

A report about branding trends at the  
2012 Consumer Electronics Show.

# Branding at CES 2012

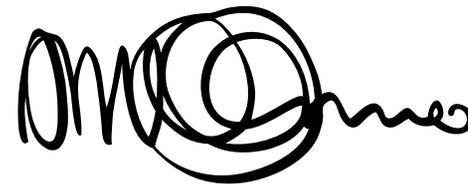
## The Consumer Electronics Show: January 10-13, 2012

Every year we attend the world's biggest consumer technology show to see how large and small consumer electronics brands are presenting their latest products, and how they are positioning themselves. And every year we publish a report on what we observed.

For those who may not have seen this document in the past, please note that this report is not about the latest gadgets introduced at the show, instead it is a collection of photographs and observations about what caught our attention while walking the crowded halls and visiting booths.

Please note that the narrative that accompanies some of the images is intended to express our personal opinion, and it is not intended to promote or offend any of the brands included in this document.

We'd love to hear what you think, so please send any feedback directly to me.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alfredo Muccino". The signature is stylized with large, overlapping loops and a long, sweeping tail.

**Alfredo Muccino**

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## A few facts and observations.

Attendance was the highest in CES' 44-year history and about 20,000 new products were launched—including the latest in Ultrabooks, OLED TVs, and 3D printers. So much for CES losing relevance!

After Microsoft announced that this was going to be the last year that the software giant would exhibit at CES, much of the press predicted lower attendance, suggesting that the trade show was losing relevance. Instead, this year more people than ever attended the event. The show floor was definitely alive with sound, vibrant exhibits and thousands of screens in every size imaginable – flat screens, touch screens, smart screens, 3D screens. As with years past, the show attracted dignitaries from around the world, including Senator Ron Wyden

from Oregon (who happened to be on our flight down from Portland). And of course, an array of dazzling celebrities took stage including the Justins (Timberlake and Bieber), Ludacris, 50 Cent, Wil.i.am, LL Cool J, Will Smith and Kelly Clarkson to name a few. But at the end, the show is really about the latest and greatest in technology. And tech there was: computers, phones, TVs, appliances, and everything from cars to remote controlled “Sphero” balls... there was something for everyone.

As we walked the show trying not to be too distracted by the latest gadgets, we noticed a few interesting booths trying to attract audiences through interesting design and engaging branding initiatives. The photos and observations featured in this report capture what stood out to us most.

# Picture gallery

## **Brands included in this report.**

The variety of tech brands, both small and large, featured in the report have been selected based purely on what caught our attention. Following is a list of brands included:

**Intel**

**Microsoft**

**Motorola**

**ESPN**

**LG**

**Griffin**

**Casemate**

**Uniq**

**Ozaki**

**Marley**

**Zipbuds**

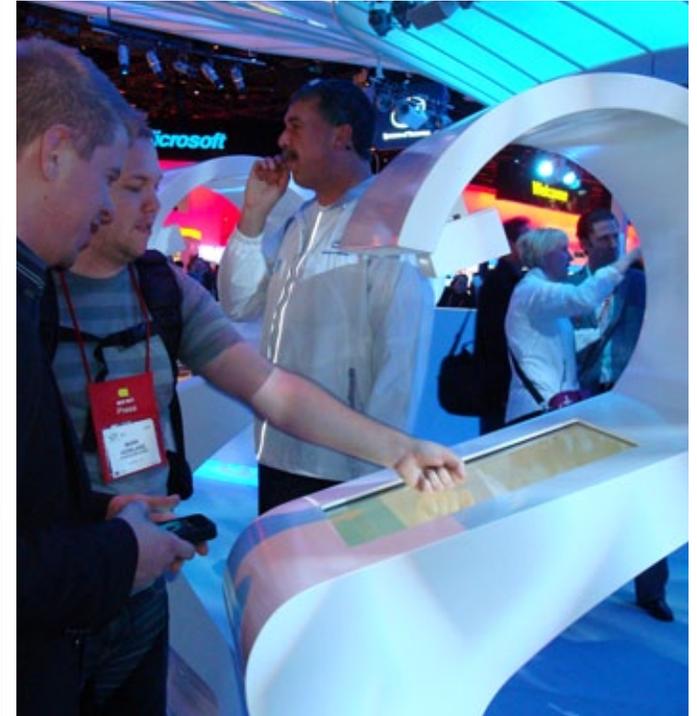
**Skullcandy**

**Pioneer**

**Dolby**

**Moneual**

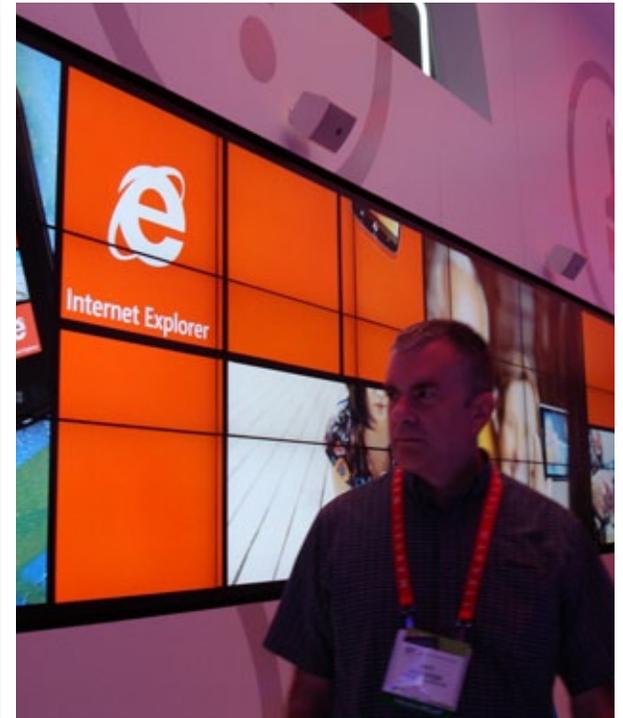
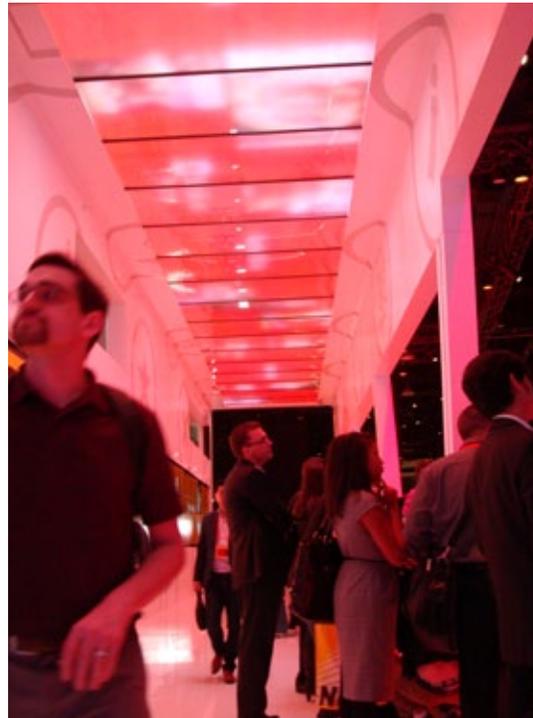
**Samsung**



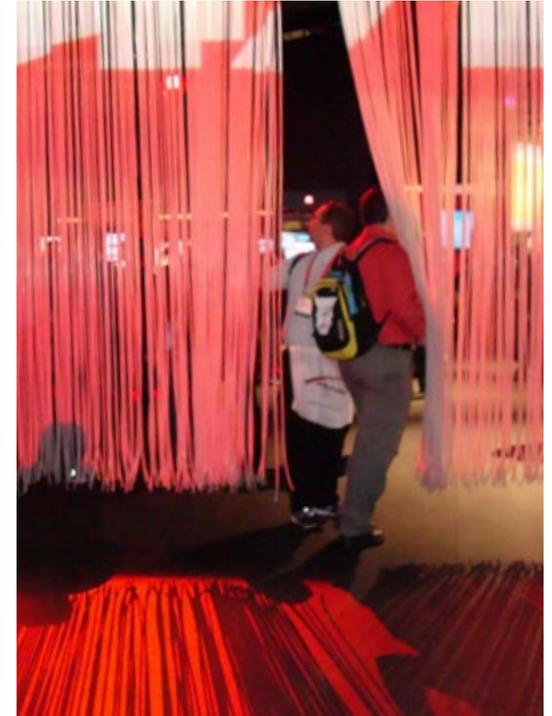
**Intel.** Intel's booth was one of the more spectacular ones at the show. With a live ceiling, augmented reality packaging demos, and a focus on the hottest new form factor—the ultrabook—Intel was worth a longer stay. The Intel Connected Life experience (what I call the “live ceiling”) was very intriguing. The 168-foot-wide interactive 3D virtual life simulation spanned the entirety of Intel's booth. Attendees could use any of six stations around the perimeter of the booth to create a shape using their hands, phone, keys, etc. The silhouette of that object would be used to generate a unique “bioluminescent life form” on the massive projection surface above. These animated life-forms interacted with each other, creating a captivating and beautiful scene that leveraged Intel's dynamic brand. What made the display even more engaging was its organic curvature and form, all created by screens that illuminated the whole booth with Intel's blue hue.



**Intel.** Another interesting display at the Intel booth was the circular sculpture built to house Ultrabooks, the slim mobile computers that were one of the hottest trends at CES. The inside of the coil shaped display featured an illuminated circuitry pattern, and the ultrabooks were placed on little shelves so they looked suspended, emphasizing their thin and light form factor (often under 3 pounds and only a few millimeters thick). Intel's booth also featured many "experience pods", where each technology was clearly branded, allowing attendees to interact with it with ease. On a far back wall, a pod showcased an enhanced retail experience where Lego and Intel partnered to deliver a cool use of augmented reality. By holding an unopened Lego box in front of the kiosk, a 3D model of the built product appears on the screen, allowing customers to experience the product before assembling it – a clever way of using augmented reality to engage shoppers during the purchase process.



**Microsoft.** Microsoft's booth was as large and crowded as ever, featuring a huge array of Windows Phone devices, demo stations for Xbox 360 and SkyDrive, plenty of PCs and lots more. The various product areas were tied together with an ever-changing light display, featuring Microsoft's brand colors, which gave the booth an 80's retro feel. Large flat screens were placed on every wall, and in this case, even a ceiling. The screens ran video loops, combining lifestyle photos featuring products with close-ups of the various UIs. Overall, the booth was elegant and featured a nicely organized floorplan, however we must admit that the experience was a bit disappointing since we knew that it was the last year Microsoft would be attending the show.



**Motorola.** Motorola, as in years past, had a very impressive and well-branded booth and was one of the most unique at this year's show. The booth's perimeter was defined by an arc shaped curtain wall made with plastic tubes hanging from a suspended rod. Motorola's various products were showcased inside the wall, which could be entered at any point across its length, but just pushing a few of the hanging tubes aside. The curtain wall also doubled as a giant kinetic projection screen that featured larger than life video imagery as well as text, inviting attendees to experience Motorola's latest technologies.



**Motorola.** In addition to the extravagant visual display, Motorola invited show attendees to work up a sweat with MOTOACTV. People could hop on a bike or treadmill and stretch their legs after a busy day of meetings while trying Motorola's newest product which allows them to track their distance, steps and calories.



**ESPN.** ESPN's booth literally packed a punch! To promote ESPN 3D, the entertainment brand presented daily live boxing in a ring right on the show floor. The matches were open to the public and attracted some of the largest crowds at CES. The exhibition matches included professional boxers and the traditional ring babes, and the whole event was taped and shown live on large TV screens around the booth. Way to go, ESPN!!!



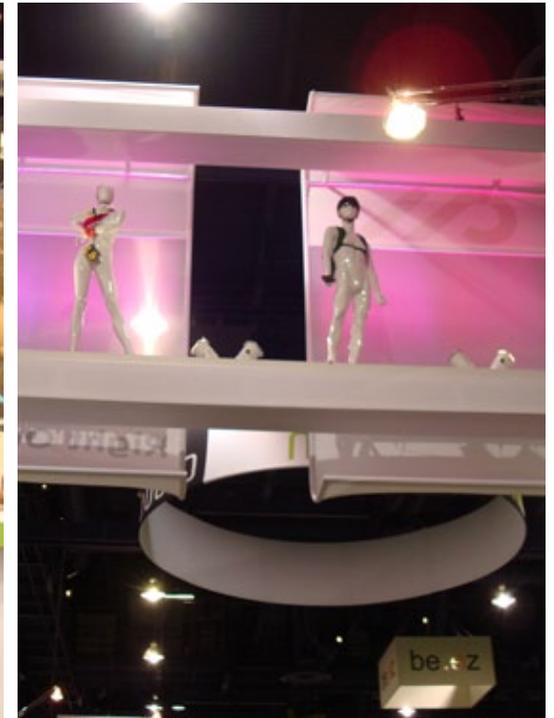
**LG.** LG TV was awarded 'Best HDTV' and 'Best of Show' at CES. With over 18,000 square feet of exhibition space showcasing 500 products in total, LG was one of the most impressive booths at CES. Glasses were handed out before one entered the very first LG spectacle with close to 30 feet of screens playing stunning and dynamic 3D footage. The sheer size of the experience was mesmerizing, luring conference attendees who were fixated for 15 minutes at a time (which is eons for booth goers). Screens placed throughout the rest of the booth told each product's story, making information easy to digest.



**LG.** One of our favorite displays at the LG booth was the smart surface window, where LG leveraged their own technology to create immersive experiences with multiple screens and beautiful video layered over the products themselves. The smart display was made of varying layers of glass, with products sitting on shelves behind the panes (like something you might see in a really, really cool retail window) and the glass itself came alive, showing full video overlaid on the products. This use of smart surface technology, if done right, could bring a whole new level of information to retail displays.



**Griffin.** Some of the more creative booths were those showcasing tech accessories. Griffin, a maker of phone and tablet accessories, designed their booth to look like the kind of store front one may find in any busy metropolitan center. Using corrugated metal, and reclaimed wood for a facade combined with glass window displays lit by street lighting showcasing their new line of accessories. The booth felt very much like a hip boutique which we think is smart for a brand that ultimately ends up being sold in stores that would hope to look as good as this one.



**Casemate.** Casemate was another example of a brand that decided their booth should look like a nicely designed store. Mannequins were suspended above the booth along the perimeter of the display wearing nothing but a Casemate accessory and a prop that showcased an activity, like a bike helmet or a the kind of hat one might wear poolside. On the ground they were dressed in clothing that complimented the accessories they were helping promote. Although this approach is not new, it was well executed.



**Uniq.** This US-based company was started by a few individuals that had enough of boring accessories, they designed their own line of fashion inspired accessories. Inspired by the tagline “Dress your gadget”, the small, modest booth was quite simple, with clean white walls showcasing clothes hangers on which the products were hung. The design solution was clever and low budget compared to some of the booths that spent millions on their displays - yet it got our attention, so kudos to Uniq for having the courage to keep it simple, proving that “clever” can definitely trump “big budget”.



**Marley.** The Marley booth was an authentic portrayal of the brand— a little bit of Jamaica was brought to life in Las Vegas. With walls covered in photography expressing the brand identity, wood poles and well crafted audio displays, the booth represented the visual language and materials one associated with the Marley brand. Keeping the theme going, all the booth representatives were dressed in Jamaican colors and wore the quintessential Marley dreads, while a DJ jammed on Marley beats. The scene was mellow. One wanted to pull up a chair, put on some Marley head gear, sit back and chill.



**Zipbuds.** Zipbuds had an eye catching display with a center sculpture 15-feet high allowing their big “Z” logo to stand tall above most other displays. The display also clearly communicated the product so attendees got the point without even having to stop at the booth. Of course a beautiful blond “booth babe” helped draw in the crowd as well.



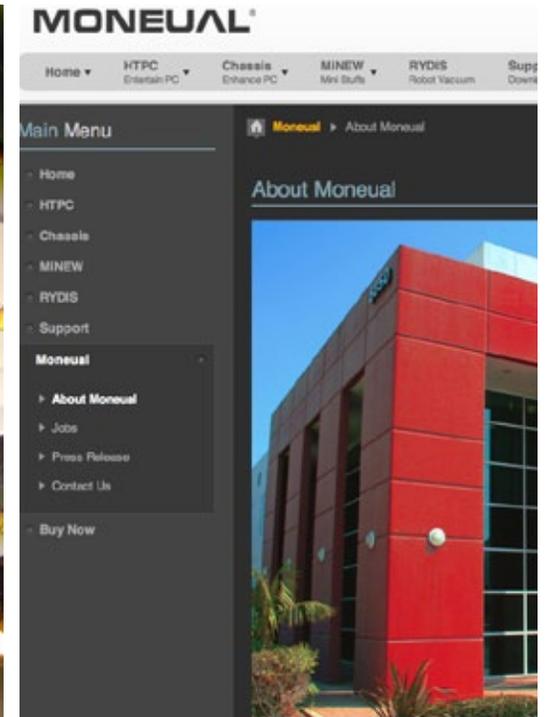
**Skullcandy.** In past years Skullcandy has always been a stopping point for us. This year the booth's design was a bit more minimal than in years past but still portrayed the Skullcandy attitude along with large clean branding of their logo. While the booth was visually more minimal than in previous years, the elevated DJ station pumping loud energetic beats was not to be ignored.



**Pioneer.** Pioneer was one of many exhibitors promising to bring apps to your in-vehicle dashboard. With multiple demo experiences and a futuristic eye-catching display, Pioneer's booth felt as if one had stepped into a sci-fi spaceship. Of course no booth related to automotive would be complete without a sleek, sexy car center stage.



**Dolby.** Dolby's display was not one to sneeze at. From a branding standpoint the elegant large format printouts emphasized audio as a lifestyle. Continuously changing lights made the booth feel like a high-end Vegas nigh club. Additionally, life-size smart phones were placed at the entrances hinting at Dolby technologies found in mobile devices. To enhance the elite booth experience, LL Cool J was also present, promoting Boomdizzle, a record label and social networking website he founded while also exposing the benefits of virtual recording. The space felt hip, modern and sleek, elevating the Dolby brand as a whole as they promoted high-quality sound across multiple platforms.



**Moneual.** This was an interesting one, both in terms of the booth itself and the brand - and we must admit we were not aware of it until the show. Founded in 2005, Moneual is a leading home entertainment provider headquartered in California. Because we were not familiar with the brand, we did a little online research and found that there was a big disconnect between the booth and the website. This brings up the importance of making sure that a brand is treated consistently across as many touchpoints as possible, so that the consumer experience with the brand is strengthened at every interaction.



**Samsung.** As always, Samsung's presence at the show was quite impressive. The Samsung booth was an immense space filled with what seemed like thousands of screens. Yet, it lacked some of the drama that made the Samsung booth one of the most talked-about destinations of the show in the past. That said, it was still amazing in many ways. The booth featured a wide variety of products ranging from washing machines with built-in smart technology to smart TV's. Samsung's brand message was all about "Smart" technology. The "M in smart" was leveraged throughout the booth with the word branded everywhere becoming synonymous with the brand name. They have also leveraged the use of the M online for interactive games and more. Overall a great example of a holistic branding campaign.



**Samsung.** Besides its strong brand messaging, Samsung created unique multi-dimensional structures throughout the booth using flat panel screens that played synched-up content. The result was stunning and reminded us of the work of Bill Viola, the pioneering video artist whose work is featured in the most prestigious museums across the world.

**Trends**



**When will 3D really take off?** As in years past, 3D was everywhere. Almost every booth had a little sampling of it, from gaming, to wrestling to printing, 3D was definitely one of the buzz words at CES. Lots of people were wearing funny-looking 3D glasses and had their foreheads glued to 3D demos. As of yet, 3D has not really taken off at retail. Some critics say that the experience is not as good as people expect it to be, and others blame the lack of 3D content. Yet, with all of the focus that this technology got at this show, we would not be surprised if in the near future you will be wearing 3D glasses next time you watch TV or play a game on your PS3.



**Go ahead. Touch it.** Another trend we noticed was touch technology. From displays to the products featured within them, every booth had devices and installations that leveraged “smart” touch surfaces tables, walls, vacuum cleaners, windows, washing machines TV’s and more. Touch technology was everywhere you looked. Something fairly novel just a few years ago, touch technology has now become an integral part of how brands connect with their audiences and how they enable more interesting experiences for consumers. Just think about how the iPhone has revolutionized the way that we interact with phones, and we imagine we’ll be doing that with your TV, your car, fridge, etc. Someone is going to make a lot of money from marketing screen-wipes!



**Is the world really getting smarter?** According to the exhibitors at CES the world is going to be smarter. Smart Technology. Smart TV's. Smart Lighting. Smart Environments. Smart 3D. And of course a ton of tag lines, logos and branding that were all about "smart". It was "smart" overload. An estimated 80% of booths at CES had a slogan, tagline, headline or sentence that promoted "smart" technology and products. At what point does the meaning of the word become drowned out by its overuse? And if everything else is becoming smarter, does that mean we are becoming dumber?

# About Liquid Agency

## An overview of Liquid Agency.

Our mission is to transform companies into amazing brands through Silicon Valley Thinking. What this means is that we're not satisfied with just making our clients look better – we want them to be better. After all, who does not want to be amazing?

Over the years we've crafted branding programs with some of the most innovative people in Silicon Valley. In the process we have learned what it takes to build the kind of brands that attract the best talent, make amazing products, and turn a good profit while making a positive difference in the world.

We've had the distinct pleasure of working with well-known brands, like Adidas, Anheuser-Busch, Cisco, HP, Hitachi, Jeep, Intel, Microsoft, Sony, T-Mobile and Visa. And, we have also worked with lots of lesser known brands, including Amyris, Meebo, Olive, Plastic Jungle, and others.

Our work has received numerous regional, national and international awards, including multiple ADDYs, ROSEY's, REBRAND Awards, RedDot Awards, and awards from other respected institutions.

Most importantly, we take great pride in doing work that gets results for our clients. Whether we are developing a new brand identity or an integrated product launch campaign, we enjoy working with people who aspire to do work that is innovative, memorable, fun and effective.

Our headquarters are in Silicon Valley (CA), and we also have offices in Portland (OR), New York (NY), Nottingham (UK) and Santiago (Chile), allowing us to provide services to clients with a global footprint.

If you'd like to learn more about us, please visit:  
[www.liquidagency.com](http://www.liquidagency.com)

### Our services include:

- **Brand strategy**
- **Brand identity**
- **Environmental branding**
- **Retail branding**
- **Internal branding**
- **Digital branding**

## We'd love to hear from you.

If you're interested in learning more about Liquid and how we could help you gain a competitive advantage, please feel free to contact:

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