

# Tech toys: Smaller, cheaper, more powerful

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Andy Starnes/Post-Gazette

Jim Barry of Consumer Electronics Association models Video Iwear by Vuzix, which projects the video images from an iPod into a pair of goggles simulating a 62-inch TV screen.

Jim Barry bears gifts in his gym bag that have been called gizmos, gadgets, boy toys and in a pinch, thingamajigs or doohickeys.

But whatever you call them, the spokesman of the Consumer Electronics Association says they are all quite recession-proof.

Americans bought \$170 billion in consumer electronics in 2007, the association reports, making it an industry that grew 5 percent last year after having grown 8 percent the year before.

Consumers seem drawn to tech toys, which are constantly getting smaller, more powerful and often less expensive. There are GPS units that fit on a keychain and oversized ones that shout out to the bifocal crowd. High-definition digital cameras have limboed under \$800. USB devices can double as thumb-size Les Brown guitars or beer-mug chilling pods.

Mr. Barry, in the midst of a 75-cities-in-365-days road trip, is the voice of a trade group representing 2,200 companies, everybody from giants such as

Sony and Panasonic to lesser lights such as Accuro and Vuzix.

His road trip often features gadgets that made their debut at the annual Consumer Electronics Association expo in Las Vegas in January.

As the former, longtime editor of Video magazine, Mr. Barry can track how fast things in the tech industry have evolved.

Fifteen years ago, "new camcorders would come out five times this size and one-tenth the picture quality," he said, as he picked up a palm-size Panasonic HD camcorder. "The tape was bigger than this. That's one reason why electronics are doing well. Value."

• **Virtual reality eyewear** is still a bit bulky, but the prices are dropping fast. The Vuzix AV920 produces the equivalent of a 62-inch screen. The spectacles are 3 ounces, but don't forget that they need to be tethered to a portable video device. A built-in lithium ion battery allows for five hours of use; \$285; [www.vuzix.com](http://www.vuzix.com)