

Panasonic Ties up with 'Avatar' Movie to go 3-D

YURI KAGEYAMA, AP Business Writer

(AP) -- Panasonic Corp. has signed on "Titanic" director James Cameron and his upcoming film in an advertising blitz for its TVs equipped with 3-D technology, both sides said Friday.

The deal between the major Japanese electronics maker and Twentieth Century Fox Film Corp.'s "Avatar" - the first major Hollywood 3-D release that's not animation - comes as competition heats up in flat-panel TVs that show three-dimensional images, or stereoscopic vision.

To watch 3-D TVs, viewers must wear special glasses that block vision in one eye and then the other as the TVs switch rapidly between images for each eye to create an illusion of depth.

Panasonic is planning to start selling 3-D TVs next year. Rivals, including Sony Corp., which has its own movie division, and Samsung Electronics Co. of South Korea have shown prototypes and may offer similar products.

The problem is the scarcity of content to view in 3-D. Skeptics say a number of Blu-ray discs of appealing 3-D movies must come out for 3-D TVs to catch on.

Several animation films are already being shown in theaters in 3-D, but "Avatar," set for release Dec. 18, will be the first major non-animation film debuting worldwide in both 2-D and 3-D.

"I believe 3-D is how we will experience movies, gaming and computing in the near future. 3-D is not something you

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watch. It's a reality you feel you could step into," Cameron said on video.

Panasonic is hoping its collaboration with Cameron will give it an edge in brand image as a 3-D leader as well as in obtaining suggestions for technological improvements for home TVs, said General Manager Masayuki Kozuka.

"We want to get global interest rolling," he told The Associated Press. "For people to want to watch 3-D at home, the movie has to be a blockbuster."

Panasonic plans to have several trailer-vans driving around in the U.S. and Europe next month with large-screen 3-D TVs inside showing "Avatar." In Japan, footage from "Avatar" - a science-fiction "Pocahontas"-like romance set in a futuristic jungle inhabited by creatures evocative of Cameron's "Aliens" - will appear in ads for 3-D TVs.

Details on the 3-D Blu-ray release of "Avatar" for TVs have not been set.

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