

Consumer Electronic Show: Day 1

January 5 2006

Day 1 of the sprawling Consumer Electronic Show proved how important convergence and high-definition technology will be in 2006. From the HD-DVD promotion group's launch party to Sony's exhibit of its new HD camcorder, HD is promising to become the buzzword this year.

At the HD-DVD launch event executives from Microsoft, Warner Home Video, Paramount Home Video, Toshiba and HP gathered to unveil the HD-DVD format in a spectacular setting that featured a large flat-panel display, a room-shaking audio system and it's "sizzle reel" featured trailers from upcoming films. The image quality was amazing, but then you would expect that from the type of "pure" HD setup that was on display. In March Toshiba will release the first HD-DVD player in two different models priced at \$499 and \$799. The differences between these two models were not explained at the conference, but they will be on display when the show floor opens later today.

The HD-DVD vs. Blue-Ray DVD battle will be heating up over the next few years, fuelled by Microsoft's announcement that it will release an HD-DVD add-on for its Xbox 360. HP unveiled its new HD-DVD media center PC, which will be available later this spring. Another compelling value proposition with HD-DVD: You will now have the ability to copy your DVDs directly to your computer hard drive or the player's built in HD.

If you thought satellite radio wasn't going to be big, you would be wrong. XM Radio has a huge presence at this year's show where it unveiled what

it hopes will be an iPod killer, a brand-new micro-sized portable XM radio that will be manufactured by Samsung and Pioneer. Both portable devices are about half the size of the iPod and combine the power of being able to receive XM Radio in a true portable format with the ability to play up to 50 hours of stored MP3s. These devices will be tied closely to Napster's music-to-go service. The devices will be on the market in March and will retail for a little over \$300.

Microsoft's Bill Gates closed Day 1 with a nearly two-hour keynote address to a packed crowd that got a little restless towards the end. The key takeaway was the idea of the totally connected world. Gates showcased how he envisioned a uniformed world of devices from cell phones to gaming to PCs to portable media centers all being "transportable."

A real highlight of the show was a 15-minute demo of the new Windows Vista, which will make its debut later this year. The first thing you'll notice about Vista is how "Mac-like" it is. The interface now sports clear windows, so if you open up multiple windows, you will almost always be able to see what's going on underneath. On hand for Gates' keynote was Justin Timberlake and the head of MTV Networks as they unveiled the prototype of the new URGE venture that will make MTV content available through the Windows Media Service. Timberlake announced that URGE will be heavily involved with promoting his upcoming album.

Sony's news conference was all about promoting interconnectivity between its product line and electronic entertainment devices. They unveiled several new devices including a new consumer-level HD camcorder and an electronic e-book reader, where books will be available through the online Sony Connect store. The device will work with Sony's memory stick. Sony Mobile announced a brand-new Sony Ericsson W8101 Walkman phone that can store up to 13,000 songs.

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