CES 2026 REPORT

WHEN AI GAINED A BODY

A Designer's Perspective on Technology, Systems, and Experience

2026.01.19. VERSION 01

argenta park

TEAM NAME

WHAT IS CES?

CES is the world's largest consumer technology exhibition, bringing together global brands, startups, media, and policymakers. While originally focused on consumer electronics—reflected in its name—the show has evolved into a broader technology platform spanning AI, software, B2B, industrial systems, and services.

In 2026, attendance increased to 148,000, up about 7,000 from last year, while the number of exhibitors declined from roughly 4,500 to 4,100—a change that, **despite higher attendance, was reflected in a quieter overall energy on the show floor.**

Total Attendee	Exhibitors
148,000+	**4,100+**
▲ +7,000 from last year	▼ -400 from last year

WHO THIS REPORT IS FOR

This report is written from a designer's perspective, **for designers, product leaders, and teams shaping real-world technology.** Drawing on six years of attending CES, it reflects patterns, tensions, and signals observed across multiple cycles of the show.

Rather than serving as a catalog of booths or announcements, the report offers an editorial interpretation—created as an ongoing practice of learning, discussion, and sense-making around emerging technologies.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHEN AI GAINED A BODY

ROBOTS ARE READY.
THE EXPERIENCE IS NOT.
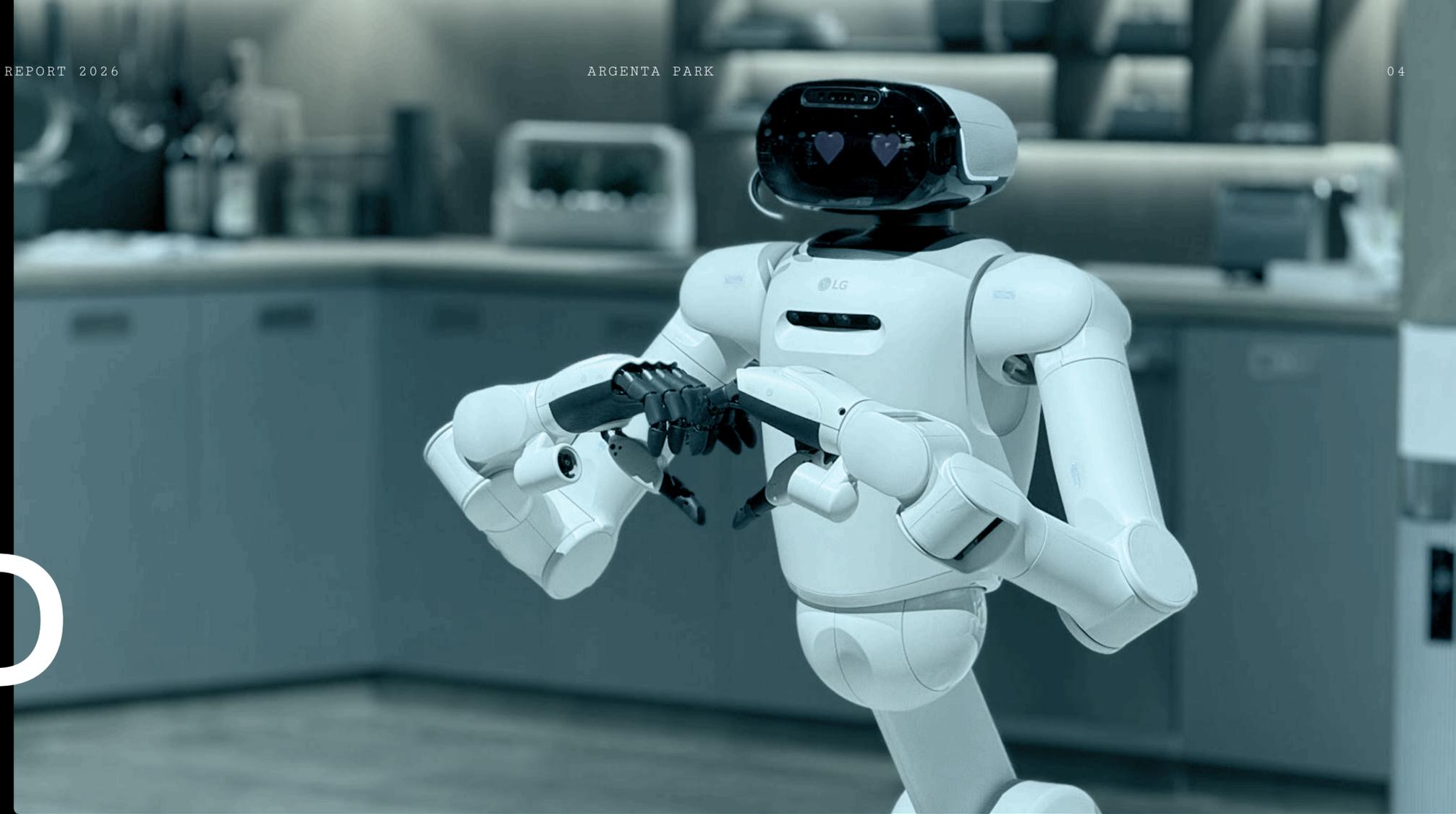
- **CES 2026 marked the emergence of Physical AI** as a visible and tangible category.

- **Robots dominated the show floor,** becoming the clearest symbol of technological progress.

- **Hardware maturity accelerated,** driven by scaled manufacturing in China and advances in production-ready technologies.

- **A gap between technical capability and user experience became increasingly evident.**

- **AI in motion**—autonomous systems operating in real-world environments —stood out as the most resolved and practical expression of Physical AI.

# WHEN AI GAINED A BODY   ROBOTS ARE READY. THE EXPERIENCE IS NOT.

01
THE RISE OF PHYSICAL AI

ROBOTS WERE EVERYWHERE —BUT THEIR ROLES WEREN'T.

CES 2026 marked the moment Physical AI shifted from a strategic narrative to a visible, tangible reality. One year after NVIDIA's CEO Jensen Huang emphasized Physical AI as the next frontier at the CES keynote, that vision materialized across the show floor. After several years in which CES increasingly leaned toward software and services, robots restored a sense of physicality—AI with mass, movement, and presence.

*PHYSICAL AI: INTELLIGENCE EMBEDDED IN PHYSICAL SYSTEMS THAT SENSE, ACT, AND RESPOND IN THE REAL WORLD.
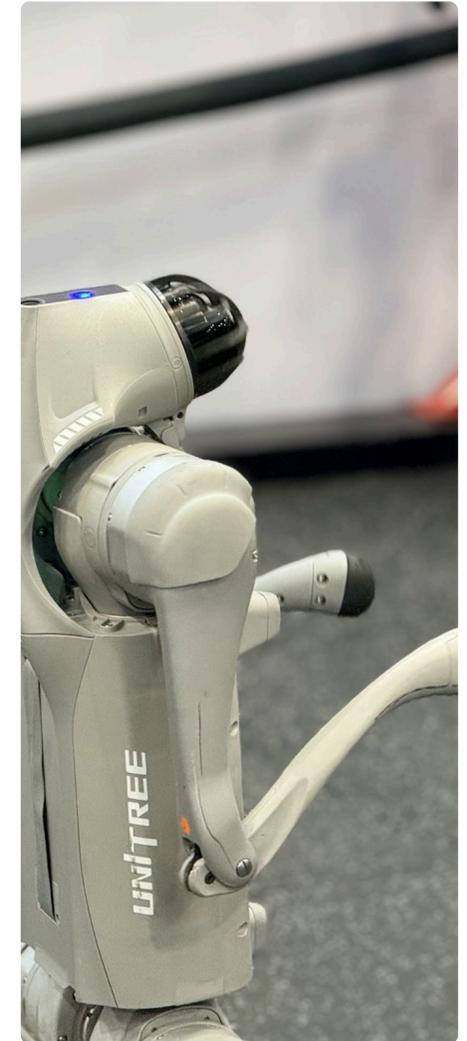
ROBOTS EVERYWHERE

Humanoid and animal-like robots appeared throughout the show floor, sharing familiar bodies, faces, and gestures. Their presence made robotics immediately tangible and emotionally engaging, becoming the most photographed symbols of CES 2026.

ROLES STILL UNDEFINED

Many robots demonstrated impressive capabilities, such as folding laundry (though not perfectly) or playing blackjack with attendees. However, **their roles remained unclear.** Are they appliances, assistants, tools, or companions? Capability is advancing faster than role definition, leaving these products without a clear place in homes, workplaces, or the broader economy.

"Is this a tool, an assistant, or just a demo?"

A QUIETER CES

Beyond robots, CES felt **quieter this year, not because innovation slowed, but because the show reflected a more restrained and pragmatic phase of development.** Many brands reduced their public presence and shifted to invite-only or media-only formats instead of large-scale booths. This change likely reflects both product maturity and the current economic climate. Samsung's shift was particularly striking. After hosting one of the largest and flashiest booths last year, the company moved to a media-only presence in 2026.

This quietness extended to the products themselves, with **familiar concepts returning with minimal updates.** Sony Honda Mobility's Afeela concept, for example, remained largely consistent with last year's presentation. As products move closer to realization, innovation becomes less performative and more incremental. As a result, CES felt less dramatic, but more grounded in execution.
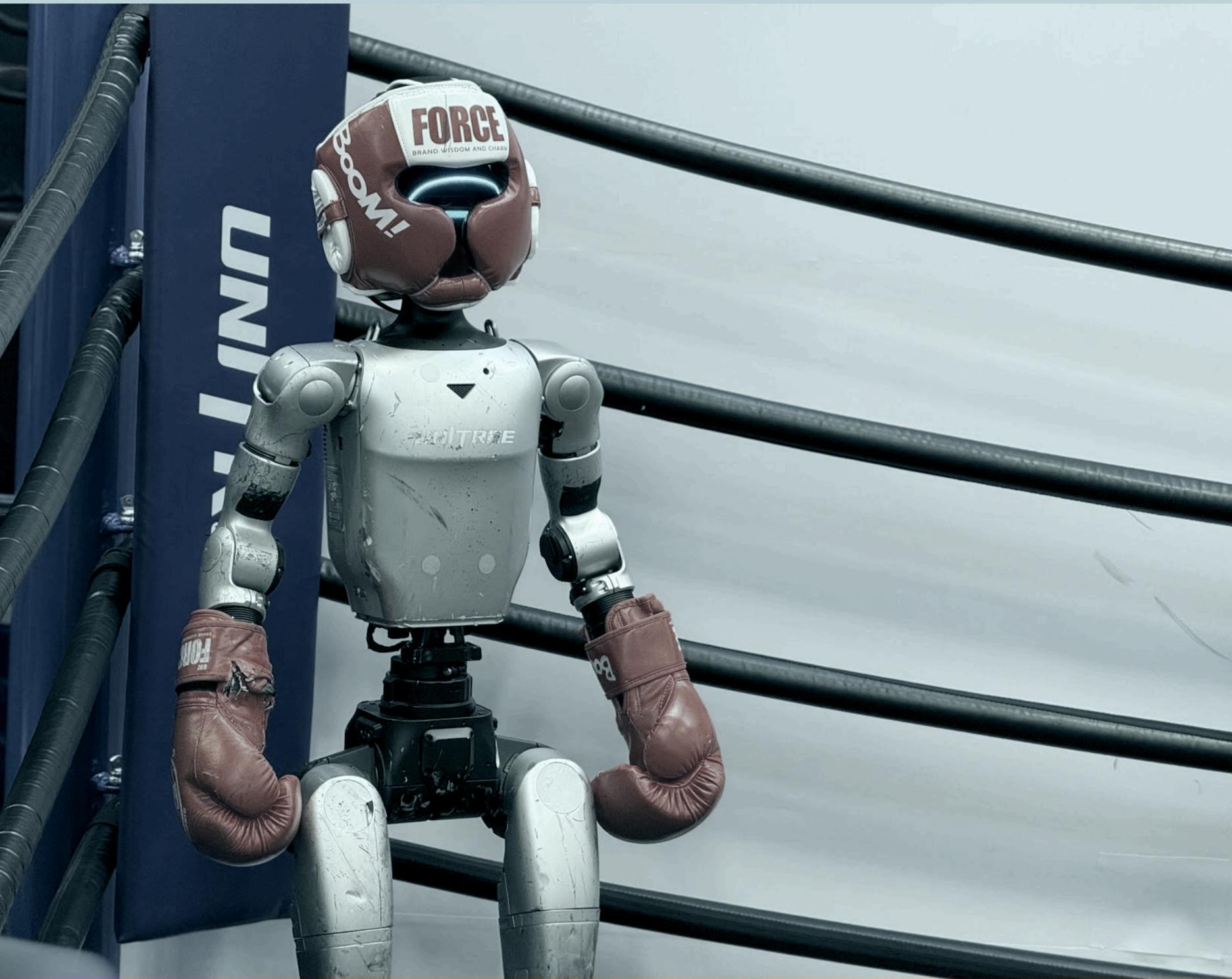
02 WOW VS. WHY

THE UX GAP IN ROBOTICS

Boxing robots, jumping vacuum robots, and ping-pong–playing robots created immediate wow moments, showcasing advanced dexterity and control. Yet these demonstrations also exposed a gap between technical performance and meaningful use.

THE UX GAP

Although robotic performance appears to be approaching practical use, the experience surrounding these systems remains unresolved. Questions of ownership, setup, maintenance, failure, and long-term value were rarely addressed. CES demos delivered compelling "wow" moments, but stopped short of explaining why these products should meaningfully integrate into everyday life.

> *"If users don't know what happens when things go wrong, trust never forms."*

DESPITE POLISHED DEMOS, SEVERAL ROBOTS EXPERIENCED FAILURES DURING THE SHOW —HIGHLIGHTING UNRESOLVED QUESTIONS AROUND RELIABILITY AND RECOVERY.
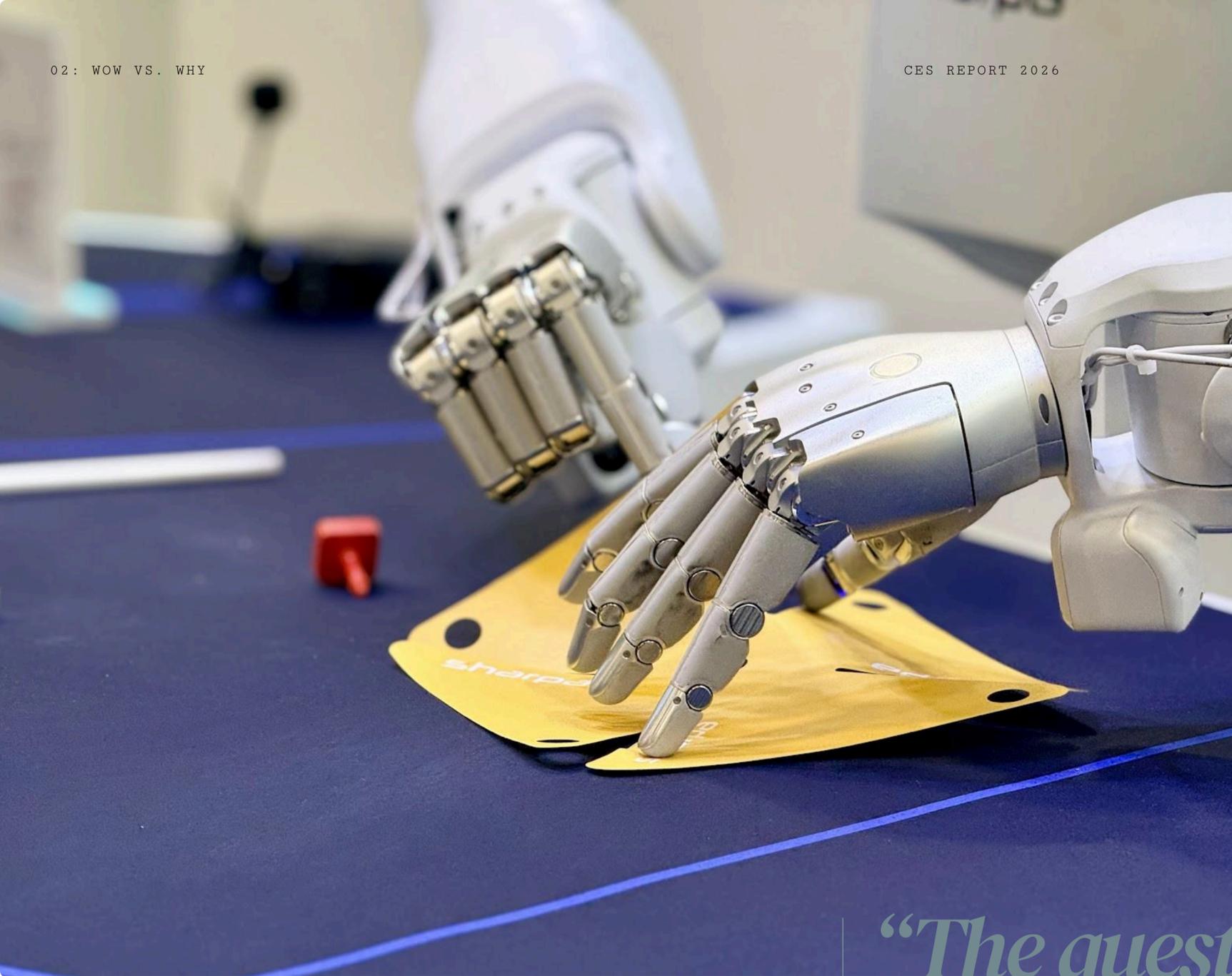
FORM FACTOR AS DESIGN QUESTION

Humanoid bodies feel familiar and emotionally engaging, shaped not only by user perception but also by the way AI systems learn from human motion. However, they are not always the most efficient form for many robotic tasks. CES 2026 highlighted this open design question: while humanoid form factors are intuitive, they may not be the most appropriate shapes for real-world use. This gap points to a clear opportunity for designers—**to move beyond imitation and explore robotic bodies optimized for purpose, context, and coexistence.**

"The question is no longer whether robots can move like humans—but whether they should."

03
AI IN
MOTION

REFERENCE POINT OF
PHYSICAL + AGENTIC AI

AI in motion—including autonomous vehicles, robotaxis, and agricultural machines—functions within complex, real-world environments. By continuously perceiving, reasoning, planning, and acting, these systems represent one of the most concrete expressions of Agentic AI today.

PLATFORMS AND AUTONOMY

Autonomous systems, particularly in mobility, emerged as one of the clearest expressions of Agentic AI at CES 2026. Operating within complex, real-world environments, these systems continuously perceive, reason, act, and learn, integrating intelligence across time, context, and uncertainty. Rather than performing isolated tasks, they demonstrate how AI can function as an ongoing, adaptive system—making their value feel both complete and grounded.

Zoox went a step further by moving beyond exhibition and into deployment. In addition to its presence in the West Hall, the company offered public rides along the Las Vegas Strip. While robo-taxis are no longer entirely new, with commercial operations already underway in select cities, what stood out here was not novelty but execution: the ride experience was smooth in an almost unremarkable way, reinforcing how far autonomous mobility has progressed into real-world operation.

*Agentic AI refers to systems that operate continuously over time—perceiving their environment, making decisions, acting in the world, and learning from outcomes.

ZOOX AUTONOMOUS RIDE NEAR THE CES VENUE. THE EXPERIENCE WAS CONSISTENTLY SMOOTH, WITH A GROWING FLEET ALREADY OPERATING IN LAS VEGAS. EVEN DURING PEAK CES DAYS, OUR WAIT TIME WAS APPROXIMATELY 20 MINUTES—AN INDICATOR OF REAL-WORLD DEPLOYMENT RATHER THAN A LIMITED DEMO.

AUTONOMOUS SYSTEMS IN PRACTICE

CES 2026 highlighted autonomous systems operating across personal mobility, shared transportation, and industrial environments, extending well beyond a single showcase.

TENSOR ROBOCAR: A PERSONAL LEVEL 4 AUTONOMOUS VEHICLE DESIGNED FOR PRIVATE OWNERSHIP, PAIRED WITH OPENTAU, AN OPEN-SOURCE AI TRAINING PLATFORM—SIGNALING A SHIFT TOWARD ACCESSIBLE, DEVELOPER-ENABLED AUTONOMY.

LUCID × NURO × UBER: A PRODUCTION-INTENT ROBOTAXI COLLABORATION SIGNALING THE SHIFT FROM CONCEPT VEHICLES TO A COMPETITIVE AUTONOMOUS MOBILITY MARKET.


JOHN DEERE: AUTONOMOUS AGRICULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL VEHICLES ALREADY OPERATING AT SCALE, DEMONSTRATING HOW SENSORS, COMPUTER VISION, AI, AND INTEGRATED SYSTEMS DRIVE EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY IN REAL-WORLD OPERATIONS.

"The car is no longer the product —the system is."

WHEN THE CAR IS NO LONGER THE STAR

In the automotive section, there were no dramatic concept cars. A decade ago, CES often felt closer to an auto show, but its focus has since shifted toward the core technologies that power mobility: sensors, compute, software stacks, and integrated systems. Companies like Amazon highlighted collaborative platforms for automotive development, while NVIDIA introduced new open AI models for autonomous driving. Together, these signals point to an industry accelerating toward software-defined vehicles, where autonomy is driven less by vehicle form and more by underlying systems and intelligence.
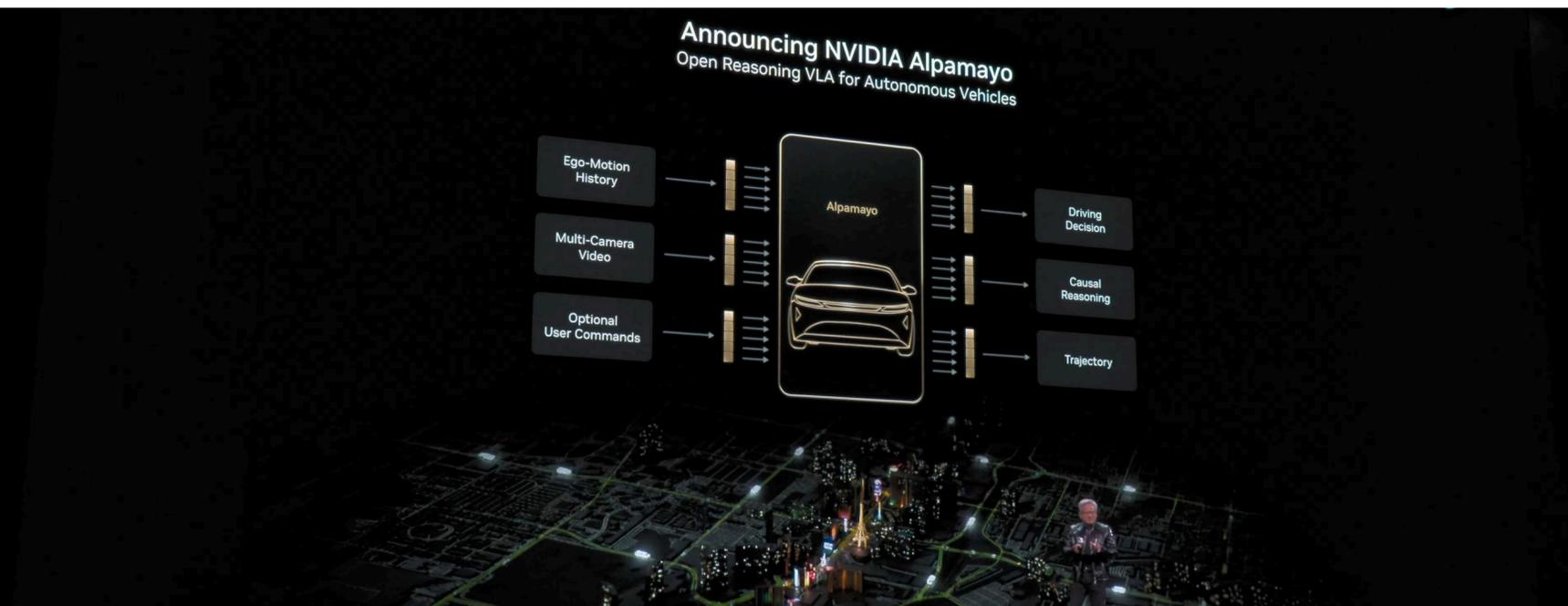
04
HEALTH, TRUST, AND CREDIBILITY

WHEN TECHNOLOGY HAS TO WORK

The smart device category, especially health tech, reveals where technology maturity becomes undeniable. In regulated contexts, reliability, accuracy, and trust matter more than novelty.

FDA-APPROVED HEALTH SYSTEMS

The IoT area at Venetian Expo felt noticeably more mature this year. Compared to previous CES shows, there were far fewer conceptual demos and more practical, market-ready products. Many exhibits, especially in healthcare, highlighted devices that are already FDA-cleared, used in hospitals, or undergoing real-world trials. Design quality was also more polished, reflecting products intended for everyday use rather than speculative concepts. Several companies focused on how they are expanding adoption or scaling their solutions.

Fully deployed solutions such as the FDA-approved Omnipod insulin patch illustrated what it means for technology to already be embedded in people's daily lives. Systems like Xandar Kardian extended this idea further, showing how health monitoring is becoming ambient infrastructure. Its FDA-cleared, contactless radar technology tracks vital signs such as heart rate and respiration without requiring wearables, reframing monitoring as a passive layer rather than a user-driven task. Together, these examples suggest that progress in health technology is no longer defined by bold concepts, but by credibility, continuity, and integration.

OMNIPOD 5, WEARABLE INSULIN PUMP SYSTEM
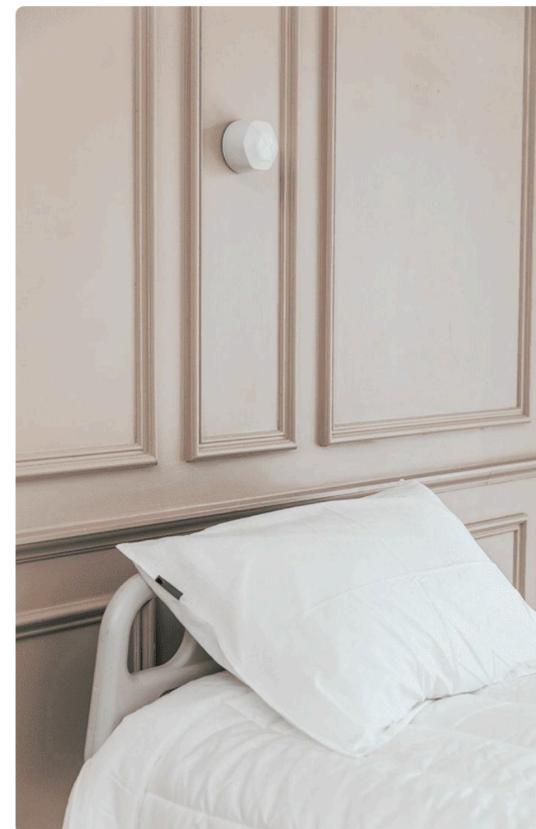
XANDAR KARDIAN: FDA-CLEARED, CONTACTLESS HEALTH MONITORING.

MATERIALS AND READINESS

This year, the IoT area offered few overt "wow" moments, but it showed clear signs of steady progress. One notable example was the biodegradable paper battery from Flint, which stood out last year as a laboratory-level concept. In 2026, the material had become thinner, more refined, and production-ready, marking a clear transition beyond the prototype stage.

While "sustainability" was no longer a dominant buzzword on the show floor, progress in this area felt more embedded and matter-of-fact. Rather than being framed as a headline trend, sustainable thinking appeared increasingly integrated into material choices, manufacturing processes, and product evolution, advancing quietly without the need for bold claims.

FLINT PAPER BATTERY (CES 2025). LAST YEAR'S PROTOTYPE WAS ENCLOSED AND NOT ACCESSIBLE TO ATTENDEES. COMPARED TO THE 2026 VERSION, IT WAS LARGER AND NOTICEABLY LESS FLEXIBLE.

AGE-TECH AS PROOF OF MATURITY

The rise of age-tech (technology designed for older adults) and longevity-focused products at CES 2026 marked a shift in who technology is being designed for, and what is required for adoption. Fall detection systems, hearing aids, and monitoring tools made clear that in this context, trust, simplicity, and reliability outweigh novelty. The presence of senior attendees on the show floor reinforced this shift: these technologies are no longer speculative, but increasingly intended for real users, in real daily life.

WITHINGS BODY SCAN 2
A SCIENCE-BACKED LONGEVITY STATION HIGHLIGHTING THE GROWING EMPHASIS ON VALIDATED DATA, INTEGRATION, AND LONG-TERM HEALTH MONITORING.

"This is not technology for early adopters —it's technology for everyday life."

SHIFT OF CES

A PLACE FOR GLOBAL GATHERING

Beyond the exhibits themselves, CES continues to play a critical role as a global gathering point. Increasingly, its value lies not only in what is shown on the show floor, but in the people it brings together: designers, engineers, clients, and partners from around the world. Conversations across industries, regions, and disciplines provide context that no single booth or demo can offer. For designers, CES is as much about building shared understanding and perspective as it is about observing technology trends.

CES 2026 MARKED A SHIFT TOWARD MORE GROUNDED, SYSTEM-LEVEL INNOVATION.

AS TECHNOLOGY BECOMES PHYSICAL AND AUTONOMOUS, THOUGHTFUL EXPERIENCE DESIGN WILL SHAPE WHAT COMES NEXT.

THANK YOU, AND PLEASE REACH OUT WITH ANY QUESTIONS!

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