

By: Vish Viswanathan

Las Vegas is the Mecca for gadget lovers in January of every year. It hosts the world's largest consumer technology tradeshow – the Consumer Electronics Show (CES). With a record 1.85 million net square feet of exhibit space – the largest in show history – the 2008 show featured over 2,700 companies launching more than 20,000 of their latest innovations. I attended this show **virtually** and followed it closely on the web in order to showcase the top products from that show and the hottest gadgets for 2008 in this issue.

Comments? Write to techtalk@citymasala.com.

PHILIPS' ECO TV



The 42-inch, 1080p resolution, flat-panel LCD, model 42PFL5603D (due in March, \$1,399 MSRP), is packed with power-saving features. Chief among them is the ability to dim the backlight, by up to five times peak

brightness, in response to program material, much like the "local dimming" found on Samsung's LED-based LN-T4681F. Dimming the backlight in darker scenes has the dual benefit of saving power and improving black-level performance, according to the company. This is one of the most eco-friendly HDTVs out there in the market.

MOTO ROKR E8



Motorola released its latest cell phone Rokr E8 at CES 2008. Music, of course, is a central theme here but the E8's real news lies with its unique "ModeShift" technology. Instead of traditional keypad and navigation array, the Rokr features a smooth "glasslike" surface with touch-pad controls that digitally "morph" depending on

how the handset is used. As you shift from phone to music to imaging modes, the backlight on the control changes to illuminate only the relevant buttons for your current function.

Other features on the candy bar device include a Linux/Java OS, support for Windows Media Player 11, a large (2-inch) 262,000-color display, 2GB internal memory, stereo Bluetooth, USB 2.0, Moto's CrystalTalk technology (like on the Razr2 series), an external memory card slot, a 2-megapixel camera, a digital-music player, and a full HTML browser. This quad-band world phone supports GPRS and EDGE networks.

AZENTEK CAR PC



All of the core features we want in car technology - GPS navigation, Bluetooth cell phone integration, and audio and media playback - can be handled by a PC, so Azentek is offering two new in-dash PCs, the Atlas

CPC-1200 and the Calypso CPC-1100. Both units are powered by an Intel Core Duo 1.66GHz CPU with 1GB of RAM, a 120GB hard drive, and a DVD-ROM/CDRW drive. Both also offer car stereo features, such as a 4 channel, 50 watt built-in amp, an FM tuner, and the ability to be upgraded with either XM or Sirius satellite ra-

dio. The Atlas CPC-1200 is a double DIN unit with a 6.5 inch screen, while the Calypso CPC-1100 is a single DIN unit with a motorized 7 inch screen. The Atlas CPC-1200 and Calypso CPC-1100 look like car PCs that are ready for prime time. Azentek says that both units are scheduled to ship in April with a price tag of around \$2,700.

LENOVO IDEAPAD LAPTOPS



Lenovo announced a whole new brand of consumer-oriented laptops and desktops. Called IdeaPad and IdeaCentre, the lines are intended to complement the company's flagship business-oriented ThinkPad and

ThinkCentre lines.

IdeaPads include such welcome design touches as textured lid finishes and a sleek "frameless" screen that's ergonomically situated a bit farther away from the keyboard than most laptops. Also, key to the IdeaPad look, are touch-sensitive media controls above the keyboard and a bright orange button, called the Shuttle Key, which can be used on its own to control volume or in combination with the touch controls for additional functionality (somewhat like a Fn key). There's Front Row-like media software, called Shuttle Center, and Dolby Home Theater sound. Every IdeaPad is also outfitted with a built-in 1.3-megapixel Webcam, VeriFace software for biometric security via face recognition, and a ThinkVantage-like Novo key that provides quick system recovery should you ever encounter a data-destroying virus.

SONY ALPHA DSLR-A200



Sony's first true foray into the entry-level dSLR market is with Alpha DSLR-A200, slipping into the market niche currently hogged by the Nikon D40x and Canon EOS Rebel XTi. Preliminary specs include - 10-

megapixel, 23.6mm x 15.8mm Super HAD CCD, ISO 100 to 3200, Super SteadyShot sensor-shift image stabilization, 9-point AF sensor with single cross-type sensor in center, 40 segment exposure metering system, 230,000-pixel 2.7-inch LCD, Maximum burst speed 3fps (unlimited JPEG, 3 frames Raw+JPEG, 6 frames Raw), Viewfinder 95 percent coverage, and .83x magnification.

On the one hand, the A200 seems to compare quite favorably to the Nikon and Canon competi-

tion. It delivers the same (D40x) or better (XTi) resolution and similar rated performance, but with the added attraction of the in-body stabilization, large LCD and better user interface.

BUG LABS: BUILD YOUR OWN GADGET



This really is a rare product with a lot of creativity and is being described as "the Lego of gadgets". The Bug Labs (www.buglabs.net) platform starts with a mini-computer, the Bug Base, onto which you can snap

multiple modules, such as a digital camera or an LCD screen. You can then program your own software to run your custom gadget or download software others have written from the Bug Labs site. Need a GPS-enabled digital camera that will automatically upload your images to Flickr? With the Bug Labs platform, you can build one.

Aside from being eager to tinker with the product, it's thrilling to see such an innovative approach to consumer electronics. The Bug Platform is totally open source, highly configurable, and designed to go wherever consumers' imagination takes them. Plus, the company has a unique "early adopter" pricing scheme, in which the price is lower during the first 60 days; this is a great way to encourage people to start developing software to share.

NYKO WIRELESS NUNCHUCK FOR Wii



Nintendo Wii was the hottest game console of 2007. It uses a wireless remote to begin with, but that remote still manages to use a cord half the time. Most Wii games use both the Wii Remote

and the Wii Nunchuck, an analog stick peripheral that plugs into the base of the remote via a long cable. Nyko first cut the Wii cord with the Wireless Sensor Bar and is taking away yet another tether with the Wireless Nunchuck.

The Nyko Wireless Nunchuck connects to the Wiimote via a little wireless dongle that clicks into the controller's accessory jack. Once plugged in, tapping the connection buttons on the dongle and the Nunchuck syncs them together, letting the Nunchuck work as if it was physically connected to the remote. The Nunchuck runs on two AAA batteries, which Nyko claims can provide up to 30 hours of gameplay.

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It has all the same features as the original Nunchuck, including the analog stick, C and Z buttons, and even an accelerometer for games that use the Nunchuck for motion controls. The Nyko Wireless Nunchuck ships in late January/early February and will retail for about \$30.

iRIVER W7 MP3 PLAYER



Now here's something you don't see everyday: an MP3 player with GPS capabilities. The new iRiver W7, one of a slew of devices the company had on display at CES 2008, doesn't

come with a built-in GPS antenna. Rather, you have the option to buy a car mount cradle that adds to functionality. The fact that the antenna is part of the cradle and not the player is actually quite compelling: it means the player can stay relatively compact and impressively thin for portability during "on-the-go" use, while still offering a handy navigational feature for the car. Sure, more than a handful of cell phones offer built-in GPS features, but the W7's 3-inch touch screen puts most phone screens to shame.

iRiver doesn't skimp out on the multimedia features, either. The W7 supports music, video, photos, text, and Flash games. There's also an FM tuner (not that you'd need that in the car), an E-Dictionary, and a microSD card slot for adding

more memory. The player will come in two flash memory options: 4GB and 8GB. The W7 is due out in the U.S. at the end of Q1 or the beginning of Q2, and pricing has yet to be determined for the States. Let's just hope the European price tag of 175 Euros for the 4GB and 215 Euros for the 8GB isn't something to go by, because that's going to make it one pricey player - current conversions



put that at \$257 and \$315, respectively.

LOGITECH SQUEEZEBOX DUET

Digital audio is great, especially if you've got a multigigabyte music collection sitting on your computer or you subscribe to an "all you can eat" music service like Rhapsody. The problem, for a lot of people, is that they're stuck listening to all that great music on the tinny speakers of their computer, or perhaps patching the laptop into their living room stereo system. Enter Logitech's new Squeezebox Duet: the \$400 network digital audio streamer employs a winning

handheld remote with a brilliant color screen (not unlike an iPod) that lets you navigate your entire music collection, including some online services and the majority of free Internet radio stations, all from the palm of your hand, while you hear the music on the big speakers of your home stereo.

The Duet is so named because it's a two-part system: a base station and the remote. The base station is a nondescript black brick that pulls audio from a networked PC or the Internet via your Wi-Fi or Ethernet home network, and outputs to your stereo from its analog or digital (coaxial or optical) jacks. But the real innovation is the remote: beyond the ten buttons controlling standard functions (volume, play/pause, track forward/reverse), it features an iPod-like scroll wheel and a brilliant 2.4-inch color LCD screen. That puts the song navigation where it belongs: in your hand, instead of a small LCD readout halfway across the room. (A charging cradle for the remote is also provided, so it can juice up while not in use.)

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