

At Samsung, the brains of TVs matter as much as their size

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For the world's No. 1 TV seller, it's no longer all about bigger screens and thinner panels. Televisions have to be smart too.

In the past, [Samsung Electronics Co.](#) proudly trumpeted the [hardware specifications](#) of its latest televisions during launch events. Now, as smart TVs become more popular and consumers' viewing habits shift, the South Korean electronics giant is turning its attention to improving the Internet-connected-TV experience.

At a launch event in New York on Wednesday, Samsung unveiled its 2013 line of televisions with the help of supermodel Kate Upton, New York Giants quarterback Eli Manning and hip-hop artist Flo Rida.

All told, Samsung will launch 100 new televisions this year; more than half will be smart TV-enabled. Still, in a nod to consumers' continuing desire for bigger TVs, Samsung increased by 50 percent the number of TVs that are 60 inches and wider.

[Company executives](#) touted Samsung's improved smart TV hub, which they say is more streamlined and less clunky. Viewers will be able to use [voice recognition](#) to turn their TV sets on, and can tell the TV to, for example, "find me a movie with Will Smith" or "find me a comedy at 8 p.m."

Over time, the smart TV will learn a user's viewing habits and will be able to make personalized recommendations, said Joe Stinziano,

[Samsung Electronics](#) America's executive vice president. It's also easier to move among the smart hub's five panels - which include applications, social sharing, TV shows and movies - and share content with other devices.

"We're working harder than ever to push technology to the edge and, more importantly, to give people what they want. And what they really want is simplicity," Stinziano told the crowd in New York.

Although smart TVs have flooded the market in recent years, reviews have been mixed. Many consumers, used to simple interfaces on their tablets and smartphones, have complained that smart TV platforms are confusing and not user-friendly.

"I think some of that criticism was fair, and as with all technology, it improves very quickly, and we've gotten to the point where we're ready to stand up and brag about the experience itself, not just the apps we have," Stinziano said in an interview with the Los Angeles Times.

Samsung also promoted its Evolution Kit, which the company says solves consumer's conundrum with when to buy a new TV. With the rapid pace of innovation and a slew of new TVs hitting store shelves every year, Stinziano noted that consumers often are upset when they realize their TVs have quickly become outdated.

The Evolution Kit, which goes on sale in May for \$299, plugs into the back of last year's Samsung [smart TV](#) models and instantly upgrades them with the company's latest features.

"The TV you buy today will evolve into the TV of tomorrow," Stinziano said. "No other manufacturer can offer this."

And finally, Samsung showed off its 85-inch ultra-high-definition luxury

television, which it unveiled at the International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in January. The TV will be available for pre-orders on Samsung's website by the end of the month for \$40,000.

"This is clearly a statement piece," Stinziano told The Times. "And clearly, we understand this is not going to be for everyone. But our first entry into ultra-high-definition should be something that was just unbelievable and timeless."

Although Samsung is the top seller of televisions, the industry as a whole continues to see soft sales.

Last week, NPD DisplaySearch said television makers are changing their game plans to adapt to slowing demand for LCD TVs, including developing strategic alliances and expanding product lineups to include a wider selection of panel sizes.

The quarterly report said panel makers were trying to avoid an oversupply of LCD TV panels. By moving to larger screen sizes, they're hoping to decrease total unit shipments without hurting revenue.

"Consumers are focused on TV prices, while brands have been focused on TV features. This disconnect has resulted in reduced demand and profits for TV supply chain participants in 2012," said Deborah Yang, NPD DisplaySearch's research director.

The market research firm is forecasting 4 percent year-over-year growth in LCD TV panel shipments this year. It said Samsung and LG Electronics Inc., along with Chinese television makers, are expected to have "aggressive" TV shipment plans.

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