

# App-solutely innovative gadgets and *Stuff* with Toby Shapshak

 By Leigh Andrews

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Apps are having their moment, with *Stuff* Magazine having just announced the winners of its annual Gadget and App awards for 2016. Here, *Stuff* publisher and editor-in-chief Toby Shapshak shares a few of his favourite entries and why tech brands in particular need to put customer experience first.

The results have been announced, and the awards will be presented to winners at an event in Johannesburg in February.



Shapshak.

Explaining how the awards work, Shapshak says, “*Stuff* has always been the go-to publication for advice on technology,” and they’ve run their Gadget Awards since they launched in 2007. With the rise of the app economy, their annual App Awards were added two years ago. On how exactly they work, Shapshak explains: “Unlike many other awards, where entrants are required to submit their tech or app, we choose what we have seen through the year for a shortlist, and then debate internally the most innovative and desirable gadgets, and the most useful apps.” To ensure bias is limited, there’s also a reader’s choice category, and Shapshak confirms that readers tend to agree with the *Stuff* team on the winners.

## Convenience and experience at a click

That’s because it’s innovation that most impresses today’s consumer. Shapshak lists this as the underlying reason for WeChat doing so well at the awards as overall app of the year, with WeChat Wallet also announced as financial app of the year. It’s more than just a messaging platform, with its latest foray into [O2O](#) (that’s [offline to online](#)) campaigns in conjunction with *Stuff* and Incredible Connection letting the magazine’s readers make purchases from the print magazine’s pages, which are delivered to their doorsteps. You can also process payments through SnapScan as well as buy airline and electricity or transfer money to your contacts. Other top apps include video-streaming service ShowMax as entertainment app of the year and super-new UberEats, [now available in Cape Town](#), as service app of the year.



Image source © – [Car and Driver](#)

On his personal favourite entries, Shapshak says: “I’d love to own a Tesla Model X, the low-end of the electric supercar range. At \$80,000 it’s anything but low-end in rands, but I think it represents the future of motoring. I feel like my next car

should be an electric car, given how fast the technology is evolving and how environmentally friendly it is. Tesla is making incredible cars, and I like the South African connection.”

The HTC Vive, a first-of-its-kind virtual reality headset that incorporates laser guidance, was the overall gadget of the year, which Shapshak says shows just how popular this new form of interface is becoming. While it's still quite expensive, VR really is starting to take off, with more and more content available to supplement the 2D standard. Watch the headset in action below:

All in all, the brands that stood out are those that emphasise customers' tech experience. It's not a passing fad either, as brands that haven't yet latched onto this are actually missing out. Shapshak says that's because experience is the thing that people remember from using a gadget or from a brand, which is why it has become the key trend in retail globally.

## **Ease of use should be top of mind**

“If someone has a good experience of a store or a product, they will have an overall positive attitude to a company or brand. Steve Jobs was fanatical about ease of use, and has spurred on the tech industry to do the same,” he says. Think about it: if it's hard to set up your phone or TV, you don't lament the technical nature of the industry – you blame the brand of phone or the TV you bought. Brands do understand this, which is why they're increasingly making their products a better "experience".

Shifting focus to mobile and tech trends we can look forward to in the months ahead, Shapshak says, “Mobile is changing everything, from general communication (voice and text) to internet access to streaming music to watching video to sharing on social media. Most people in Africa will experience the internet for the first time on a mobile phone.”

As a result of this, he predicts that using one's voice to interact with your phone or other services is going to be the major trend for this year, especially so after Amazon's voice assistant Alexa made such a big splash at the Consumer Electronic Show (CES) in Las Vegas this month.

Digital Trends has gone so far as to corral all the devices featuring Amazon Alexa from CES 2017 in the video embedded below:

Explaining this in more detail, Shapshak says, “Amazon has been selling its Echo speaker for the last year or so, which lets people say ‘Hey Alexa’ and then ask for a range of services (play music, change the lighting, and obviously buy something from Amazon).”

By allowing other manufacturers to also use Alexa, it gives them a significant head-start over Google, Microsoft and Apple, who all have voice assistants of their own. [Lenovo](#), Huawei, Ford and Volkswagen have all announced Alexa being included in their products or cars, which Shapshak explored in greater detail in his recent *Financial Mail* [column](#).

With the rise of electric cars and the internet of things, effectively empowering them to respond to our basic verbal input, it seems we really are driving towards a connected future.

Visit [stuff.co.za](http://stuff.co.za) for the full list of *Stuff* magazine’s Gadget and App awards 2016 categories and winners, follow them on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) for “everything you want to know about everything you want”, and track [Shapshak’s updates](#) to stay on the cutting edge of innovation.

## ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh\_Andrews.

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