

February 6, 2016

What's New?
By George Harding

URB-E ...

One of the very interesting products at CES was URB-E, a collapsible bicycle. As it happened, I had attended the Rose Parade in Pasadena on New Year's day. What an event! Like many others, I had only seen it on TV. Seeing it in person is a really exciting experience.

Before the parade starts, people and vendors walk and run along Colorado boulevard. There are those who are just getting their morning exercise, those who are checking out the crowds, those selling horns, hats, umbrellas and other stuff, those hawking food and more.

Among all this noise and confusion, there were several people, some adult, some children, riding these strange-looking bikes that appeared to be motorized in some way.

At one of the press events, I saw a couple of these bikes up close. I mentioned seeing something similar at the Rose Parade and the vendor said, "That was us!"

It is a remarkable bicycle, indeed. It is battery powered and folds up to the size of a golf bag, goes up to 15 miles an hour and weighs about 35 pounds.

It is constructed of aircraft grade aluminum and carbon fiber and is made in Pasadena. The battery is a 36v lithium ion and can carry the bike for up to 20 miles.

It has a USB port for charging phones and can be outfitted with an LED headlight, a detachable basket, a cup holder and a mount for cell phones.

This is an intriguing product unlike anything else I've seen. It drew quite a crowd at CES.

URB-E www.urb-e.com

Price \$1,500-2,200 depending on style



Virtual Reality (VR) ...

One of the relatively new products to become popular is VR. When Oculus Rift announced this revolutionary product three years ago, it attracted a lot of interest. Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg thought it had so much potential that he bought the company for \$2 billion! Since that time, the technology has been licensed by many companies for applications of many different sorts.

VR give you the illusion thought sight and sound that you are in a different place and are able to look around 360° and in some cases move in the environment. There are several ways in which this is accomplished. Oculus and others like it provide a helmet-like viewer and headphones that are used to transport you to the other environment. Your brain is tricked into believing that you are really there because you can see all around you and even appear to move in it, as well.



Other companies that have licensed the product use somewhat less involved methods, but which produce the same “other world” experience. One of the least expensive (free!) is Google’s Cardboard viewer. This method uses a cardboard frame in which one inserts a smartphone and runs one of the many applications geared to viewing in this device. Sound is provided by the smartphone.

Almost every day some new application for one or more of the viewer devices is announced or reported on. USA Today has a reporter assigned to bring us up to date on these new uses. Here are extracts from some of the reports:

- January 26 from the Sundance Film Festival's New Frontier VR lounge.
 - The reporter was allowed to hang out with the *Star Wars* droids.
 - The reporter wore the goggles used to enter an environment which mimics Serbia's war-torn lands. She entered a basement shelter and heard the sirens and felt the bomb blasts.
 - The reporter entered a VR experience that explores the internal essence of blindness.
 - The reporter experienced what women experience when they try to enter Planned Parenthood, crossing picket lines and hearing verbal abuse.

- January 27 from Penrose Studios in San Francisco.
 - The reporter is chased by a T-Rex.
 - The reporter climbs the Khumbu ice fall on Mount Everest.
 - The reported experiences *The Rose and I*, a story of a small child whose world consists of cloud-based cities and gondola-shaped floating ships.

- February 3
 - At the UCLA Center for Neurophysics, tests on rats indicate that the brain reacts differently to VR than to real world stimuli.
 - At the University of Houston, experiments take patients into a realistic heroin gallery and gradually coach the patient to resist the usual physical response.
 - At the University of Southern Cal, VR software has been developed virtual Afghanistan and Iraq software to help veterans plagued by PTSD.

Time will produce more interesting and innovative uses for this new technology. There was a VR section at CES this January, displaying the various devices and scenarios that had been created.

For more information see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_reality, www.usatoday.com/story/tech/news/2016/02/04/super-bowl-fans-get-hit-virtual-reality-future/79737124/ and www.oculus.com/en-us/

Qkey ...

Here's a solution to the problem of security breaches during online purchases. Qkey stores your card info and substitutes for entering your card info on a web site.

You use a secure web site to enter all your card info, which is then transferred to the key. The key plugs into a USB port and the info is transferred to the key.



When you want to make an online purchase, you plug in the Qkey and use it to provide the credit card info to complete the purchase. No chance for a hacker to steal your keystrokes or the store's data.

The Qkey uses the same "chip and pin" methodology that is embedded in today's credit cards, and offers the same degree of security.

This product gives you the ease of purchasing online with maximum security. No passwords to remember, no bank information divulged and no forms to fill out.

Qkey by uQontrol

qkey.com

Price \$99 currently for pre-orders