

The Miracle Of Travelling Sound - The Walkman

One of the most original products in the musical world is the Sony Walkman. Walkman made its debut in 1979 in Japan. It also came to be termed as the Soundabout, Freestyle and Stowaway. The Walkman was the brainchild of Nobutoshi Kihara of Sony.

The co-chairman of Sony, Morita was very fond of operas and wanted to hear these while on his frequent international trips. Sony still uses the brand name of Walkman for portable audio gadgets. The plural form is not `walkmen` or `walkmans` but Walkman personal stereos. In March 2007 Sony launched the first digital video Walkman - NW-A800.

The first blue-silver Walkman was up for sale in Japan on 1st July 1979. It allows two persons simultaneously to listen to it. Soon models came in that could also do recording. In 1984 the best quality - Walkman Professional WM-D6C made its appearance with superb audio quality. It became popular with journalists and hi-fi fans. It is remarkable that considering the ever-changing nature of electronic goods, this model has remained the same and continues to reign over others.

Stiff competition came from Toshiba with its Walky, CassetteBoy from Aiwa and Panasonic. But Sony kept up the pace and created the playback only - the only one of its kind in 1989. It became a sacred collector`s item for Walkman admirers.

The company used unique methods to publicize the introduction of the device. People using the Walkman were seen cycling or roller-skating in the open and this had an impact on the attending journalists. Upon arrival they were each handed a Walkman and had to listen to instructions over the stereo. A young couple listening to it while on a tandem cycle completed the show. All involved in the launching programmed sported Walkman T shirts.

The journalists experienced how one can listen to music of choice wherever and whenever desired. For casual spectators it was a puzzling event without any public announcements. To further promote the product among the people the members of the publicity team went around buses and trains during peak hours sporting a Walkman. Sony made a concerted effort to negate the adverse impressions of headphones.

Celebrities were presented with sets and magazines glossed over it. Within a month of the launch only 3,000 units had been sold but thereafter sales picked up and Sony had to struggle to keep pace with demand. Initially it was those in mid 20`s that showed interest but soon the fan base widened to include a cross section of society.

During the 1970`s the home stereo market had become popular and the portable radio transistor had created a boom. Boom-boxes that were one-piece stereo systems powered by battery were making waves with the sound emanating from two or more speakers. Thus one could listen to music without being confined to one place.

Micro and mini-cassette players that could fit into a pocket were becoming hot favourites. This was the background of the scene when the Sony Walkman appeared with a bang. The basic idea was to place a radio inside an audiocassette chassis and manipulate it to send the audio into its cassette home player. Soon a secondary market developed round the Walkman - headphones and other accessories like the need to install speakers on the desk at home. Special travel bags came into vogue with speakers inside it. Trendy vests sported speakers on the shoulders.

The Walkman era drew to a close in 1986 with Sony introducing the Discman ushering in the digital age. Today there are disposable personal stereo cassette players priced at \$20 bearing little resemblance to their ancestors.

About the Author

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