

Sony shareholders approve Howard Stringer as new CEO

June 22 2005

Sony shareholders Wednesday approved making Welsh-born former television journalist Howard Stringer the iconic Japanese company's first foreign CEO as the electronics giant struggles to preserve an edge.

Stringer, a US citizen who has headed CBS News and spearheaded entertainment at Sony's US unit, becomes the second foreigner to lead a major Japanese company after Brazilian-born Carlos Ghosn revived Nissan Motor from 1999.

"It is our responsibility to bring the reputation you demand," Stringer told shareholders of the company founded in the aftermath of World War II which came to symbolize Japan's rise into an economic power.

Stringer -- known as "Sir Howard" due to a knighthood conferred by Queen Elizabeth II -- called Sony's storied history "a destiny which I cherish."

"It is a great honor," he said.

He takes over the company that created the Walkman at a time that cut-throat price wars sap into its profits and competitors prove increasingly innovative, as seen with Apple and its iPod.

Retiring CEO Nobuyuki Idei was questioned by shareholders on why Sony was unlikely to meet this year the management's medium-term target of a ratio of 10 percent profits to sales.

"It is partly because of drastic changes in the overall economic environment, which we cannot control directly," said Idei, a career Sony employee.

Stringer defended last year's acquisition of Hollywood studio Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which he orchestrated as head of the US unit. The deal raised concerns for the whopping five billion dollars Sony invested with its consortium partners.

Stringer said MGM will boost Sony's profit through distribution fees of movies in the studio's library and would also enrich Sony products such as Blu-ray optical discs and the PlayStation Portable game machine.

The shareholders also approved the appointment of Ryoji Chubachi, a career engineer, as Sony's chief operating officer.

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Citation: Sony shareholders approve Howard Stringer as new CEO (2005, June 22) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2005-06-sony-shareholders-howard-stringer-ceo.html>

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