



Lucas Laursen
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Five Cool Things Revealed at Mobile World Congress

This year's Mobile World Congress was about everything except the mobile phones.



Mobile World Congress attendees get a taste of virtual reality.

Smart watches got stylish, tablets got new software, and virtual reality goggles wrapped their tentacles around everyone's faces. Some companies are deconstructing their mobiles into modules. And discussions of the next generation of mobile networks, 5G, centered on how useful it will be for the Internet of Things, not mobile voice or data.

Here is a look at five important tech developments from this week's conference:

Deconstructing the mobile: the pieces come together for modular mobiles.

Smartphone maker Yezz showed off a prototype of Google's [Project Ara](#) modular phone, which can fit up to 11 components onto its frame. The concept goes back to the [PhoneBlocs](#) project, which has promoted modular phones as way of reducing e-waste. Also this week in Barcelona, Circular Devices [announced](#) at the parallel 4 Years From Now conference that its Puzzle Phone is also on the way.

Jolla, a Finnish startup that crowdfunded its flagship tablet last year, has also experimented with separating the NFC-equipped back half of its smartphone and attaching keyboards via magnets. So far, that's not too different from other external cases. But its tablet, which has a gestures-only operating system called Sailfish OS, won the Best Tablet award today at MWC. The firm also announced that a future version will be the first open security-focused operating system.

Smart-watches go lux.

Perhaps for the first time, smart watches won applause for their looks, not just their features (see "[Smart Watches Show More Style and Substance](#)"). LG and Huawei brought out models with round faces, metal and leather straps, and a sense of elegance. To drive the point home, they were being displayed alongside leather shoes and other non-tech goods at the LG stand.

5G is really for businesses, not people.

If you think 5G is going to make your movies download faster, think again. The real motivation appears to be a ubiquitous, stable link between devices on a scale never before seen. Executives talked about how they need to create new ways of connecting everyday hardware, such as your kitchen appliances or car, in order to justify the massive investment a future 5G network will require.

Virtual reality will be your new reality.

That said, your video will reach you faster and it will come from more sources. Virtual reality goggles were at a surprising number of exhibits this year.

At the SK Telecom stand today, a staff member passed around an Oculus Rift headset showing footage from a wingsuit flyer somewhere in the Alps. The sensation of being somewhere else was immediate. My first instinct was to swing my head around in every direction to see where the limits of the video were. The footage was filmed in every direction—the only limit was when I looked straight down and saw the flier's helmet.

As I adjusted my eyes, however, I did realize that the resolution of the video was a few years behind the big-screen standard. When I took off the goggles and watched on a television screen as the next person tried them, my eyes appreciated the clarity of the big screen, but my mind wished it was back inside the goggles and flying again.

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