

How TV makers are selling the idea of 3-D at home

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The consumer electronics world thrives on the latest new thing. And this year that would be 3-D. It was once considered a quirky technology gone nowhere, but, because of the popularity of "Avatar," television makers now are racing to bring multidimensional viewing to the living room.

Samsung Electronics is introducing 15 3-D television models with a live-action three-dimensional commercial created by the same technical production company that made "Avatar," James Cameron's popular film.

And just like the 1950s when the technology was popular in the country's theaters, special spectacles — which look nothing like the paper versions but come at an additional price — are required for the full visual experience.

But for all the razzle-dazzle, Samsung knows that, with hefty price tags, consumers need to feel they are not buying into a one-off phenomenon. So the company has worked with DreamWorks Animation and the pop band Black Eyed Peas, and is talking to Hollywood studios and other companies about creating and providing 3-D content for home viewing.

TV manufacturers are betting on 3-D. There are forecasts that consumers will buy 3.5 million to 4 million such sets, or about 10 percent of all United States television sales, this year. But that may be optimistic. Different and incompatible technologies mean that one maker's glasses, for example, cannot be used on another's television model.

"The glasses go for a premium — around \$150 — which means it's costly, for example, to have a few people over for a Super Bowl party, unless it's 'bring your own compatible spectacles,'" said Ross Rubin, an analyst for NPD Group, a market research firm.

Tim Baxter, president of Samsung Electronics America, said that electronics companies were working to come up with a single standard, but he conceded that it would not happen immediately. Even so, he said that Samsung executives believed that 3-D technology was ushering in an era where "there will be less passive sitting back and watching television, and a more immersive, interactive experience."

He said that the high-definition TVs, which can be switched from 2-D to 3-D with the push of a button, built on Samsung's previous experience with such technology. Its research found that more than 90 percent of United States consumers were aware of the technology, but fewer than a third had experienced it.

"We've already sold a couple of thousand units in less than two weeks," Mr. Baxter said. The first two models — the 46-inch and 55-inch — are now in stores, and the remaining sets will be available in the next 60 days, he said. The best seller is the wider model, he said, because "early adopters gravitate toward the bigger screen."

Panasonic also has introduced its 3-D products and sent a fleet of tractor trailers on a tour to acquaint consumers with the technology. This month, LG Electronics began promoting its new Infinia series of televisions, which feature 3-D. The 30-second spots, created by Young & Rubicam, part of WPP, are appearing during the N.C.A.A. basketball tournament on CBS.

LG's 3-D televisions will be in stores in May or June, the company said. Sony's 3-D products will be available in June.

Samsung is spending about \$100 million this year on marketing and advertising its 3-D products. That included promoting its 3-D line with a Black Eyed Peas concert in Times Square on March 10.

For its signature advertising spot, Samsung hired the Oscar-winning cinematographer Mauro Fiore, who used the fusion 3-D camera technology that was employed to make "Avatar." The 30-second commercial, called "Dedicated to Wonder," was created by Chicago's Leo Burnett agency, part of the Publicis Groupe.

The commercial shows a family at the wall of a huge aquarium. The father reaches over and, using his finger, carves out a block of the water — manta rays, fish and all — then transports it home and places it inside the Samsung 3-D television. As the family settles in on the sofa, a manta ray swims out of the television.

"It's so real that the family's little boy reaches out to touch it," said Bob Price, Leo Burnett's creative director. A 15-second snippet of the commercial was shown during this year's Academy Awards telecast. The full campaign began on March 21, with ads scheduled to run in a number of prime-time programs. The ads will also appear on cable, and a print version will run in Architectural Digest, Entertainment Weekly and ESPN magazines, among other titles.

Peggy Ang, Samsung's marketing director, said the company would advertise online at entertainment and sports sites and was looking at gaming sites. Samsung is on Facebook also and had 130,000 page views immediately after its Academy Awards spot, she said. Samsung also plans to advertise in Imax theaters and in conventional theaters before 3-D movies.

Samsung is pursuing partnerships with film studios, cable networks and others to supply content, Ms. Ang said, but she predicted that "3-D content will proliferate because industry sees the potential for it."

Anthony Chukumba, an analyst for BB&T Capital Markets, said the increased offerings, like ESPN's 3-D broadcast of World Cup soccer in June, DirectTV and Discovery's planned channels, as well as more 3-D movies and video games, would increase consumer awareness.

"The fact that these are also 2-D televisions also means that if you are looking to buy a television, you may want to future-proof by purchasing 3-D and wait for the content to catch up," he said.

On Sunday, Samsung introduced a second commercial that showcases the DreamWorks animated film "Monsters vs. Aliens." Under the arrangement, Samsung can include a 3-D copy of the space-invaders-meet-weird-earthlings movie along with a Blu-ray player and set of 3-D glasses that are bundled in a separate "starter-kit" package.

The studio also will convert its "Shrek" movies to 3-D, including the fourth installment that is scheduled to be released in May. DreamWorks has agreed to let Samsung include 3-D "Shrek" versions as part of its promotional bundle.

The offers will be part of a national in-store marketing program, with 5,000 kiosks available for prospective buyers to sample 3-D. The 3-D line includes LED, plasma and LCD models, with the 46-inch model selling for \$2,600, and 55-inch model for \$3,300. The bundle, which includes two pairs of active-shutter glasses and a 3-D DVD, costs an additional \$350.

Fonte: New York Times, New York, Mar. 29th 2010, Media & Advertising, online.