# CES 2018:
## The Future Is Here and Now (and Incredibly Engaging)

by **REYNE RICE**, *global trend expert, CEO of ToyTrends*

THE CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW (CES) in Las Vegas is the biggest annual playground for technology products. Today's consumer is embracing technology faster than any previous generation, as they are living in smart homes and getting around in self-driving cars.

Not just for the technophile, new technology enhances our lifestyles and is integral to what we want to do, see, play, experience, touch, and speak. Here are some of the ways that technology reaches into our homes, playgrounds, and shopping experiences at retail as seen at CES.

### VOICE-ACTIVATED DIGITAL ASSISTANTS

Amazon's Alexa has become our best friend, and she's always ready to engage with us. Voice-activated digital assistants enable consumers to access devices such as smartphones and smart homes, and link via the Internet of Things (IoT) to lighting, locks, appliances, TVs, and even cars. Smart speakers, such as the Amazon Echo, are on track to become the fastest-adopted device in consumer electronics. These devices reached a 50 percent penetration of U.S. households in just 3.5 years, compared to the smartphone adoption rate, which took 5 years. Amazon sold more than 22 million Echo units last year.

Now, these smart devices are also becoming an everyday part of kids' worlds. With Disney's Circle smart device, parents can filter content, limit screen time, and set a bedtime for every device in the home. Circle pairs wirelessly with home WiFi so parents can manage every device on the home network, including smartphones, gaming consoles, smart speakers, and more, ensuring that kids aren't ordering toys or accessing inappropriate content online without parental approval.

Is this a big risk? Statistics show that nearly a third of consumers—more than 29 percent—currently use their smart speakers to shop and order products, and projections show Amazon Echo devices will generate $7 billion dollars in retail sales by 2020. With a recently launched monthly subscription service, Circle GO, parents can also monitor their kids' WiFi footprint and usage outside the home to teach kids digital etiquette.

Kid-focused, voice-activated digital assistants I saw at CES include the Elfkins communications companion, from Empath Interactive, made for kids ages 4 and up. Designed for kids ages 5 and up, Elemental Path's CogniToys WiFi-enabled smart toy dinosaur, STEMosaur, is a cloud-based interactive friend powered by IBM Watson technology. It tells stories, plays games, cracks jokes, and answers kids' endless questions with age-appropriate responses. Professor Einstein, a personal genius from Hanson Robotics, teaches older kids about science and STEM concepts, and is suitable for kids ages 13 and up.

### ONLINE COMMUNITIES FOR KIDS

The Kids at Play Conference at CES, organized by Living in Digital Times, explored a variety of online communities. Facebook's *Messenger Kids* launched late last year, and encourages parents and kids ages 12 and under to have conversations about proper internet usage and to use tools to share content online. With parental approval, kids can post photos and add stickers to learn how to to post and play online responsibly, using fun tools via the parent's Facebook account.

Google also announced its "Be Internet Awesome" initiative, designed to encourage conversations about digital literacy with tools and training available for kids, educators, and parents. Kids can play games and engage in cooperative-play online scenarios to learn about digital bullying, phishing, password protection, and building their own responsible digital footprint.

iOKids, by Dynepic, manages the Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule (COPPA) compliancy maze for manufacturers that want to build online activities for kids. Dynepic showcased its *Shot Doctor* app, which is a wearable experience, powered by the kid-safe iOKids platform. This wearable wrist tool allows kids to perfect their basketball shooting skills with friends and share their training data with coaches. It teaches skills to improve basketball shooting accuracy with a "coach-on-the-wrist" app.

### AR AND VR

Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) tools improve and expand play experiences using enhanced smartphone and TV chip technologies. Newer phones have advanced computer chips built in to enhance the AR experience, and VR headsets are becoming much more affordable and user-friendly. One of the Kids at Play Award winners this year was the Lenovo Star Wars Jedi Challenge. Players don a VR headset and battle with a virtual light-saber against Kylo Ren and other villains, or build entire Star Wars scenes to reenact epic battles on a tabletop-sized AR game board.

Retailers now use AR and VR experiences in their stores—which was also explored at the High Tech Retailing Conference—providing shoppers with enhanced interactivity via in-store interactive store kiosks, magic mirrors, and smart robot sales assistants. Companies highlighted included MetaVRse with AR window displays; L'Oreal and Perfect Corp. with Magic Mirror technology; and Lowe's with Holoroom, which teaches consumers DIY skills. Smart retailers are personalizing the consumer shopping experience to draw consumers back into their stores