

The AI ??device revolution will not kill smartphones

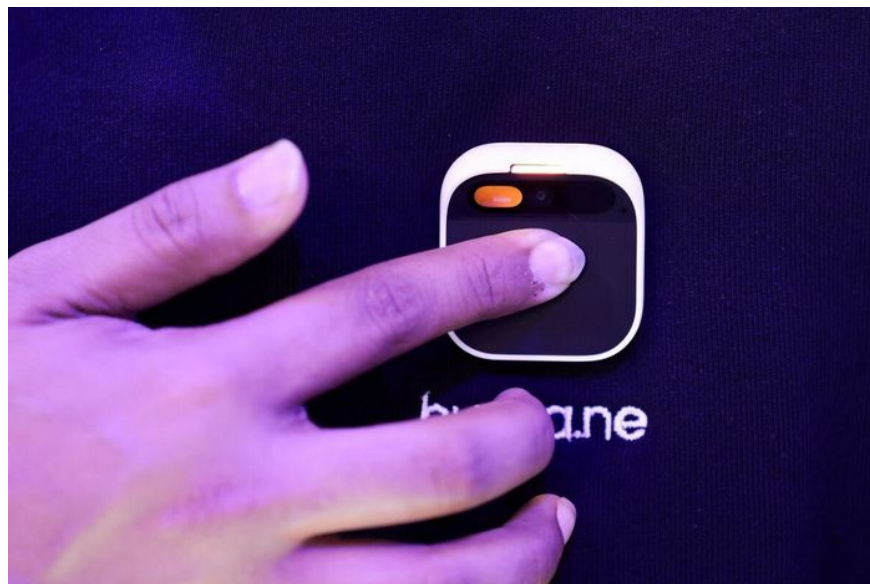
The technology industry is betting on artificial intelligence (AI) to create alternatives to the iPhone in particular and smartphones in general. However, the testing process of a prominent AI device, Ai Pin by startup Humane, shows that smartphones will not be eliminated.

The tech industry is on the hunt for a new type of consumer device that could spark a revolution and even replace the already ubiquitous smartphone. But that is not an easy task.

Let's look at some past candidates. Voice-controlled smart speakers used to be an exciting product, but advances in that field seem to have stagnated. Tablets have not yet become the PC (personal computer) replacement that Apple and other companies expected. Mixed reality headsets like the Vision Pro are still far from becoming mainstream products.

That brings us to the latest attempt to create an AI consumer device from scratch, Humane's Ai Pin. Humane has received a lot of attention because the startup's co-founders are former Apple managers who worked on the iPhone and iPad. With that foundation, Humane has attracted hundreds of millions of dollars in investment.

Humane has made no secret of its ambition to eliminate smartphones or at least reduce the need to use this device. Priced at \$699 and about the same size as an Apple Watch Ultra, the Ai Pin is a device that magnetically clips to clothing and acts like a smart speaker placed on your chest. It lacks a screen and has voice controls and a small touch surface. Additionally, Ai Pin has a laser that projects images into the palm of your hand. This device has a limited battery capacity, but the underside of the magnet doubles the battery life.



In his tests, famous technology journalist Mark Gurman from Bloomberg news agency found that AI technology on Ai Pin works well, on par with other generative AI systems on the market. For example, Ai Pin often knows

the context needed to answer questions. Ai Pin's Vision feature can observe an object or room and describe it using voice.

However, Ai Pin responds slowly or cannot recognize the touch gestures needed to start listening to commands. It overheats to a worrying degree and lacks key features, like the ability to control timers and calendars (coming soon). Ai Pin also can't access third-party apps and has annoyingly short battery life, even with the extender.

Mark Gurman also encountered other errors, such as the device not connecting to the cellular network or responding to commands, the touchpad not accepting input, and the laser projecting a blurred orange vertical line on the palm instead of communicating normal green color. Humane admits that Ai Pin is version 1.0, but makes it feel like it's even earlier than that.

Setting up Ai Pin is also difficult. Mark Gurman had to reboot the device a few times to get everything working. By default, users need to enter a pin code each time they attach Ai Pin to clothing. The interface for entering the pin requires the user to move their hand away from the Ai Pin and then back towards their body while swiping through the numbers. What's annoying is that the pin input interface sometimes doesn't appear, essentially bricking Ai Pin until you figure out how to restart it.

However, the inherent problem of Ai Pin is not glitches, incomplete feature sets or low battery life. Ai Pin's basic design and interface are seriously flawed.

To put it bluntly: Most people won't want to rely on voice controls and a laser projection system. They simply don't want to interact with technology this way.

Ai Pin's voice interface is complicated and ineffective for productivity. Siri could be much better, but that doesn't matter much. The reason is because most users will not control their iPhone through Siri. Android device users also don't handle most tasks through Google Assistant. There's also a reason why interest in Alexa and smart speakers has dropped: They're not actual user interfaces.

Next, we need to mention the laser projection screen. This approach is inconvenient and makes adding features more difficult. Surely users of any new interface need some time to get used to it, but this one is especially difficult for them.

Mark Gurman said: 'When the first iPhone came out, it took me a while, maybe a week or so, to get used to the touch keyboard. There's nothing wrong with needing time to learn.'

But with Ai Pin, even if you master navigation, everything still takes too long to complete. You control the interface by tilting your hand like you're moving it around a marble, and it's frustratingly imprecise, no matter how many times you do it.

Laser displays also don't work well in particularly bright lighting conditions and often don't come on when needed. It all undermines Humane's marketing message of trying to keep people in touch with the real world.

The remaining problem is that Ai Pin needs to be attached to clothing. If you're in a climate that requires more or less layers (sweaters, jackets, outerwear), keeping the Ai Pin securely attached can be very inconvenient.

Additionally, some people may feel uncomfortable seeing a device with a camera attached to your shirt. They may fear that they are being recorded and may not want to engage in a normal conversation.

Humane has been thinking about this. The company says Ai Pin doesn't record audio or any footage unless you hold down the touchpad. However, any new technology company must assure users that it is protecting privacy,

and Humane will have to build that trust.

With the goal of being a device to replace smartphones or the development of computers, Ai Pin has a not very bright future. However, the team behind Ai Pin deserves credit for bringing something new to the table, as well as creating a system that can aggregate data from several AI tools and sources.

There's a reason why some people say Humane should have developed a phone or smartwatch app. With a value of 700 USD and 24 USD service fee per month, Ai Pin is not worth buying.

Perhaps Ai Pin will just be an additional accessory for technology and AI enthusiasts willing to spend quite a bit of money. But using Ai Pin with your current smartphone is not easy. Ai Pin requires a separate phone number, and Humane has refused to launch a smartphone app to help set up the device and access data on it (like stored notes and photos). If Humane repositions Ai Pin and reduces the price significantly, the chances of this AI device surviving will be higher.

However, Humane seems intent on building an all-in-one platform that can exist outside of the existing iOS and Android ecosystems. That makes it difficult for users to incorporate Ai Pin into their lives easily. No marketing campaign can fix this problem.

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