

## Best Buy seeks to spark interest in '4K' TVs

MAE ANDERSON - AP Retail Writer - Associated Press

Best Buy will start offering the high-end Sony 4K Ultra High Definition TV sets in 700 of its U.S. stores on Sunday in an effort to shake up the stagnant TV category.

The TVs — which have 8.3 million pixels compared with the 2.1 million pixels on regular high-definition TVs — are purported to have four times as sharp a picture as traditional HD TVs.

They'll be showcased in Best Buy and Magnolia stores' home theater departments, and executives say a demo will make all the difference in convincing consumers this is the next big TV trend. The set will also do its best to "upscale" TV, DVD and Blu-ray movies, so they look better.

"It's a marked step up in quality in terms of picture improvement," said Mike Mohan, president of home for Best Buy.

Sony Corp. and other manufacturers, debuted pricey 4K TVs at the Consumer Electronics show in Las Vegas in January, but those had 84-inch screens and cost \$25,000, out of range for most people.

The latest round of 4K Ultra High definition TVs are somewhat more affordable, though still pricey: They retail for \$4,999 for a 55-inch screen and \$6,999 for a 65-inch screen.

Best Buy Co. Inc., which is based in Richfield, Minn., has been facing tough competition from online retailers and discount stores and has implemented a turnaround plan under CEO Hubert Joly. Offering the high-end TV, which won't be available at other national chains, is one way to get around the so-called practice of "showrooming," when customers go into stores to research products but buy them cheaper online. Other moves Best Buy has done to combat showrooming include online price matching and investing in employee training.

But will a sharper picture be enough to reignite demand in the TV department? Other efforts to introduce new technology in TVs, such as 3-D capability and Internet-connected TVs, have so far not captured consumers' imagination, said NPD industry analyst Ben Arnold. But the 4K TVs have a chance, he said.

"There are some reasons for optimism," Arnold said. "4K TVs are at least helping to drive some renewed interest in the premium end of the TV market."

In addition to Best Buy, the TVs will also be sold at Sony Stores, regional chains including HHGregg and P.C. Richard & Son, and smaller independent electronic stores such as ABT in Glenview, Ill., and via wholesale distributor TechData Corp.

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Sony Executive Vice President Mike Fasulo said the company chose Best Buy as the only national chain to sell the TVs because of its Magnolia showcase and its staff trained in giving demos.

"It really requires a demonstration," he said. "Seeing is believing."

NPD's Arnold said that the new Ultra HD TVs might at least help shift consumers' attention away from their laser focus on the cheapest price for TVs. The average price of a 40-inch or larger TV has been falling for years. It is now \$756, down 5 percent from a year ago and 15 percent from 2010, according to NPD data.

"The TV market right now is defined by lower average selling prices as a way to prop up demand," Arnold said. "What the 4K does is it gets consumers to focus less on getting the biggest screen for the lowest price, and more on a super sharp picture, which some may be willing to pay more for."

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