



By: *Elise Quevedo*

MWC Barcelona 2026: entering the IQ Era



Every February, Barcelona becomes the centre of thought leadership, innovation, and global strategy as the countdown to Mobile World Congress begins.

This year, MWC will run from 2 to 5 March 2026. The official theme for 2026 is “The IQ Era”, in which connectivity and intelligence converge to shape the next decade of digital transformation.

2026 will be my 9th year attending in person. Each edition brings something new. This year, the foundational technologies are solid, and the question is how AI, networks, space tech, and immersive experiences translate into real-world impact.

Here is my take ahead of **MWC 2026**.

The six themes of 2026

MWC26 has organised its thought leadership under six key themes: AI 4 Enterprise, AI Nexus, ConnectAI, Game Changers, Intelligent Infrastructure, and Tech4All. Themes that reflect the industry's priorities for the next few years: operational intelligence, ethical inclusion, network evolution, disruptive innovation, and human impact.

AI 4 Enterprise will concentrate on how businesses use automation and data to boost growth.

AI Nexus will facilitate industry-wide AI integration.

ConnectAI will investigate how the connection itself is transformed by connected intelligence.

Game Changers will showcase groundbreaking inventions that have the power to completely alter markets.

Intelligent Infrastructure will underscore the platforms and networks that support digital systems.

And Tech4All will tackle accessibility and societal inclusion through technology.

What is new and worth watching?

A new addition to MWC this year is space technology and satellite communications. For the first time, these areas will be showcased in dedicated exhibition zones called **New Frontiers** and **Airport of the Future**, demonstrating how connectivity will extend beyond terrestrial boundaries.

Having worked at an airport for over a decade in my younger days, I am curious about these zones. I was there in the early 2000s, showing people how to book flights online, when you could rock up to an airport and book a last-minute flight at a low cost.

Executives from companies like SpaceX and Starlink will be on stage to discuss real-world use cases for global coverage.

Workshops, hackathons, and developer zones will offer hands-on insights into AI, cloud, cybersecurity, and emerging tech

Space-based connectivity is becoming business-critical. It delivers resilient networks in remote regions, supports industrial IoT, and contributes to emergency response infrastructure.

Talent Arena returns with expanded programming focused on digital skills and developer engagement. The lineup features industry pioneers, including Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, and robotics expert Kate Darling. Workshops, hackathons, and developer zones will offer hands-on insights into AI, cloud, cybersecurity, and emerging tech.

The expanded Robotics Zone within Talent Arena shows how robotics is moving from lab demos into practical deployments.

Five to watch in 2026

MWC is big, 240,000 m2, to be exact, and each year hundreds of companies appear for the first time. Apart from the usual giants attending, such as Accenture, Amazon Web Services (AWS), Cisco, China Mobile, Ericsson, Huawei, Intel, Nokia, Orange, Qualcomm, Samsung, and Vodafone, to name a few, here are five companies I'm curious about:

IQSTEL Inc. is bringing its AI services division, Reality Border, to the event, showcasing production-ready AI tools for web chat and intelligent voice interaction. Intelligent communications solutions are evolving.

Whale Cloud will present its intelligent productivity solutions for telecom operators, focusing on deeply embedding AI into core business processes rather than surface-level features.

New space satellite connectivity startups will demonstrate hybrid space-terrestrial broadband architectures that enhance global reach and resiliency, such as SES.

Emerging robotics firms will showcase robots with practical autonomy and assistive capabilities for humans, expanding the conversation beyond mobile devices. This includes AGIBOT and PAL Robotics.

The IQ Era continues

Connected intelligence is where we are at. AI is pervasive, but its value emerges only when it is connected to networks, sensors, and decision systems. Connectivity is about speed, continuous learning, edge intelligence, low latency, and adaptive systems.

In 2025, integration of AI with 5G and advanced networks was already a primary focus. This year, the integration goes a step further. Large language models, sensor-driven AI, and autonomous system pipelines are becoming part of connectivity strategies. These developments move us into operational adoption.

Terrestrial networks are being joined by

satellite and space systems. In addition to supporting data and phone traffic, intelligent infrastructure will enable practical problem-solving in manufacturing, emergency systems, logistics, and health.

AI and improved connectivity are merging to facilitate real-time analytics, distant operations, and hybrid workforces

Enterprise AI is now moving beyond experimentation and finally into scale, with leaders demanding measurable business outcomes rather than theoretical value.

At the same time, AI and improved connectivity are merging to facilitate real-time analytics, distant operations, and hybrid workforces.

Additionally, satellite and space technologies are becoming more well-known as workable ways to fill up coverage gaps without sacrificing dependability and performance.

Underpinning all of this is talent. The conversation, which was much needed, is expanding to include how we develop and support the next generation of technology leaders, ensuring skills, leadership, and opportunity evolve in step with the demands of the future.

A new phase of digital evolution

Last year, MWC25 highlighted the momentum of 5G-AI convergence and the shift towards intelligent networks. This year builds on those ideas while expanding the stage to include space, robotics, and developer ecosystems.

The emphasis on intelligent infrastructure reflects the reality that networks, AI, and data systems should operate in harmony to support sustainable growth.



The expanded Talent Arena and developer zones offer pathways to connect with industry pioneers and to participate in mission-critical projects

In 2026, the IQ Era theme declares that we are entering a mature phase of digital evolution.

MWC26 is a reminder that digital IQ is for every industry. Technology decisions are strategy decisions. Investing in connectivity, AI literacy, and talent ecosystems determines competitiveness.

For decades, Barcelona has been a meeting point for ideas and careers. The expanded Talent Arena and developer zones offer pathways to connect with industry pioneers and to participate in mission-critical projects.

Large events such as MWC always influence how we think about the next wave of digital transformation. Whether you are attending in person or following online, I look forward to learning about your key takeaways.

In this new IQ Era, how will you invest your energy, curiosity, and influence to shape a future where technology empowers everyone to thrive?

As I always say, together we are stronger.