleeding edge technology that I want to happen in the future. While this is still a few years away from being able to intuitively scroll through multiple columns of financial data at a high enough resolution or as efficiently as with an oversized monitor and mouse, it gives us hope that it will be in our future.

Technology and the associated products are evolving faster than ever and the International CES allows a unique opportunity to experience what is actually available today as well as peak into the tools that could someday find their way into our firms. With that, we want to sign off and wish you a wonderful busy season!

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