

The wedding tech now at the heart of couples' nuptials

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Jiri Vedral

Ondrej (left) and Jiri Vedral exchanged smart rings, but their wedding day was otherwise a traditional affair

Instead of traditional gold bands, Czech couple Jiri and Ondrej Vedral exchanged smart rings on their wedding day.

Smart rings are wearable electronic devices with functions similar to smartwatches. They typically allow the user to monitor his or her heartbeat, and make a contactless payment.

It's a fast-growing tech sector, reported to be seeing global sales rise by 21% a year.

Jiri and Ondrej's smart rings are, however, designed to be more romantic than most - they allow them to see and feel each other's heartbeat.

Each ring is connected by Bluetooth to an app on the wearer's smartphone. And via the app two rings can be linked together.

So every time Jiri presses his wedding ring, it both physically pulses with Ondrej's heartbeat, and displays the heartbeat as a moving red line. And the same in reverse for Ondrej.

As long as their mobile phones are both connected to the internet, they get a real time heartbeat. If either is offline, they get the last recorded one.

"We were never into gold and diamonds," says Jiri. "We wanted something different, so we liked the idea that this was something new. We feel like pioneers in this."

The rechargeable ring, called the HB Ring, is made by Czech firm The Touch. Although the first iteration went on limited sale back in 2016, the company is now seeing an increase in global interest thanks to the wider surge in the smart ring sector.

In addition, the business has this year launched a new parallel product - The Touch Locket. To be worn on a necklace, this has the same technology as the smart rings.

Its target customers include engaged couples who might like the idea of being able to feel their loved one's heartbeat, but don't want to forgo having traditional wedding rings.



Jiri Vedral

Jiri and Ondrej's rings, pictured, allow them to feel each other's heartbeat

Jiri and Ondrej are among the many couples now increasingly using tech in their wedding celebrations. From drones for wedding photography, to digital tools to help with wedding planning tasks, such as managing the budget and seating arrangements, tech has infiltrated many important aspects of the wedding day.

The wedding tech trend is growing as a result of people conducting so much of their lives on their smartphones, says Zoe Burke, the lead editor for UK wedding planning website Hitched.co.uk.

"I think people just take it for granted now that you'll be able to plan your wedding through your phone. You probably met your partner through your phone," she says. A third of couples in the UK are now said to use WhatsApp to invite guests to their wedding, and 60% **announce their engagement on social media.**

New Tech Economy is a series exploring how technological innovation is set to shape the new emerging economic landscape.

Some people are even now using artificial intelligence (AI) software to write their wedding vows or speeches. US-based wedding planning website Joy recently launched an AI tool that can do all this for you.

Called "Wedding Writer's Block Assistant", it is based on ChatGPT, the chatbot founded by the San Francisco-based tech firm OpenAI.

Vishal Joshi, co-founder and chief executive at Joy, says that rather than killing off the romance involved in writing vows or speeches, the aim of the AI tool is to make life easier for people who have difficulty putting their feelings into words.

"We did a survey, and found 89% of respondents find it overwhelming to start writing their wedding material," says Mr Joshi. "The AI tool is not supposed to replace human emotions, but for many people it's helpful."

Joy

Joy's AI-powered tool can write wedding speeches for people

The global coronavirus pandemic helped pave the way for tech-based weddings, with couples that didn't postpone their nuptials getting married over Zoom or livestreaming their ceremony to guests at home.

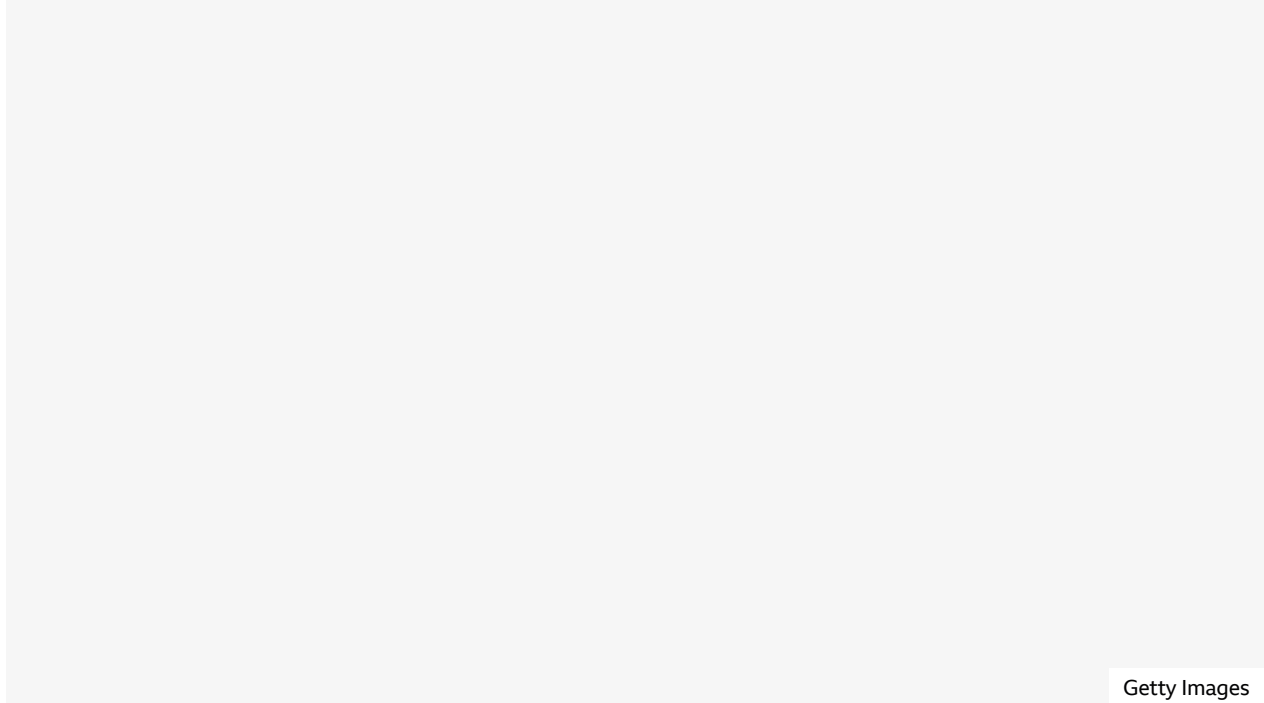
But virtual weddings now suffer from their association with Covid-19 restrictions, according to Ms Burke. "People have moved away from livestreaming weddings. They don't want to be reminded of that time," she says.

For couples dealing with spiralling costs brought about by higher inflation, utilising tech can save money, such as sending out e-invitations instead of posting out paper ones. This also has an environmental benefit.

Rohita Pabla, a wedding planner based in London, says: "It's about cost saving and being environmentally conscious. More and more couples are thinking about the environment."

Making an impact on social media during the big day is also, perhaps unsurprisingly, now a huge focus for many, with couples and guests posting videos on TikTok or Instagram during the wedding and the following reception.

One new development in this direction is the growing trend of hiring "gif booths" for the reception. These are photobooths that take short bursts of photos to create gifs, or moving images. The user then simply enters his or her mobile number, and the gif is immediately sent to their phone.



Getty Images

Photobooths have been a fixture at wedding receptions for a number of years, but can now create gifs too

"Some [couples] want the pictures to get picked up and shared over multiple different platforms," adds Ms Pabla. "They want to be the Instagram couple."

But couples also need to cater for their less tech savvy wedding guests, or those who prefer to get their invitations the traditional way. Ms Pabla, who specialises in planning South Asian weddings, says that many couples she works with ensure they observe certain traditions alongside using tech-based solutions.

For example, in traditional Indian weddings, it's customary for the bride and groom to give family members and older guests a physical wedding invitation in person.

"So the couple will get a few copies of invitations made and those will be for parents and grandparents," says Ms Pabla. "But for their peers the same age they'll just send them a digital invite."

Mr Joshi adds that wedding tech can be used to "make everything easier and much more interesting". Yet he cautions that at the same time you need to avoid the risk "of losing the charm and the romance of what real weddings are about, which is essentially bringing friends and family close together".

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