

Amazon says pet translators will turn walkies to talkies

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The smart collars of the future will be able to say what a pet wants



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The good news is that we will one day be able to communicate directly with our pets and understand their every bark and miaow. Perhaps not so good, we will be eating an awful lot of insects.

Every year Amazon, the online retailer, issues a report that tries to identify future buying trends. The latest, commissioned to mark the launch of its Shop the Future online store of tech stuff, features pet translators, foldable screens and virtual shelves that will display your taste in music and TV shows.

We will also be using voice activation for simple tasks such as shopping, according to two “futurists” hired by Amazon: Anne Lise Kjaer, Danish founder of the “ideas and trend management” adviser Kjaer Global, and William Higham, who runs the consultancy Next Big Thing. Mr Higham said: “We are in the middle of one of the most volatile technological, social and economic periods in decades, perhaps even since the Industrial Revolution.”

Translation devices will go beyond the various apps and online tools available now and allow hands-free communication with fellow humans and even pets, it is predicted. Mr Higham says the devices will play back a pet’s barks or miaows and provide an explanation of what they mean.

Those on the horizon include a collar that tells a dog’s owner what it wants. Owners record themselves saying phrases in their pet’s “voice” and link each phrase with a certain behaviour, recognised by the collar’s “three-axis accelerometer”, which analyses movements. If a dog is barking or scratching at a door, the collar could say “I’m hungry” or “walkies”.

As for food, the rise of veganism is just the start. Ms Kjaer says: “Many foodstuffs are becoming scarcer and we’re looking into the environmental effects of rearing animals.” Food shopping will centre around individually tailored diets that will use blood samples or our own DNA to tell us what we should be eating.

Not only will we be eating more insects, an under-used protein source, we will be buying specially developed cutlery to help us.

The two also see a time when everyone will have an “at-home hydroponic farm” producing a wide range of fruit and vegetables.

Virtual reality will play a huge part in our lives, with filming in VR becoming as commonplace as filming on video is today as costs fall. Eventually, cameras will create virtual 3D images that you will be able to walk around.

Autonomous cars will be the norm, with in-car entertainment to take our minds off the boredom of being driven around, say the futurists, as will 3D printers to facilitate repairs and make spare parts in the home.

There already exists a fridge, available from the South Korean manufacturer LG, with a door that can be made transparent so you can see what is inside. Further on will be a “smart fridge” to detect when any sort of food is getting low and re-order it for you.

“Virtual shelves” will sit on the wall: LED screens that will display your impeccable taste in books, films and music and allow you more easily to pick your choice of viewing, reading and listening.

The toddlers of the future will not miss out on this technological revolution. Toys and dolls will have artificial intelligence embedded that will have an almost unlimited vocabulary so they can behave like a human friend — or even a teacher.

The report predicts that consumer goods of the future “will revolve around ease”. Wearable fitness trackers will shrink to the stage where they can be implanted into the body, the authors suggest. The voice-activated smart home hubs of today, such as Amazon Echo and Google Home, will gain more functions, reaching a point where “homes will increasingly manage themselves”.