Products in Search of Buyers at the Consumer Electronics Show

by J. Miller [images by D. Massarik, R. DiSilvestro]

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Las Vegas, NV, January 2009. The manufacturers and vendors left little open space on the floor of the Las Vegas Convention Center for the 2009 edition of the Consumer Electronics Show. If only the same could be said of the attendees.

New products abounded in the Nevada desert. Four of the world's largest TV manufacturers, Samsung Electronics, Sony, LG Electronics and Panasonic, displayed their latest offerings of 3D TVs. As in 2008, Panasonic set up its mini-home theater with its 150-inch, plasma screen. For 2009, Panasonic brough 'only' a 103 inch plasma screen, but the images were 3D--showing movie clips of Journey to the Center of the Earth and Walt Disney's animated film Bolt, as well as some high-definition 3D footage from NBC's broadcast of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, China. Those that made the trek were wowed, but to say it was crowded at any of the displays would be a stretch. With the impending conversion to all digital (broadcast) Television later this year and the necessity to upgrade older TVs, it remains to be seen if the buying public will be interested in yet another hardware upgrade to support 3D.

Microsoft, Intel HP and Toshiba, were all cautiously optimistic with their displays. HP's Firebird desktop debut showed HP was still interested in offer performance at a competitive price. HOP also continues its aggressive pursuit of market share in the mini/Netbook arena with its well-received Mini 2140 Netbook. The brushed metal design and ExpressCard/54 slot made the 2410 stand out in a field crowded with competitors.

Microsoft continued it's relatively low key but consistent push for Windows 7 (still in Beta at this time). Early Beta test reports indicate that the upcoming operating system scales very well to low-end Netbooks (current Netbooks, as a function of their hardware, have universally avoided Microsoft Vista), suggesting Microsoft is not oblivious to a growing market segment as well as conscious of the fact that Vista's reception has ranged from luke-warm to roundly despised.

Sony displayed its Intel Atom-powered Lifestyle PC --an upscale take on the mini-laptop. The sleek mini ▲◆▲✌◗❊❊ ❁ ▲◗❊❖❊●❊■❊ ▼❑◆❋❊✍▲❋❒❋❊■ ❖❋❒▲❊❑■ ❑❊ ▼❊❊ ❒❑❒◆●❁❒ ✣❋❋ ☆✣✛ ❁■ ❊ ✡★✤✌ ◗❊▼❊ ▼❊❊ ■❋◗ ✡▼❊●❑■ ★❋❑ ❒●❁▼ ❊❑❒❍✍✍❋▲▲❋■▼❊❁●●❙ ❁ ●❑◗✍❒❒❊❋❊ ❍❊ ❊❒❑❊■▼ ❂❋▼◗❋❋■ ★❋▼❂❑❑❋▲ and mainstream laptops.

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In the home-video area, Blu-ray compatibility continues to be an issue. Samsung and Panasonic offered home theater systems with built-in Blu-ray players in 2008, but they debuted with differing interpretations of the older Blu-ray spec. The prospects have improved for 2009: Blu-ray systems from, Panasonic, LG, Samsung, and JVC are all Profile 2.0/BD-Live compliant. and many ❑❊❊❊❒ ❁❊❊❊▼❊❑■❁● ❋❑■▼❋■▼ ❊❒❑❍ ▼❊ ❋ ☆■▼❋❒■❋▼ ✈★❋▼❊●❊❙ ❁■❊ ☆❁■❊❑❒❁ ❑ ■ ✳❁❍▲◆■✳✛ ★❋▼❊●❊❙✌ ✷❑◆✳◆❂✌ ❁■❊ ✣ ❊■❋❍❁★❑◗ ❑■ ★✧✛ ✡❍❁❙❑■ ❁■❊ ✷❑◆✳◆❂ ❋ ❑■ ☆❁■❁▲❒■❊❋✉✎ Samsung added to the option list with a Wi-Fi feature available via an add-on plug-in module.

A closer examination of the Blu-ray vendors revealed nearly all (Phillips?) at CES were Profile 2.0 compatible. The result is that buying a Blu-ray player won't involve having determine if the player will support Internet-enabled BD-Live features. WiFi

continues to evolve as a feature on Blu-ray players with Wi-Fi options promised from LG and Vizio. ❊❊✻❊ ❁●▲❑ ✳❑✻▲ ❁ ●❑■✳ ◗❁▌ ▼❑◗❁❒❊ ❍❁ ✻❊■✳ ❊▼ ✻❁▲▌ ❊❑❒ ✳❑■▲◆❍✻❒▲ ▼❑ ❁✻▼ ◆❁●▌◗❁▼✻❊ ✢✤✍★❊❖✻ ❊✻❁▼◆❒✻▲ ◗❊▼❊ ❑◆▼ ❊❒❁✻✻❊■✳ ❁ ●❑■✳ ✥▼✻✻❒■✳▼ ✻❁✪ ●✻ ▼❑ ▼❊✻ ●❊❖❖■✳ ❒❑❑❍✎ ★◆❒ ✪❊✳ ❍❊ ▲▲ ❊■ ▼✻❒❍▲ ❑❊ ❒❒✻❊❊✻▼❊❑■▲ ◗❁▲ ▼❊ ❁▼ ●❁✻✻ ❑❊ ❁ ✄✑✕✐ ✢●◆✍❒❁▌ ❒●❁▌✻❒✌ ✪ ◆▼ ❊❑■✇▼ ✪✳ ▲◆❒❒❒❊▲✻❊ ❊❊ the $200 Vizio VBR100 ❊▼✻❒ ▼✻▌✇❒✻ ❒✻●✻❁▲✻❊.

Blu-ray device form factor also took a turn for the unexpected: Panasonic showed off the worlds first portable Blu-ray player, the DMP-B15. With a 3-hour battery life, the player it right at the limit of porable usability. Panasonic also had unusual debut with its DMP-BD70V VHS-Blu-ray combination player. VHS? ✶❊✻ ■❑▼❁✪●✻ ❍❊▲▲❊■✳ ❒❒❑❊◆✻▼ ◗❁▲ ❁ U.S.-market Blu-ray recorder, ❁■❊ ◗✻✇❒✻ ▲▼❁❒▼❊■✻ ▼❑ ✪✳ ▲✻✻❒▼❊✻❁ ● ▼❊❁▼ ◗✻✇●● ▲✻✻ ❑■✻ ❊■ ▼❊✻ ❊❊❒▲▼ ❊ ❁●❊ ❑❊ 2009. ☆▼✇▲ ❁●▲❑ ◗❑❒▼❊ ■❑▼❊■✳ Blu-ray built into HDTVs and HTIBs, confirming that Blu-ray is mainstream.

The portable phone market continues to strive for differentiation with manufacturers turning over very rock of sorts to market a mobile phone that stands out. LG Electronics grabbed attention at CES with the unveiling of what it claims is the world's first market-ready touch-screen watch phone--- a phone you wear on your wrist. Not to be outdone, Motorola brought its Aura cell phone. This $1,999 piece of art doesn't have Web-browsing abilities of a smart phone, but its appeal is it's form: Handcrafted from stainless steel and sapphire crystal, the phone flips open like a switchblade. ❊▼▲ ❊■ ▼❊✻ ❊❊❒▲▼ ❊❁●❊ ❑❊ ☆▼✇▲ ❁●▲❑ ◗❑❒▼❊ ■❑▼❊■✳ ❒❑◆■✻ ❊❊▲ ❒●❁▌ ▲✻❒✻✻■ ❊ ❊■ ▼❊✻ ❊❊❒▲ ❑❊ CES 2009.▼✇▲ ❁●▲❑ ◗❑❒▼❊ ■❑▼❊■✳ ❁▲ ▼❊✻ ●❑❑✻ ❑❊ ❁ ✻●❁▲▲❊✻ ◗❁▼✻✻ ❊❁✻ ✻✎ ✡✻✻ According to Motorola marketing Vice President Melissa Gardner, "We're targeting it around people who really value fashion and style." And a $2000 work of art that 'talks'.

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