

## Keep Your Brand Relevant

### - *Change & Rearrange*

Brands that don't keep up with changes in the market fall behind. This is an obvious observation, yet one that you should say out loud to yourself, your R & D department, marketing department and any other relevant people in your company on a regular basis. Coming off of 2008 International CES, we saw brands that didn't exist five years ago attract hoards of buyers and TV crews to their booth, while some long-established brands generated little excitement for this year's offerings.

Remember the Sony Walkman? Once considered the only portable audio player worth owning, it lost the hearts of consumers upon Apple's introduction of the iPod. Originally a portable cassette player, the product became an immediate success when it debuted in 1979 – so much so that the name "Walkman" was in danger of passing from a brand name to generic term. Other portable cassette players were on the market, but no one who was anyone had anything other than the Walkman attached to their earbuds.

The 1980s saw the Walkman's transition from cassette to CD player. Keeping its new design sleek, lightweight and hip, Sony continued the brand's category dominance. But Sony evidently wasn't paying attention at the advent of the digital audio era, when Apple seized upon its opportunity to change the way consumers experience music (and now other downloadable media).

The Walkman eventually morphed into an MP3 player, but Apple's ownership of the market is – so far – absolute, despite such challengers as Microsoft's Zune. Sony Ericsson debuted the Walkman W810i – a nifty cell phone with plenty of impressive features – But guess what product came along to steal its thunder (not to mention practically upstage the entire show)? That's right, Apple and the iPhone.

The take-home lesson from our cautionary tale? If you're not creating a culture, and therefore a market for your brand like Apple does (although you should be), make sure that you're hyper-alert to technological advances, anticipate their impact on consumers and immediately adapt accordingly. Otherwise, you'll be left in the dead center of the mushy middle with other brands that were slow on the uptake, while the brand with the vision and passion redefined the category.

