

Panasonic heats up next-generation DVD war (Update)



The Panasonic brand maker said Wednesday it will start selling its first Blu-ray high-definition DVD player in North America in September as electronics makers prepare to go to battle over two rival formats.

The DVD war has just heated up further, as the manufacturer of the Panasonic brand announced that it will start selling next-generation players by autumn.

Specifically, Japanese conglomerate Matsushita Electric Industrial said that it will be marketing Blu-ray high-definition DVD players for under \$1,500 by September. Through the player, Panasonic "proves its commitment to providing the best high-definition entertainment experience for the home," the company stated.

The fact that the company has finally set a date and price tag on the forthcoming DMP-DB10 player is making the battle between the DVD technologies all the more poignant. For the past two years, Matsushita and rival electronics giant Sony have been leading the rallying cry for developing Blu-ray discs, while Toshiba and NEC have led another troop that has been developing the HD DVD.

Sony was expected to drive up demand for Blu-ray discs with the launch of its much-anticipated PlayStation 3 video-game consoles by this spring, but the company announced several weeks ago that it would postpone the launch of the product until November. That has put a monkey wrench into the movement to get consumers excited about buying up Blu-ray players.

Meanwhile, Toshiba had postponed the launch of its HD DVD player in the United States until later next month at the earliest.

Of course, the battle to win customers over the latest DVD technology is nothing new. Nearly two decades ago Sony and Toshiba slugged it out to see who would win the war of videotape technology between VHS and Betamax, and the former ultimately won. There had been hopes among those in the entertainment business that the two groups could reconcile and come up with a common platform so that customers would not have to deliberate on whether to get one form of DVD over another, but such negotiations ultimately fell through last year.

The plan now is to see which side will finally win and dominate the market, and industry analysts are already worried that consumers will withhold from buying into the new technology until a victorious side

actually emerges.

Still, even within the same camp, there are deep rivalries too. While Sony and Panasonic may be allies and united in promoting Blu-ray technology over HD, they are ultimately each other's competition as they seek to lure customers to their particular player. Earlier this year Sony said it would start selling its player in the U.S. market for around \$1,000 by July.

While the Panasonic player would thus be about 50-percent more expensive than its Sony counterpart, it may actually be a better buy for some as it will be able to play older-edition DVDs as well as CDs and other software. In addition, the company will be launching a 58-inch plasma screen HDTV.

Interestingly enough, though, while Panasonic is a Japanese brand, the company is refraining from announcing when it will launch the player in the domestic market, nor will it comment on what its price might be at home.

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