



A report about branding trends at the
2010 Consumer Electronics Show.

Branding at CES 2010



The Consumer Electronics Show: January 7-10, 2010

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".

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A few facts and observations.

The first CES was held in 1967 and, four decades later, it is still going strong. More than 120,000 attendees, including 5,000 media, analysts and bloggers, convened in Las Vegas to attend CES 2010, making it the largest global platform for the introduction of new consumer technology products.

That's more people than last year, but still a lot less than a few years ago. Yet, most folks we spoke with agreed that although there were less people than in the past, the quality of the attendees was excellent – and many of them said that the show was a success.

Approximately 20,000 new products were introduced during CES – with 3D solutions, tablets, eReaders, apps, and smartphones capturing most of the buzz. This year, the mood was definitely more optimistic than the previous year, as companies are starting to see some positive signs of recovery.

That said, we noticed the conspicuous absence of a few exhibitors that have made a big impact on the show floor in the past – like HP and Logitech, who completely eliminated their booths.



Picture Gallery



Brands included in this report.

The companies that have been included in this report represent only a small fraction of the companies that exhibited at CES 2010. We've included small as well as very large companies based solely on what caught our attention. Following is a list of the brands that have been featured:

Built	Motorola	Lenovo
Miniwiz	Kodak	Nokia
Simplism	Marvell	LG
American Express Open	Microsoft	Sony
Skullcandy	Intel	Samsung



Wow. It looked empty. I usually get to CES a day earlier than when I arrived this year. Much to my surprise, I was greeted by an airport empty of people with very little fanfare about CES. The pillars at baggage claim, which have been used to promote tech brands during CES in the past were left mostly blank this year. And the taxi line was non-existent. Quite frankly, I was a little worried.



Built. We ran into this small company at CES for the first time last year. They had a nice little booth made with recycled materials. This year they had expanded their presence and created a quasi-retail environment that allowed them to showcase their colorful and well made products. The company does not have its own stores, but given what we saw, we believe that they should explore opening one. Nicely built. :)



Miniwiz. This Taiwanese company specializes in renewable green power technology and sustainable rechargeable systems for handheld digital devices. We liked that it lived its mission by building a booth using one of its own new products. This unique structure was built using recycled polymer architectural bricks that basically look like plastic water bottles, and are in fact made from recycled PET.



Simplism. This small booth lived up to the company's name and kept things very simple. Oversized lighting hovered over a couple of display tables topped with lots of small products. The lighting illuminated the products while also serving as signage. A low cost, yet effective solution that was easy to spot from across the show floor. We're big fans of "simple", so would like to congratulate Simplism – who seemed to be having a very busy show.



American Express OPEN. In our opinion, bigger is not necessarily better. We noticed that American Express had two booth at the show, a small one and a larger version. Although the larger exhibit was able to accommodate more people and included larger signage opportunities, it did not create as welcoming an experience as the more intimate version. Perhaps, since OPEN is a program for “small” businesses, they should stick with “small” booths.



Skullcandy. The design of this booth had as much attitude as Skullcandy's brand. The back side of the booth featured a black wall with a large Skullcandy logo...which was not all that exciting. But on the inside, the walls were covered in colorful artwork inspired by tattoos and the street art culture that is representative of the brand's audience. The booth was definitely a clear departure from most of the slick design that is typical of CES.



Skullcandy. At CES, Skullcandy introduced 2XL, a youth-centric brand that, according to a Skullcandy spokeswoman, is geared toward “the mainstream market and middle America”. To promote this “middle America” theme, Skullcandy had an elaborate slot-car race track set up for CES attendees to use...and in another part of the booth, they had a car where you could sit and enjoy the music. The only thing we didn’t see where the products. We guess that actually showing products would make the brand less cool. Go figure!



Motorola. Motorola was awarded the 2010 CNET Best of CES award for its BACKFLIP Android-powered phone. And, their booth experience was not shabby either. The spacious exhibit featured a park-like setting complete with trees, and a large stage with a massive screen that featured beautiful product demos while entertainers lured crowds of attendees to the booth.



Motorola. As always, the Motorola booth does a great job of making sure you know you're in their booth, while also providing an interesting visual experience and plenty of opportunities to demo their new products. The booth included a series of video walls, as well as large lit logos and oversized photography that created a dynamic and interesting environment.



Motorola. The booth's exterior walls faced on of the main corridors in the Central Hall. In order to further the reach for impact, Motorola created a multi wall video installation featuring the interface of their new products. This was a smart use of space, and a great way to enable passers-by to see how their new phones work. To take a look at the video, [click here](#).



Kodak. The centerpiece of the 100x110 foot Kodak exhibit Kodak was a giant funnel-shaped touch screen that started on the back wall of the exhibit and transformed itself into a lengthy interactive table top. During most of the day, dozens of attendees gathered on either side of the long display, accessing information about new Kodak products. Definitely one of the highlights of the show in terms of getting people's attention in a very effective way.



Marvell. We don't remember seeing the Marvell booth at CES in 2009. However in 2010, Marvell – a world leader in storage, communications, and consumer silicon solutions that bills itself as “The Next Generation Semiconductor Company” – could not be missed. Although not the most innovative exhibit at the show, it was still impressive because of its large footprint and the number of demo stations that lined the entire length of the exhibit.



Marvell. It looked to us that whomever designed the canopy graphics for this side of the booth did not get a chance to see what was being done with the front – as the style is completely different. We actually liked the humanistic photography and the tagline “Uniting the Human Experience”...although we’re not 100% sure what it means. However, it seems to compete with the message on the front of the booth....“Delivering the Always On Lifestyle”.



Marvell. The booth was organized by functionality, with colorful demo stations that invited attendees to “play”, “connect”, “share”, “manage”, etc. It seems that Marvell is trying to position itself as a bigger and more meaningful brand within the technology industry. If they want to accomplish this goal they will need to leverage design in a more sophisticated manner, create more interesting and engaging experiences, and clarify the key messages that people should associate with the brand.



Microsoft. People that attend CES on a regular basis have seen the gradual transformation of the Microsoft exhibit. A few years ago the brand was nothing more than a series of independent displays under one roof. Today the exhibit is an extremely sophisticated and organized showcase of the multitude of disciplines in which this company seems to dominate – from operating systems to gaming to music and television. However, in 2010 – not much changed from the previous year at least in terms of the booth space.



Microsoft. Microsoft refurbished the previous year's exhibit and added a few new graphics and updated a few components, but otherwise kept the booth pretty much the same. One thing that changed for sure was the fact that now it's all about Windows 7. In 2009 the much hyped Vista operating system was the darling of the booth. This year, we did not see any mention of Vista, but plenty of focus on Windows 7 instead.



Microsoft. At the center of the booth, Microsoft built an elaborate circular room with beautifully lit displays emanating a pale blue light. The environment was certainly very cool and interesting, however, the interaction opportunities that it offered were quite disappointing. Essentially, when visitors pushed a button, some of the lit panels screens would play video content...however, the content was nothing more than more overlapping blue shapes....leaving visitors wondering what this was all about. [Click here](#) to see a short video.



Intel. As usual, the Intel booth was impressive and very popular. Located directly across from Microsoft, almost to underscore the relationship between the two companies, the Intel booth also emanates a blue glowing light. This year even the world's largest semiconductor company cut back on expenses and refurbished the same exhibit property it had used in years' past. However, Intel included quite a few opportunities to engage attendees and reward them for stopping by.



Intel. Probably one of the most talked about exhibit components of the entire show was an interactive display at the corner of the Intel booth, known as the “Intel Cube”. This 7x7 touch screen display featured 576 live links of information – pulling from 20,000 different content sources and over 20 live feeds from global news providers and networks like Flickr, Twitter, YouTube and intel.com. Take a look at this video clip: [Click here.](#)



Intel. The Intel booth seems always packed with visitors. If they were not playing with the Intel cube, they were engaged thanks to a series of theater presentations, a myriad of demos, and museum-like displays featuring the latest trends. For example, last year netbooks occupied one entire wall....this year they were replaced by "NextGen Handhelds". In order to further "brand" the space, Intel used blue vinyl on the exit doors nearest its booth space, which echoed the blue lighting emanating from the exhibit itself.



Lenovo. In real estate, location is everything. And at CES, exhibit spaces on the convention room floor cost a fortune. Apparently, in order to break away from the rest of the exhibitors, and save some money while trying to stand out, Lenovo decided to take over a restaurant strategically located in the hallways of the Venetian Casino where it could attract the attention of the many show attendees who would have to pass by on their way to the exhibits in the Venetian Towers. We don't know how effective this was, but it was an interesting approach.



Lenovo. The Lenovo exhibit looked more like a retail window display than an actual booth. The new laptops were mounted on pedestals. The tops rotated slowly, enabling passers-by to see the products from all angles and therefore notice how thin they are. We think that this exhibit could have been a great deal more effective if Lenovo would have used digital signage to tell its story, as opposed to relying on static backwalls.



Nokia. Given the directional signage and the reference to maps, “Connecting People” seemed to suggest that Nokia is entering the GPS marketplace. Instead, Nokia – who had no big announcements at CES – was trying to create attention for Nokia’s Ovi services, which includes maps, music, email, games, photos, etc. available to folks who use Nokia phones. Unfortunately, the booth’s chaotic design did little to create attention for the brand or to help support its position as a mobile phone leader....perhaps they needed an Ovi Map for the booth.



LG. Life's good at LG. The company introduced a vast array of new products at the show – from 3D to wireless TVs; a concept called Network Monitors; new phones; and a teleconferencing solution in partnership with Skype. And all of this in a booth that was extremely well executed while being cheerful and sophisticated – as you might expect from a company whose mission is “to create a happier, better life”.



Sony. As a whole, we would not say that the Sony booth is beautiful or particularly engaging from a design perspective. That said, it is most certainly impressive, and it definitely has lots of noteworthy aspects. This year, Sony unveiled a new theme: “Make.Believe”. This theme was weaved throughout the exhibit and in banners, videos, column-wraps, and other marketing vehicles throughout the Las Vegas Convention Center.



Sony. According to Sir Howard Stringer, Sony's CEO, "3D will sweep the world. There should be no reason why we shouldn't be enormously successful". And that's probably why Sony built what it called "3D World" within its booth, showcasing a variety of devices that will work together and take advantage of 3D – from the PS3 gaming platform to Bravia TVs and even 3D Blu-Ray disc players. Of course, 3D was one of the main themes at CES...so Sony does have its share of competition.



Sony. The booth featured its fair share of TVs, displayed in impressively tall towers that were internally lit. In a bid to dominate the 3D marketplace, the electronics giant introduced three series of Bravia 3D sets (all with LED backlighting), with the top line, the Bravia XBR-LX900, including a built-in 3D transmitter and a pair of active-shutter 3D glasses.



Sony. One of the most dramatic sections of the sprawling Sony booth was the lounge area, featuring comfortable seating and a dramatic theater setting used for presentations. During breaks, people sat and watched the “make.believe” video loop and rested their weary feet before venturing out for more of the kind of visual overload that is only available at CES.



Sony. Given the recent popularity of the PlayStation 3 and the PlayStation Portable, the entire PlayStation platform was well represented at the Sony booth. Here, a gamer is seen enjoying a game played on a PS3 using the PS Network while viewing the action on a Bravia TV. A PSP is standing by, in case another gamer wanted to join in the fun.



Samsung. The Samsung exhibit was nothing short of superb. The scale of it alone was absolutely gigantic, but that was only the start. Every inch of the booth was extremely well thought-out, and it was meticulously executed, leaving visitors thoroughly amazed and entertained. In our opinion, the section featuring 3D TVs by the booth's main entrance could have easily been an installation at any of the top contemporary art museums in the world. Take a look at this video: [Click here](#).



Samsung. The front of the 3D TV display was simply amazing, but even the back was exquisite. The sinewy columns reminded of us of organic shapes, like white leaves of grass or peapods, containing incredibly vibrant seeds of technology that flickered constantly in a riot of color, motion and sound – attracting hundreds of people all of whom would immediately take out their cameras to try and capture the beauty of the moment.



Samsung. As one wandered in the booth, Samsung did a great job of presenting a myriad of products in a manner that was inviting, clean, organized, and easy to digest. Where the 3D display was a sumptuous feast for the senses, the rest of the booth was an elegant respite from the cacophony of CES. The blue and white color helped create a seamless branded experience.



Samsung. The Samsung Omnia display used angular forms and introduced black as an accent color. This display served to provide a bit of contrast to the rest of the booth, yet the turning ribbon shapes worked harmoniously with the rest of the geometry in the exhibit. And Samsung did a great job of exercising restraint in terms of signage, avoiding the visual clutter that product and marketing managers think is necessary to “communicate all the features and benefits” of their babies.



Samsung. When Samsung felt that more information would be helpful it used large and inviting touch screens to enable visitors to have access to as much detail as they wanted. It's no wonder that Samsung has grown from a small export business to become one of the world's leading electronics companies. Samsung pays attention to the details, they have a healthy respect for innovation, and they execute beautifully.



Trends



Some of the stuff we noticed.

As we walked the show, observed what drew attendees into booths, and talked with people about what caught their attention, a few trends started to emerge. Here's a sampling:

The future will be in 3D. As we walked the show we could not help but notice that the show floor was filled with people wearing 3D glasses and 3D TV displays. If CES 2010 is any indication, it looks like 3D is going to be the way of the future.

The iPhone effect. The booths that got most attention used interactivity – with lots of touch

screens – as a way to lure attendees and keep them engaged in more interesting and more interactive ways.

Do you DJ? From what we saw, you probably will. We were amazed at how many exhibits featured DJ booths and introduced DJ equipment for everyday consumers. We expect you will be spinning at the next party!

Taglines are simple. Actually, that has definitely not been our experience. Everytime we work on a tagline, it becomes a highly debated topic. From what we saw the trend is to make sure that ideas like “simple”, “life” and “innovation” must be included. That simplifies life quite a bit... right? However, the results may not be that innovative.



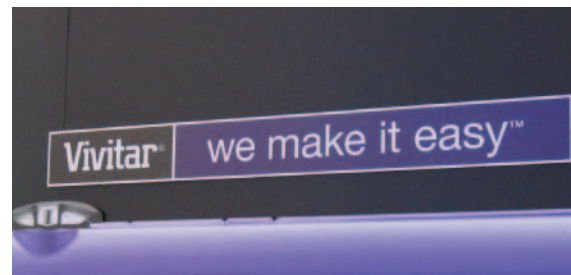
Can you see in 3D? By what we observed at CES, the future belongs to 3D. At least that's what Samsung, Sony, Panasonic, Nvidia, Microsoft, and a host of smaller brands are betting. Soon you will be watching TV and playing games while wearing 3D glasses. And, from what we saw, they still look pretty silly.



Touch me now. As evidenced by the crowds around the Intel Cube, the touch screen table at the Kodak booth, and the Surface tables at the Microsoft booth, visitors expect to be able to interact with the exhibits and touch screen technology makes for more interactive experiences – while also enabling access to more information.



Where's your DJ? If your booth did not have a DJ, you just missed one of the biggest trends at CES. Apparently next time you go to your friend's house he will not only be barbequeing, but he will be spinning tracks as well. We were simply blown away by the number of DJs and DJ equipment at this year's show.



Taglines make it simple. Walking through the booths at CES, gives us an opportunity to see how brands express what's important to them through their taglines. These few words attached to the logo are usually the result of much debate and discussion at the highest level within the corporate structure. What seems to be important to communicate at CES 2010 was: Innovation. Life. Simplicity.



Liquid Agency

We're a leading brand marketing firm with offices in Silicon Valley and in Portland, Oregon.

Liquid has worked with some of the world's best known technology brands including Cisco, HP, Logitech, Microsoft, Sony and Seagate, as well as many other smaller brands in a wide variety of tech sectors.

We offer a comprehensive set of services that include strategy, design, and implementation of integrated branding programs. Liquid's services are designed to build brand awareness, differentiation, and preference – ultimately helping our clients outmaneuver their competition.

Our services include brand strategy, brand identity, advertising, packaging, retail merchandising, Web and interactive services. We also deliver design for tradeshow and events, and for retail and corporate environments like lobbies, executive briefing centers and corporate museums.

We take pride in doing work that gets results for our clients, and like to work with people who aspire to do work that is memorable, effective and fun. If you'd like to learn more about us, please visit:

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We'd love to hear from you.

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