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## This Week's Stories

### Facebook, Google And Twitter Reveal Little In Answers To Senate

January 25, 2018

They danced. They dodged. They deflected.

A Senate committee on Thursday published answers from Facebook, Google and Twitter to followup questions about Russia's interference in the 2016 election, left over from a public hearing late last year. But the 100 pages of responses amounted to little more than recitation and description of the tech giants' terms of service and operating procedures.

"The Twitter Rules prohibit using automation tools for the purpose of generating spam," Twitter wrote in one response. "User reports are an important signal, and we rely on our community to help identify inauthentic accounts," Facebook wrote in another.

Twitter additionally said its ability to respond to the senators' questions was limited because it couldn't "comment on whether or not we received requests related to any specific law enforcement investigations."

All those answers aren't likely to please the senators, who already criticized the trio for not doing more to safeguard their collective services from a Russian misinformation campaign. Representatives from each of the senator's offices didn't respond to requests for comment.

The written responses come at a time when the tech industry is increasingly under Washington's microscope. Over the past year, the industry has shifted from a darling of the economy to accidental stooges for a Russian plot to interfere with the presidential election.

Meanwhile, the tech industry has increasingly spoken out against President Donald Trump's actions, from his administration's travel bans and his announcement that transgender people cannot serve in the military, to the Federal Communications Commission's vote to end net neutrality rules that ensured all internet traffic be treated equally.

#### Questions Over Collusion

One of the big questions hanging over the investigation into Russian interference in the election has been whether any campaign colluded with the Russian government. Senators tried to find out with their questions what the social media companies might be able to pull from their vast stores of data to shed light on this question. The answer was, not much.

Did the Trump campaign interact with much of the content created by Russia-affiliated accounts? Facebook said it saw "insignificant overlap" between the targeted content used by alleged Russian conspirators and Trump's presidential campaign.

"Facebook does not believe it is in a position to substantiate or disprove allegations of possible collusion," the company wrote in its responses, but it will provide what information it has for investigators to evaluate.



## Money, Money, Money

Senators asked a variety of questions trying to understand how much money the tech giants earn in advertising revenue.

Google identified \$4,700 in ads from Russian-affiliated advertisers. That's below the \$100,000 that seemed to be spent on Facebook. Twitter, meanwhile, said it counted roughly \$400 from the Internet Research Agency, the Russian-linked troll farm.

Google didn't directly answer a question from Sen. Kamala Harris, a Democrat from California, about whether the company collected any ad revenue from ads placed with regular posts from Russia-affiliated accounts. Those ads would have been legitimate, while the posts themselves wouldn't have been. Instead of providing a number, Google reiterated that it took in \$4,700 in revenue from Russia-affiliated advertisers.

## Who's Scamming And Spamming

The senators asked questions about how the companies detect a abuse of their platforms. When it comes to fake accounts, Twitter detects approximately 450,000 "suspicious" logins a day that it says may be bots, or computer programs created to automatically post and respond to things on Twitter. Additionally, it appears the problem is getting bigger. Twitter said it "challenged" an average of 4 million suspicious accounts a week in September, more than twice the rate from the same time in 2016.

Twitter also said it isn't worried about false news on its service. "We have observed our users engage with false information by refuting it," the company said. "Notably, those refuting retweets generated significantly greater engagement across the platform compared to the Tweets spreading the misinformation -- 8 times as many impressions, engagement by 10 times as many users, and twice as many replies."

## Fake Political Events

Harris asked Facebook about events posted on its network. In response, Facebook said there were 129 events posted across 13 different pages run by the Internet Research Agency, a Russia-affiliated group involved in spreading misinformation online. Facebook estimates 338,300 unique accounts saw the events.

"About 25,800 accounts marked that they were interested in an event, and about 62,500 marked that they were going to an event," Facebook said. But Facebook said it didn't know whether any of the events ever took place in real life.

## The 2017 Elections

Twitter said it's not aware of any state-sponsored efforts to interfere with American elections in 2017, including the Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial elections. The only thing the company did note was a "surge in automated followers for a candidate in a recent Senate election," which Twitter said does not appear to have been state-sponsored. Google, by the way, also said it didn't detect anything.

Facebook didn't give a direct response to whether it saw any state-sponsored operations associated with the 2017 American elections. "We have learned from the 2016 election cycle and from elections worldwide this last year," the company wrote. "We have incorporated that learning into our automated systems and human review and have greatly improved in preparation for the upcoming elections. We hope to continue learning and improving through increased industry cooperation and dialogue with law enforcement moving forward."

## To 2018 And Beyond

Facebook, Google and Twitter all pledged to do more going forward. They've begun working together in a group called the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, to help them identify and deal with "bad actors" on each of their platforms. Through that program, Twitter said the group has created a database of 40,000 "hashes," or accounts that have violated their respective policies and been removed. Twitter says Microsoft, LinkedIn, Oath and Snap have joined this effort.

Twitter reiterated its promise to launch a "Transparency Center" that it said will be an "industry-leading" effort to give researchers access to its data. One feature, for example, will be better search capabilities. It will also include more detail about who is advertising on Twitter and how those ads are targeted. The company didn't immediately respond to a request from CNET for information on when the transparency center will open.

[cnet.com](http://cnet.com)

## AT&T : Tech Mahindra And AT&T Bring AT&T FlexWareSM To More Businesses Around The World

January 22, 2018

Tech Mahindra Will Also Use the Solution Internally in Addition to Making it Available to its Global Clientele

In yet another step toward expanding its relationship with AT&T \*, Tech Mahindra, a specialist in digital transformation, consulting and business re-engineering, will now make available AT&T FlexWareSM to its global clients as well as use it internally.

AT&T FlexWare is a transformative, global network infrastructure solution. It reduces hardware requirements and streamlines operations so companies become more agile and responsive to their IT and business needs. The platform makes it easy to set up and manage virtual network functions (VNFs) on a single device reducing dependence on physical network appliances. This helps businesses become more agile and save costs.

Tech Mahindra intends to combine AT&T FlexWare with its System Integration and Services Portfolio, and offer the solutions to its global clientele who are undergoing digital transformation.

This collaboration will deliver a unique bundled offering of AT&T network and management services and Tech Mahindra's expertise in service management.

Ashish Julka, senior vice president, Tech Mahindra said, 'This is another significant milestone in our strategic relationship with AT&T. AT&T FlexWare is a state of the art product which we believe delivers significant value to enterprise customers in their network transformation journey. With Tech Mahindra's strengths in System Integration combined with a transformative solution from AT&T, it is a win-win for all stakeholders.'

'AT&T FlexWare enables intelligence at the edge that will help businesses analyze, protect and refine their networks. And it's adaptable. You can easily revise for future changes and incorporate new technologies to stay ahead,' said Roman Pacewicz, chief product officer, AT&T Business. 'Having Tech Mahindra on this journey with us will make the platform available to more businesses globally.'

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*"It reduces hardware requirements and streamlines operations so companies become more agile and responsive to their IT and business needs."*

AT&T FlexWare is available in more than 200 countries and territories (subject to conditions), almost all of which are covered by Tech Mahindra's footprint.

[4-traders.com](http://4-traders.com)

## Amazon Go: Lines Form In Seattle To Be Among The First To Try Checkout-Free Shopping

January 22, 2018

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*"One notable difference about the Amazon Go store is that it only sells identical items."*

Crowds of tech aficionados, news crews and the simply curious turned out for the public opening of Amazon's checkout-free convenience store Monday, giving a generally non-descript sidewalk the air of an Apple store the day a new iPhone comes out.

"This is the future of grocery shopping. It's exciting to see the technology in action," said Yuval Fleming, who was so eager to try it out that he happily stood in a pre-dawn line to be one of the first to enter the store.

Fleming came out with a six-pack of beer and a mug emblazoned with the Amazon Go tagline, "Just Walk Out shopping."

Amazon Go shoppers need to have an Amazon account and to put the Amazon Go app on their phones. They scan the app on the electronic readers at the entrance turnstiles, then walk in and grab whatever they want. They can stick their purchases in their pockets, a bag or a pack — Amazon's technology knows what they've taken and charges their account. There are no checkout lines.

The store opened to Amazon staff a year ago but only now to the public, with fascination mingling with worries about future jobs lost to automation and the tide of cool-but-expensive technology that highlights the growing divide between haves and have-nots.

Critics note that shopping at the store requires a smart phone, a credit card or electronic payment system linked to an Amazon account, and that the shop carries items mostly aimed at a wealthy clientele who can afford to choose organic and locally-sourced items.

It notably doesn't accept SNAP, the modern equivalent of food stamps, in contrast with 90% of the 7-Elevens in the nation.

Amazon has been working on the technology that powers the Amazon Go store for about five years and opened the store to staff for beta testing in 2016. It was supposed to open to the public in 2017 but getting the bugs worked out appears to have proven trickier than expected.

Most visitors Monday morning were buying snacks and items simply for the novelty of getting to try out the technology. By 8:00 a.m. stockers were already replenishing the Amazon Just Walk Out mugs and bags, which had been cleared out by the eager crowd.

The space is the size of a regular convenience store, though with a high-end assortment of foods. They include chilled beverages, sweets, snacks, ready-made salads and sandwiches, frozen foods and a wall of meal kits for dinners.

The foods sits on shelves full of hidden sensors that note when an item's been removed or when it's been put back. Hundreds of cameras, painted matte black to blend in with the ceiling, capture movement.

Shopper Fleming, one of more than 100 would-be shoppers gathered in 41-degree weather to be the first to shop in the store, timed his trip: 51 seconds from turnstile to pick-up to exit, according to the app.

### Future Plans

Amazon has declined to speculate on any future plans for using the technology in other venues, including Whole Foods stores, which it purchased in 2017.

Amazon analyst Sucharita Kodali with Forrester Research believes the technology itself should be scalable in the long term.

"If they've figured out how to manage 100 people in a store simultaneously and keep all of those transactions straight and keep all of the inventory that those people purchase straight, then why wouldn't it be scalable?" she said.

One notable difference about the Amazon Go store is that it only sells identical items. All the salads and sandwiches are prepackaged and sold in identical amounts, so each ham sandwich, for example, is the same price and can be seen by the store as interchangeable with every other ham sandwich. This limits the number of items the store must keep track of.

Kodali doesn't see this as a problem long term, though it might result in changes to the typical supermarket practice of selling items such as fruits and vegetables in bulk by weight.

"Subway and Chipotles have very strict standards that standardize everything, that's how they're able to make sure there's not huge variation in cost. These major chains have figured it out, so I have no doubt Amazon will as well," she said.

One thing that doesn't appear to be different at the Amazon Go store is prices. They don't seem to be any higher than for similar items at other stores, said Cooper Smith, head of Amazon research at the business intelligence company L2.

But that could change in the future if Amazon scales it up to work in its Whole Foods stores, he says.

Then, Amazon could use the savings it realizes from not having to pay cashiers in its Whole Foods locations to subsidize the cost of groceries to consumers.

That, he said, "would be a game-changer."

### No Food Stamps

One criticism of the Amazon Go store has been that it does not accept SNAP benefits, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program that was formerly called food stamps. Since the 1990s, SNAP recipients receive an electronic benefits transfer card similar to a debit card that allows them to make purchases.

Grocery stores are not required to accept SNAP but many do, including convenience stores and Whole Foods, which Amazon purchased in 2017.

SNAP benefits cannot be used to purchase prepared foods such as salads and sandwiches that are served hot or foods that will be eaten in the store. The Amazon store has a small area with seating and a counter just outside the turnstiles where shoppers can eat their purchases.

[usatoday.com](http://usatoday.com)

## Products & Services

### Alphabet Unveils Business Unit Devoted To Cyber Security

January 24, 2018

*“The cyber security initiative reflects Alphabet’s desire to expand beyond its core online advertising business at Google and become a major player in enterprise computing technology.”*

Alphabet Inc launched a new business unit on Wednesday that will sell cyber security software to Fortune 500 companies, the latest move by the parent of Google to become a big player in corporate computing.

The new unit, dubbed Chronicle, is betting on the premise that machine learning software, a type of artificial intelligence, can sift and analyze massive stores of data to detect cyber threats more quickly and precisely than is possible with traditional methods.

Stephen Gillett, chief executive of Chronicle and a former top official at the cyber firm Symantec Corp, said access to Google’s expertise in automated data analysis would give the company an edge. Alphabet’s big cash pile and existing customer relationships also make Chronicle a threat to security tools vendors such as Symantec, Palo Alto Networks Inc and Cylance Inc. The global cyber security market is worth nearly \$100 billion, according to market researcher Gartner.

But analysts note that previous efforts by internet search and networking companies to get into the cyber security business have faltered.

“Being the heavy hitter and even having small teams spun out of that doesn’t translate to instant success,” said Avivah Litan, a vice president at Gartner.

Gillett, on a conference call, declined to specify how Chronicle’s technology works and would not give the exact number of companies testing the service. Chronicle also houses VirusTotal, a virus-scanning tool Google acquired in 2012 that charges for premium features.

The cyber security initiative reflects Alphabet’s desire to expand beyond its core online advertising business at Google and become a major player in enterprise computing technology. Google is a distant rival to Amazon.com Inc in cloud computing infrastructure and lags far behind Microsoft Corp in workplace productivity software.

Gillett, also a former Starbucks Corp chief information officer, said Chronicle aims to identify problems in seconds or minutes instead of hours or days.

The process would be aided by lowering customers’ data storage costs. Keeping years of logs can make the threat-detection process more effective, he said.

Gillett co-founded Chronicle in February 2016 with former Google cyber security leaders Shapor Naghibzadeh and Mike Wiacek. Gillett met them after becoming executive-in-residence at GV, Alphabet’s venture capital investment arm, in 2015.

Chronicle, based at Alphabet’s Mountain View, California, headquarters, becomes the third business spun out of the company’s “X” research lab and into the holding company - a process it calls “graduating.” It follows healthcare unit Verily and self-driving vehicle company Waymo. Alphabet has also acquired companies that operate under its umbrella, including thermostat maker Nest.

Astro Teller, the head of X known as the “captain of moonshots,” said his team pursued cyber security technology after noticing that cyber attacks had become a “yeah, yeah” problem, as in, “Yeah, yeah, a lot of people have diabetes, there are things to manage it.”

“The real moonshot, which is still several years away, is predicting and deflecting cyber attacks before they infiltrate an organization’s network,” Teller said in a blog post.

[reuters.com](#)

## Apple’s Siri-Equipped HomePod Comes To Your Home On February 9

January 23, 2018

Apple announced this morning that the wait for its HomePod smart speaker is nearly over. HomePod will be available starting February 9, with preorders beginning Friday, January 26. The home speaker that houses the company's virtual assistant Siri will initially be sold in the US, UK, and Australia, and will be available in France and Germany this spring.

The company first announced HomePod at last year's WWDC with the hopes of releasing it in December for \$349, ahead of the holiday season. However, that deadline came and went and those who wanted an Apple version of Amazon's Echo and Google's Home were left waiting.

Apple's announcement doesn't detail anything we didn't already know about HomePod. The cylindrical speaker is powered by Apple's A8 chip and uses an array of six microphones to pick up your calls of "Hey, Siri" from across the room, even with music playing. It also uses real-time acoustic modeling, audio beam-forming, and echo cancellation to create a rich sound experience, and its spatial awareness feature lets it automatically adjust to produce the best sound for its location in your home.

Much like Amazon's Alexa and Google's Assistant, Siri in the HomePod can answer questions, read off forecast information and the news, and control HomeKit-compatible smart home devices. Apple notes that HomePod is "designed to work with an Apple Music subscription," meaning you likely won't be able to call upon Siri to play music from Spotify or other third-party services (at least, not yet).

It appears Siri will have special third-party integrations on HomePod as well. Apple states in its announcement that SiriKit for HomePod will allow users to ask Siri to send a message through different third-party apps like WhatsApp, not just Apple's native iMessage, and add things to lists in apps including Evernote, rather than Apple's default Reminders or Notes apps.

Since Apple revealed HomePod, it's been clear that the company is focusing more on sound quality and the music-listening experience with this smart speaker than Siri's capabilities as a home assistant. That's why Apple's device is so much more expensive than most Amazon Echo devices and the Google Home and Home Mini speakers (although Google does have Home Max, its own high-end smart speaker). However, HomePod will not launch with an important music feature: multi-room audio and stereo. Apple states that this will come to HomePod later this year through a free software update, allowing two or more HomePods to play the same audio throughout an entire home or specific room.

[arstechnica.com](#)

## Emerging Technology

### Medtronic Begins ENCHANT Study To Assess Chevar Parallel Graft Technique With Endurant Graf

January 25, 2018

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 “A ChEVAR procedure refers to the use of a parallel graft chimney technique that uses covered renal stents with a standard aortic stent graft.”

Irish medical devices maker Medtronic has started ENCHANT (Endurant Chevar new indication trial) study.

The post-market, non-interventional, multi-center, non-randomized, single-arm study will enroll approximately 150 patients across 25 sites in Europe and Russia, and will evaluate the safety and performance of a ChEVAR procedure using the Endurant(TM) II/IIIs stent graft system in a real-world setting.

The first enrollment at St. Franziskus Hospital in Munster, Germany, was led by Professor Giovanni B. Torsello, M.D., chief of Vascular Surgery and principal investigator for the ENCHANT study.

A ChEVAR procedure refers to the use of a parallel graft chimney technique that uses covered renal stents with a standard aortic stent graft. The study is the first to assess the clinical outcomes, safety, and performance of the ChEVAR technique for treating patients with complex aneurysms with short infrarenal neck lengths of  $\geq 2$  mm in a real-world setting.

The ENCHANT study's primary safety endpoint is major adverse events through 30 days post-index procedure. The primary performance endpoint is the proportion of enrolled patients who have technical success at the time of the index procedure and are free from secondary interventions through 365 days.

Medtronic aortic and peripheral vascular division's aortic business general manager and vice president Daveen Chopra said: "As the only stent graft company with a ChEVAR indication, we are deeply invested in delivering solutions, in partnership with the clinical community, that are backed by clinical rigor and address the unmet needs of AAA patients."

The Endurant II/IIIs stent system received CE (Conformité Européenne) Mark for a ChEVAR indication in December 2016.

The approval was supported by the PROTAGORAS study, which demonstrated that standardized use of the Endurant II/IIIs stent graft system with ChEVAR in 128 patients is associated with 100 percent technical success, statistically significant aneurysm sac regression ( $p = .001$ ), 95.7 percent primary patency of the chimney grafts and a low incidence of chimney related reinterventions.

The Endurant II/IIIs stent graft system is based on Medtronic's leading Endurant stent graft system, which for the last five years, has been selected for nearly one of every two endovascular AAA repairs globally and has resulted in more than 300,000 successful implants.

The original Endurant system received the CE Mark in June 2008. In the U.S., Food and Drug Administration approval for the Endurant stent graft system was granted in December 2010. In the U.S., the Endurant II/IIIs stent system is approved for neck lengths  $\geq 10$  mm and  $\leq 60^\circ$  infra-renal angulation.

[patientmonitoring.medicaldevices-business-review.com](http://patientmonitoring.medicaldevices-business-review.com)

## 2018 Will Be The Year Of 'Smart' In Mobile

January 24, 2018

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*“They have the potential to both dramatically alter how we interact with our devices, as well as how they interact with us.”*

Mobile remains a very competitive business, with major smartphone vendors continually trying to outdo one another and consumers often left doubtful that the latest gadget is really something they need to buy.

Previous mobile competition was all about having the best displays or the fastest processing. Early on-board assistants, such as Siri and Google Assistant, raised the bar and gave us a taste of what was coming. However, these features have become much less differentiated by brand these days. It's time for the next wave.

The next generation will be about “smart” and is now making its way into our everyday mobile devices. It's not just about voice interfaces to a search engine or calendar entry, as we've had in the past, nor is it about rudimentary augmented reality/virtual reality. We're now seeing truly smart assistants learning about us and altering the functioning of our device as they go. They have the potential to both dramatically alter how we interact with our devices, as well as how they interact with us. And we've just scratched the surface with new visual interactions.

### Artificial Intelligence Linked To Mobile Devices

This new strategy is emerging as more vendors deploy an AI cloud behind and closely linked to their devices. Services such as Samsung Bixby, which started as a way to help users navigate functions on their device, is now being extended to include interactions beyond the device and into the real world.

Clearly Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant are not just popular because they are a way to interact with your devices using your voice. Rather, they are increasingly popular because they tie our devices to other things around us (e.g., home automation) and make it much easier to perform complex tasks.

### Assisted Reality To Become Part Of Our Devices

But "smart" doesn't stop there. With the advent of more capable mobile engines, including enhanced graphics and AI capability from the likes of Qualcomm, Samsung, Huawei, etc., we're now in a position to see “assisted reality” become part of our mobile devices.

This is will be even more compelling once we move to 5G networks, which have faster speeds and importantly, much lower latency. But even with current 4G/LTE advanced networks, the ability of the device to guide us in the real world by providing visual cues and superimposed images often based on internal 3D visual sensors is enabling a smart ecosystem to emerge to offer many more intelligent ways to interact with our world. This will definitely be a major battleground in the next two to three years as vendors try to outdo one another in providing assisted reality capability — and generally without the addition of a head-worn display that is unappealing to many consumers.

### Apps That Understand Our Moods And Emotions

Voice interfaces and assisted reality are not the only smart features coming. Apple's visual login capability demonstrated on the iPhone X may indeed be revolutionary, even though visual logins have been done before. But more importantly, it's a first step towards something potentially much more profound. It will ultimately allow apps to understand our moods and/or our emotions, much like people do when they speak to one another and read facial expressions.

This not only provides emotional feedback, but it can potentially be used in many important ways — from reading facial expressions from people who may not be able to communicate in normal ways, to

monitoring a patient's health, to creating a new way to secure data/passwords/logins through unique facial expressions.

In the next two to three years, I expect to see a plethora of new and innovative uses for advanced facial recognition technologies, and I expect most vendors to make the capability an inherent part of their offerings.

While I expect the typical players to be dominant in this emerging market (e.g., Amazon, Google, and Apple), it's unclear yet how well Microsoft will do. Cortana is a good assistant, and Microsoft clearly has high levels of expertise in all aspects of assisted reality and AI. But without its own ecosystem to play on, it's reliant on enticing vendors to support their offerings. This may be a hard sell to mobile phone vendors bound to the Android ecosystem, but I do expect Microsoft to be successful with their smart technology in most enterprise uses of smart mobile.

### The "Smart" Enterprise

All of this "smart" that's coming in the next few years will start out in consumer devices, but it is destined to become an important part of enterprise use, as well. Things such as assisted reality, emotional monitoring/visual cues, and smart virtual assistants will become an important part of logging in, safety monitoring of users, just-in-time training and on-the-job assistance, among many other purposes. They will ultimately make enterprise users more productive and allow enterprise apps to be much more intuitive and easier to use, while also making the work environment safer.

Enterprise deployments generally lag consumer tech by two to three years, but I expect this time around they will be implemented fairly quickly, since many of the services associated with this new tech will be tied to the cloud, which enterprises are already adopting in a big way.

### Bottom Line

The next 2-3 years will see a large impact from "smart" mobile devices as service providers, including Apple, Amazon and Google, make their systems available universally, and vendors with the needed high level of resources, such as Apple, Samsung, Huawei, and LG, add increasingly sophisticated tech into their devices — sometimes as a hardware enhancement, and sometimes as their own implementations of cloud services (e.g., Samsung Bixby).

Although companies like Baidu will be content to play in their home market for the short term, they definitely have visions of being a major international player and rival of the big guys. I expect with their massive scale and considerable resources, Baidu and other Chinese players will eventually achieve broad market penetration, although that likely will take three to five years. Nevertheless, you will see "smart" coming to your device very soon.

[computerworld.com](http://computerworld.com)

## Mergers and Acquisitions

### SAP Acquires Recast.AI And Invests In France

January 24, 2018

SAP is looking to France for a new generation of innovation. It has announced the acquisition of the French start up Recast.AI and is planning to incubate 50 more. Using the SAP.iO Fund, it will also invest in French start ups in their seed funding or Series A rounds. It will also spend €150 million each year in R&D over the next five years. Though that last figure does not appear to be directly tied to France.

## Familiar Focus For Investment

It will come as no surprise that SAP are looking to invest in companies focussing on Internet of Things (IoT), Machine Learning, blockchain and SaaS software. It will specifically focus on companies that are complimentary to SAP Leonardo. SAP Leonardo is the platform through which SAP integrates the latest technology, including those named above, into its architecture.

In total it will invest more than €2 billion into France over the next five years. Bill McDermott, CEO, SAP, said after a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron: “There is a real sense of economic momentum in France. President Macron’s bold embrace of the digital world will help France rise to an enviable position as a global innovation leader. We see immense potential in the entrepreneurial spirit of France to disrupt business models, create modern jobs and unleash exciting new opportunities that help the world run better.”

Macron described digital industry as: “a motor of renewed economic growth and promised to unleash a startup revolution.” In recent months he has also announced a €10 billion investment fund in France to fuel the country’s rise in the digital industry. This drive to modernise France might see the country reverse its fortunes and punch its weight on the international stage. This could be both an advantage and a disadvantage to the UK economy. That depends, at least in part on the outcome of the Brexit negotiations.

## Acquisition Of Recast.AI

SAP acquired Recast.AI through its French subsidiary SAP France Holding. No financial terms of the agreement were disclosed. Founded in September 2015 Recast.AI is a collaborative bot platform. It raised €1 million in seed funding in June 2016 and the acquisition probably comes at a time when they were looking for new funding.

For SAP, whose hunt for the next great start-up includes those with global ambitions finds Recast.AI a good fit. Its platform supports more than 20 languages already. Once integrated, it will bring conversational support throughout its software platform. It will add to the work that SAP has already done with Bots.

SAP may also have snatched Recast.AI from under the noses of Microsoft. Recast.AI was the first member to join the Microsoft AI incubation program at Station F. What this means for that program is unknown and it may see recast.AI leave the innovation hub. It also launched its first office abroad last year. It opened in San Francisco intent of growing the company internationally.

That expansion has seen the company work with well-known brands such as Desjardin, EDF, eur op assistance, KLM and SNCF Transilien. There is no comment about their existing client base and product but the staff, including data scientists, will “strengthen” ML development at SAP. Whether this is in a separate stream or merging the product lines is unclear.

### What Does This Mean

This is a significant investment by SAP in France. Whether they will make the same level of investment in the UK is unknown. Google and Facebook as well as SAP have recently made investments in AI/ML in France and there are few parallel investments in London or elsewhere. Is Brexit finally having an impact or is it merely a rebalancing of funding that was overdue.

For France and Macron this is positive news. It may start to move the reliance away from heavy industries and towards digital technology. It is something that Macron is keen to promote. While these investments take time to reach maturity it needs to start somewhere. That Recast.AI has gone from start-up to being acquired by a major global software company in under three years, indicates that it is a focus that will start to payback before the next elections.

[enterprisetimes.co.uk.com](http://enterprisetimes.co.uk.com)

## Salesforce And IBM Combine Analytics Forces

January 22, 2018

IBM and Salesforce have expanded their strategic partnership, bringing together IBM Cloud and Watson services with Salesforce Quip and Salesforce Service Cloud Einstein.

The companies will combine the power of IBM Watson and Service Cloud Einstein to deliver new AI-driven recommendations for next best actions. Now, with AI-driven predictive analytics, companies will be able to create personalized, customer-triggered interactions based on the latest call or messaging chat they had, to help build stronger connections with their customers.

“The success of our customers drives everything we do at Salesforce, including our strategic partnership with IBM,” said Marc Benioff, chairman and CEO, Salesforce. “The combination of IBM Cloud and Watson services with Salesforce Einstein and Quip will deliver even more innovation to empower companies to connect with their customers in a whole new way, leveraging the power of the cloud and AI.”

As a part of this extended strategic partnership, IBM will build new IBM Watson Quip Live Apps, bringing the power of Watson and Quip together. These interactive custom-built applications will be embedded directly into any Quip document to increase the effectiveness of sales teams across the lifecycle of an opportunity. With Quip’s document creation and editing platform, customers are able to bring relevant content, for any project, into a centralized document, removing the need to toggle between multiple windows and apps to get work done.

[dbta.com](http://dbta.com)

## Industry Reports

### Blockchain And IoT: 3 Missing Links To Catalyze An Autonomous World

January 24, 2018

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*“Consider the opportunities for value exchange when disparate and diverse manufacturers, brands, service providers, insurance companies, energy providers, etc. can leverage each other’s platforms to extend and improve their products and services.”*

There's much ado about blockchain, and still plenty ado about the internet of things (IoT). But are these two technology phenomena complementary? Both suffer from significant barriers such as scale, market fragmentation, costs and regulatory issues. But if the past is prologue, technological disruption doesn't occur in a vacuum; rather, it occurs when multiple technologies converge.

While it is simply too early to accurately dub blockchain the “missing link” for IoT, analysis on the intersections of Distributed Ledger Technologies (DLT) and IoT surface a variety of links worth exploring. Below are three ways distributed ledger technologies help fill critical gaps in IoT.

#### **Security: DLTs Presents New Design Considerations For IoT Topologies**

Blockchain is not a silver bullet solution for IoT security. Instead, DLT offer new design considerations and applications for cryptography across myriad parts of any IoT topology.

Smart contracts are small pieces of software encoded into blockchain protocol and a first line of defense, in that businesses can write security rules into the execution of a transaction.

Distributed architectures in and of themselves help minimize the risk of single-point failure, such that the penetration of any single node will not cause the broader network to collapse.

Cryptographic signatures occurring at the block or transaction-level also spell immutability and greater transparency, which can deter tampering.

Zero Knowledge Proofs (ZKPs) are a cryptographic technique allowing two parties to prove that a proposition is true without revealing any information about the event.

Identity authentications, permissions, public and private keys all enhance security associated with who can access what and when.

#### **Interoperability: DLT Fosters More Granular And Controlled Data-Sharing**

One of the most commonly cited (and experienced) challenges facing IoT is the inability to integrate data and functionality, never mind insights, across multiple devices. Although blockchain is not a data integration tool per se, distributed ledgers are inherently designed to offer shared visibility of data.

Decentralized architectures are inherently designed to distribute controls across multiple participants. In enterprise IoT environments, this helps mitigate competitive threats of centralized control—a significant barrier to IoT interoperability.

Consensus mechanisms are essentially the computational proofs participants in the network must complete to verify an event has been registered. IoT devices themselves could come equipped with wallets, firmware, or code to participate in shared ledgers. SKUChain's PopCodes are one supply chain example.

On-chain versus off-chain, and multiple chains. What data go on versus off-chain is an essential question in configuring DLT initiatives, and particularly important in consideration of data volumes, scale, privacy, security and compliance. From an IoT standpoint, it allows a more granular way to parse out which data are shared and which are not.

Open data exchanges, in which DLT is used as a decentralized secure open marketplace for multiple participants to share data to drive innovation (and even be compensated for doing so). IOTA's Data Marketplace and the automotive industry's Autonomous Vehicle Data Exchange (AVDEX) are two important examples to watch.

### **Monetization: Beyond Device-To-Device, To Ecosystem-Level Business Models**

Although blockchain is often associated with the exchange of value, its underlying technologies comprise core platform architecture. Therefore, they are more often associated with cost efficiencies than net new revenue generation. That said, our research suggests near term efficiencies gained will lay the bedrock for the coordination and data sharing required to support next generation monetization models involving an ecosystem of providers.

Near-term, efficiencies gained through product identity authentication and shared visibility across product lifecycles. A single truth for product identity is foundational to design integrity, track and trace, supply chain reconciliation, compliance adherence, counterfeit prevention, etc. It is also key for any use case in which devices generate net new revenues (e.g., M2M transactions, microtransactions, autonomous services, on-demand asset sharing, etc.).

M2M transactions and microtransactions, DLT serves as a shared instantaneous payment rail to register, validate, reconcile and release payments across parties or other devices. Early examples include Teslas transacting with tollbooths or P2P+ commercial energy bartering. Longer term, this is an essential building block for autonomous products and on-demand access, insurance and self-repairs.

Ecosystem-wide infrastructure = ecosystem-wide monetization opportunities that today, are not possible. Or to the extent they exist, are highly centralized (e.g., app ecosystems à la Google, Microsoft, Amazon, etc.). Consider the opportunities for value exchange when disparate and diverse manufacturers, brands, service providers, insurance companies, energy providers, etc. can leverage each other's platforms to extend and improve their products and services.

Similar to what TCP/IP -- the de-facto standard for transmitting data over networks -- did for the internet, the sharing of data across physical networks requires an interoperable layer for recording the events associated with the data. Although we're in the embryonic days of blockchain and DLT, the decentralized paradigm akin to, but still missing from the internet, offers the potential for ecosystems to generate and move value with vastly greater security, efficiency and most importantly, trust.

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## Comcast Hopes For A TV Ad Windfall From Super Bowl, Olympics

January 24, 2018

NBC is airing both the Super Bowl and the Olympics in February, a double-whammy sports extravaganza that Comcast expects to yield \$1.4 billion in ad sales, helping it justify the hefty price it's paying for both events.

NBC is banking heavily on these sports events since traditional TV ratings have slumped in recent years. Live sports are marquee TV events that draw most of the largest audiences, but even those ratings have declined.

More Americans are dumping their cable packages — Comcast lost 33,000 video customers in the fourth quarter and 151,000 for all of 2017 — and advertisers are following consumers to their phones.

Spending on U.S. TV ads is expected to grow an anemic 0.4 percent this year, according to eMarketer.

In the October-December quarter, NBCUniversal's broadcast TV ad revenue fell 6.5 percent, after a boost in 2016 from election ads. As it adapts to a slowing TV market, NBC is continuing some digital efforts from the Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro and expanding others to meet viewers wherever they are — whether in front of a TV or not.

The Super Bowl reaches more than 100 million people in the U.S., outstripping every other TV event. It's the most expensive ad time on TV.

This year's Super Bowl is Feb. 4 and follows a two-year slump in regular-season NFL ratings, according to ESPN. But NBC has said it is not worried about a lack of interest. The game is an event that "transcends sport and even the game itself," Dan Lovinger, an NBC Sports ad-sales executive, said in January, about three weeks before the game.

NBC said then that it had nearly sold out Super Bowl ad spots and that on average, companies are paying more than \$5 million for 30-second ads during the game. Kantar Media expects rates slightly higher than last year's \$5.05 million.

Fox aired the Super Bowl in 2017, and said it had \$500 million in ad revenues for the day. NBC has predicted about \$500 million for the game and associated events this year.

NBC also makes money from ads during events before and after the game and a special episode that night of its hit drama, "This is Us."

For the first time, it's selling ads for the game that will appear only on its app or website. NBC is paying \$963 million for the broadcast rights to the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, which follow a Summer Olympics in Rio two years ago that disappointed in some ways.

NBC ruled the airwaves during the Rio Games, besting other networks, and raked in \$250 million in profit. But ratings for the prime-time broadcast declined compared with the London Olympics in 2012, so NBC had to give advertisers some extra ad slots to make up for it.

This time around, NBC will sell ads for this Olympics based on total viewership, counting cable and digital viewers as well as those who tune into NBC proper. That gives the company more leverage with advertisers, said Brian Wieser, an ad analyst for Pivotal Research Group.

NBC expects to sell more than \$900 million worth of ads for the Olympics, which it says would be the highest ever for a Winter Games. (Summer Games are more popular.) The company is offering more hours of programming this year, both on TV and online, than it did for the Sochi Games in 2014.

Past Olympics have been criticized by fans for tape-delayed events. This year, NBC will air its nightly prime-time broadcast simultaneously across the country. That means the West Coast evening broadcast will start early, at 5 p.m.

The company says it will be able to show many Olympics events live for the U.S. audience, including skiing, snowboarding and figure skating. (U.S. prime time starts at 10 a.m. Korean time.) But some popular events will be live at odd hours in the U.S. Speed skating will take place in the evening in Korea, for example — but morning in the U.S.

NBC will stream the opening ceremony at 6 a.m. Eastern on Feb. 9, but only for cable customers. A delayed version will air on prime time. And it's not yet clear whether exciting medal-round events will be shown at the best time for NBC's ratings, said Kantar Media chief research officer Jon Swallen.

NBC just says that all figure skating, alpine skiing and freestyle snowboard finals will be aired live in either prime time or what it calls "prime-time plus," which stretches from 11:30 p.m. until 2 a.m. Eastern — which is still in prime time on the West Coast.

As it did during the Rio Olympics, NBC has again teamed up with BuzzFeed to make videos on Snapchat. These will include behind-the-scenes videos posted by Snapchat users, clips of athletes and Olympics venues shot by BuzzFeed, and snippets of NBC's own Olympics coverage. NBC's revenue from its Snapchat deal is in the tens of millions, said an NBC Sports spokesman.

The broadcaster is also teaming up with online news site Vox to make a daily Olympics podcast for the 18 days of competition. Comcast is showcasing both NBC's Olympics broadcasts and streaming video for its home cable customers in a way that will be easily searchable on TV sets.

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