

10 trends in tech to watch in 2018

By [Jamie Carter](#)

What will we all be talking about next year?

Introduction

What will happen in the world of technology in 2018? Trends in technology are not easy to spot, but there are two things you should never do; talk to anyone who actually makes hardware or software, or pay much attention to the CES Show in Las Vegas each January.

The former use the word 'disruptive' about themselves like it's going out of fashion (it is, finally), and the latter is crammed with thousands of new products that promise a glimpse into the future, then fail to get any traction (we're looking at you, [3DTV](#) and [netbooks](#)).

So here are some more general trends in tech based on number crunches and analysts' hunches that are set to become more pronounced in 2018 and beyond.

Electric car tech will reach its tipping point

Self-driving cars are in the labs being readied for the 2020s. So forget about them for a few years, and embrace electric cars.

In 2018 we'll see new electric cars promising ranges of 200 miles or more, including the [Tesla Model 3](#) and the second-generation [Nissan Leaf](#). That will mean more positive coverage for electric cars in the media.

So what? BP predicts that the number of electric cars will rise from 1.2 million in 2015 to around 100 million by 2035, but that represents only 6% of all cars. Petrol and diesel, established for a century as the technology of choice for drivers, will take some shifting, but with the UK and France banning sales of new petrol and diesel cars by 2040 – and [China about to follow suit](#) – long-term investment in petrol cars will soon cease. When the markets get involved, things can change very quickly, and 2018 looks set to be a tipping point.

The iPhone and Galaxy S will continue to wane

Once iconic gadgets, Apple and Samsung now update their iPhone and Galaxy S handsets with little press attention. Are Apple's days as the go-to smartphone over? Yes, says ABI Research, which predicts that we're entering a 'post-smartphone' era where voice, AI, augmented reality and gesture tech are growing, and Google and Amazon will lead.

A 'complacent' Apple, along with Samsung, Microsoft, and Huawei, will merely follow.

“This next wave of innovation in the smart device ecosystem will be led by Google and Amazon, as their apparent strength in major growth sectors, notably computer science, allows for a more

flexible approach to next-generation user experiences that are essential for creating immersive experiences and brand-new ways of human-to-machine interactions,” says David McQueen, Research Director at ABI Research.

Growth in voice-controlled speakers will spawn skills apps

Alexa, what’s the hottest trend in consumer electronics right now? Mass adoption may still be a few years away, but voice-enabled speaker use has grown almost 130% during 2017 according to [eMarketer](#).

From a pretty niche market in a handful of countries, Amazon’s Echo line-up of 'voice first' products can now be bought in about 80. It's throwing everything at the market, with its slew of products including the original [Echo](#), plus the [Echo Plus](#), [Echo Tap](#), [Echo Dot](#), [Echo Show](#), and [Echo Spot](#).

That ought to grab Amazon about 70% of the market in 2018, while [Google Home](#) will scoop-up most of the rest. Then, of course, there's Apple's much-delayed [HomePod](#), which is scheduled for launch sometime in 2018.

For now, voice-controlled speakers may be largely about playing music and getting answers to stupid questions, but make no mistake about it; this is about the [smart home](#) and the [Internet of Things](#), two massive trends that in 2018 will become more ingrained in daily life. More general use of Alexa, Siri, Google Now and Cortana on various devices grew 23% in 2017, and will mushroom in 2018.

“The battle for the consumer will move beyond the device into the so-called skills,” says Sergey Bludov, SVP Media and Entertainment at tech consultancy DataArt. “Now that Google Assistant and Alexa are openly accessible to third-party developers, the software, not the hardware, will largely determine success in the market of voice-activated technology.”

Streaming wars intensify

Do you use Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Prime Music or Google Play Music? Or all four? When the Napster era morphed into the iTunes era, digital downloads were legitimised. Now they’re almost dead.

Fuelled by a surge in sales of voice-controlled speakers in 2018, the likes of Apple, Amazon and Google are surely on the verge of abandoning digital downloads in favour of their fast-growing streaming services. Those big players plus Spotify have followed Netflix’s example in video, but somehow managed to convince millions that paying it a monthly fee is good value. What will Apple do in 2018 with its latest acquisition, [Shazam](#)? No one's sure, but every time you Shazam something, it will now surely point you only to Apple Music.

PxC estimated in 2017 that streaming revenues will rise 37 per cent to US \$9.1bn in 2017 while sales of physical formats will drop 10 per cent to \$7.7bn. That’s the critical mass achieved. And that means death is surely coming for downloads. Is that a good thing? Not for music; some think algorithmic playlists favor terrible [muzak](#).

Smart soundbars will surge

The ability to play music around the home is a trend that has threatened to go mainstream for years, but on the back of the growth in voice-controlled speakers it looks set to grow. There’s an

explosion in hardware; it's no longer just about Sonos, with the likes of Marshall, Bluesound and Denon now offering modular multi-room systems.

It's a genre inextricably linked to both the voice-controlled speaker market and to music streaming, of course, but this one appears to have legs. GfK just [reported](#) a growth in premium multi-room systems of 14% in 2017, and in particular for smart soundbars.

In a market where quality rules over convenience, GfK thinks we'll see a lot more of [Dolby Atmos](#) and [High Resolution Audio](#) in 2018.

We'll use Facebook (and our phones) less

Social media is under pressure. Criticised for hosting [fake news](#), hoax stories, [violent videos](#) and hate speech, Russian ads and even – [suggests](#) its former executive – of ripping apart the social fabric, Facebook is suddenly on the back-foot. Gartner even thinks that by 2022 the majority of individuals in mature economies will consume more false information than true information. OK, so it just posted a 47% leap in revenue to US\$10.3 billion, and its users grew to 2.07 billion people. So what? The average Facebook user posts a third less content in 2016 than in 2015, during which time there was a 15% drop in engagements per post, and comments per post declined 37%.

With users between 12 and 24 [in decline](#) and everyone else using it less, there's a simple truth about Facebook that will continue into 2018; we care about it less than we used to.

Deloitte predicts that almost half of adults and two-thirds of under-35s worry that they are using their phones too much, and could try to limit their usage in 2018. For a newly mobile-first platform like Facebook, that's bad news.

Podcasting will grow

Video and music streaming may get all the press, but for an increasing number of us, it's podcasts that we're consuming more and more of. For some of us, it's all we listen to.

“Podcasting has been growing for a while, increasing 21% to 24% year-over-year, with the audience predominately in the ages of 18-54,” says Bludov. One in four Americans has listened to at least one podcast in the past month according to recent research from Edison Research.

Podcast listeners tend to listen to mainly podcasts, not music, and are willing to pay to get rid of adverts. However, despite it being the perfect medium for listening to on the commute, the majority of podcasts are listened to in the home, with the vehicle a close second.

Disney will challenge Netflix (and Amazon Prime Video)

Disney wants to get closer to you. Its recent colossal deal to acquire much of Twenty-First Century Fox in a \$52 billion deal will see it control Fox's movie studios, over a dozen cable TV networks, a 50% stake in production company Endemol Shine, a 39% stake in Sky, and a 30% stake in Hulu. That includes ESPN, The Simpsons and the soon-to-return Avatar franchise.

In an effort to go direct to its customers, as all media companies now need to do, Disney will likely pull its content from Netflix and instead beef-up Hulu. In response, Netflix will likely spend more and more on creating its own original programming. The end result? You'll have to add a monthly subscription to Disney/Hulu to your monthly digital outgoings.

We'll start talking about 'social video'

From 360 cameras to wearable cameras, almost anything that can capture video can also broadcast it in real-time to social media.

A trend on the verge of going mainstream, social video is the overall effect of all of us uploading more and more video to YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram.

According to Cisco's Visual Networking Index, 2016–2021, the volume of mobile video traffic has almost doubled in 2017, and about 80% of all personal internet traffic in 2018 will be from personal, social video traffic. That's not lost on the marketing monkeys, 64% of whom expect video to dominate their strategies in the near future, according to Nielsen.

Video advertising is expected to become the fastest growing type of advert; it's going to get harder to avoid those irritating 30-second videos about things you don't need. If you think YouTube is already pushing its luck with those 30-second adverts, prepare for an ill-conceived onslaught.

The first space tourists will get to orbit

Forget Donald Trump's [vague promises](#) about the US going back to the Moon; he mentioned no money. Instead, 2018 will be all about the private space industry kicking-on in some impressive ways.

Elon Musk's [SpaceX](#) probably won't send two paid-up space tourists around the Moon, but it will finally conduct a trial launch of its Falcon Heavy rocket – the most powerful operational rocket in the world by a factor of two – and NASA will trial its Orion spacecraft, which is designed to go to Mars.

However, space tourism may finally get off the ground. Not only does Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin hope to take the first space tourists into orbit in its Crew Capsule 2.0 aboard its New Shepherd rocket, but Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic is counting down to the first commercial trip into orbit for its VSS Unity spacecraft.

Will 2018 really be the year space tourism at last becomes live tech? The countdown is on.

Original article can be found here: <http://www.techradar.com/news/10-trends-in-tech-to-watch-in-2018>