Sharp Brings 3-D, Dorky Glasses Into Your Living Room

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TOKYO (AP) — Sharp is trying to play catch-up in 3-D TVs with powerful rivals Samsung and Panasonic with displays the Japanese electronics maker says are brighter and clearer.

Osaka-based Sharp Corp., which makes Aquos brand liquid-crystal display TVs, initially played down the urgency of selling 3-D TVs, questioning whether consumers wanted them. But with 3-D growing hotter not only with Hollywood releases but also flat-panel TVs for living rooms, Sharp is switching gears.

On Monday, the company promised 3-D TV sets this summer for Japan, and before March 31, 2011, for the U.S., Europe and China. Sharp said it will disclose prices and other details next month.

Sharp also said it had several original cutting-edge technologies to make its 3-D TVs brighter and produce more vivid color, especially yellows. The sets still require special glasses.

Another technology makes the images flash faster than existing 3-D TVs. The change is meant to reduce the flickering or blurring characteristic of 3-D TVs because different images are being sent to the right eye and left eye to create the illusion of depth.

Shigeaki Mizushima, group general manager, said shoppers walking into any electronics store will spot out the superiority of imagery on a Sharp 3-D set compared to those of rivals.

"Our product shows a far brighter image," he told reporters. "The difference is going to be clear to anyone. Brightness is just so easy to understand."

Sharp, which sold more than 10 million TV sets during the fiscal year through March, has been financially resilient compared with Japanese rivals such as Sony Corp. because it sells displays to other manufacturers as well as making TVs under its own brand.

But it has always lagged behind TV global leader Samsung Electronics Co. in brand recognition, especially abroad.

Sharp's entry into 3-D will intensify the competition among Japanese and Korean electronics makers, which are already fighting to woo global consumers.

Samsung of South Korea is already selling 3-D TVs. Japanese rival Panasonic Corp. is

having success with its 3-D TVs, while Sony plans 3-D sets for this year.

The Japanese have been beaten by Samsung in flat-screen TVs in the U.S. and China but hope to compete in high-end TVs, including bigger sizes and 3-D, said Osamu Hirose, analyst with Tokai Tokyo Securities in Tokyo.

Hirose believes 3-D technology will catch on only with early adopters at first but competition will heat up in the year-end shopping season.

"Panasonic is still leading in creating the 3-D market," in Japan, he said. "Sharp had fallen behind in 3-D."

Executive Vice President Masafumi Matsumoto said he expects 3-D sets to make up 5 percent to 10 percent of Sharp's TV sales in the initial year but to rapidly climb to 20 percent or 30 percent in following years.

Sharp says its new technology for clearer, brighter images can be applied to regular TVs as well.

The company showed reporters how a TV image of a field of sunflowers and golden brass instruments was clearer with its new technology compared to old-style displays, although the difference was less easy to discern with other colors such as pinks and greens.

It also showed prototypes of its 3-D TVs, though they still required bulky dark glasses.

Last week, Sharp showed smaller 3-D displays, suited for handheld game machines, which don't require special glasses. The company said that no-glasses technology works only when the distance between the viewer and the screen is set and doesn't work as well when people are seated in different places to watch a TV set.

Sharp said its 3-D displays will show up first only in its own Aquos TVs and it has not decided whether to supply 3-D displays to rivals.

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