

Sony's Hirai to replace Stringer as CEO in April

February 1 2012, By MALCOLM FOSTER , Associated Press



In this Nov. 19, 2009 file photo, Sony Corp. CEO Howard Stringer, left, and Executive Deputy President Kazuo Hirai smile as they show off the company's latest products, e-book "Reader," and a new remote controller for PlayStation 3, respectively, during a press conference in Tokyo. Sony announced on Wednesday Feb. 1, 2012 Kazuo Hirai will replace Howard Stringer as president and chief executive officer effective April 1. (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi, File)

(AP) -- Sony Corp. announced Wednesday that Kazuo Hirai, who leads the company's core consumer products business, will replace Howard Stringer as CEO and president effective April 1, as the electronics and entertainment company desperately tries to engineer a turnaround.

The 51-year-old Hirai, currently executive deputy president, was widely expected to succeed Stringer. The Welsh-born Stringer, one of the few

foreigners to lead a major Japanese company, will retain his post as chairman of the board, Sony said in a statement.

In 2009, Hirai, who has also led the company's gaming business in the past, was named as part of a new management team to lead Sony, and Stringer had recommended to the board that Hirai replace him. Hirai, who is fluent in English, will be Sony's youngest CEO.

Sony has been fighting to regain its image as a global leader in gadgets as consumers have increasingly turned to rival offerings such as the iPod and [iPhone](#) from Apple Inc., making the Walkman brand a has-been. It has also fallen behind in liquid-crystal displays for TVs to South Korean manufacturer [Samsung Electronics](#) Co.

"Kaz is a globally focused executive," Stringer said in a statement. "I believe his tough-mindedness and leadership skills will be of great benefit to the company and its customers in the months and years ahead. I look forward to helping Kaz in every way I can so that succession leads inevitably to success."

The management shuffle came a day before the company was to announce fiscal third-quarter earnings.

Battered by a strong yen and poor sales in its flat-panel TV business, Sony has forecast its fourth straight year of net losses for the fiscal year through March. The [company](#) has gone through massive cost cuts and restructuring and is hoping to recover in flat-panel TV, gaming and personal computer businesses.

"The path we must take is clear: to drive the growth of our core electronics businesses - primarily digital imaging, smart mobile and game; to turn around the television business; and to accelerate the innovation that enables us to create new [business](#) domains," Hirai said in

a statement.

Sony, which makes about 70 percent of its sales outside Japan, has also been hurt by the strong yen, which erodes overseas earnings.

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Citation: Sony's Hirai to replace Stringer as CEO in April (2012, February 1) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-02-sony-hirai-stringer-ceo-april.html>

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