

Brand Wars



There have been many brand wars throughout consumer history:

Pepsi vs Coke.

iPhone vs Android.

Burger King vs McDonalds.

Mac vs PC.

The first time I remember having to pick a side as a consumer had to do with a home entertainment system. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, I had left my school days behind and, needing to establish myself as a certified grownup, began to furnish my own place. Naturally, my first purchase was not going to be a bed, couch, table or chair – it would have to be a TV and home theater system. That was a no-brainer.

The head-scratching decision for me was: “Should I invest in the Sony Betamax or in the newer and less expensive Video Home System which became known simply as VHS?”

There were advocates on either side. Both did basically the same thing. They worked with cassette tapes which could fit

into a camera, record footage, and instantly play it back. They also both made videotape players that were attached to the television and capable of not only playing their tapes but recording your favorite TV programs onto blank tapes. They both came with programmable timers so you never had to miss your favorite shows. But neither would play the other format's tapes. The consumer had to choose between them.

Most acknowledge that the picture quality was superior on the Betamax. And Sony was the first to the market with their product which should have given them the advantage. However, VHS was not too far behind them and because, unlike Sony, who held close reins on their technology, the VHS developers shared their technology with multiple manufacturers. This spurred competition in the marketplace and kept the VHS prices lower as a result.

Also, some people think another reason Betamax did not grow to dominate the field was its limited recording time ability. Beta tapes were initially held to a maximum of one hour. It didn't take long for consumers to demand more. After all, most movies lasted longer than 60 minutes. Likewise, who wanted to record just the first half (or quarter) of a televised football game? VHS was the first to respond to this perceived need with an SP/EP/LP recording option that eventually gave users the ability to record up to eight hours of programs on a single tape. While the extended play option did reduce the picture quality significantly, that didn't slow the sales juggernaut as the vast majority of buyers lined up for the VHS products. Sony finally capitulated in the late 1980s by offering its own VHS line thus signaling what would prove to be the end of Betamax.

Michael Ondrasik and Home Video Studio specialize in the preservation of family memories and can successfully transfer both VHS and Betamax videotapes to a digital form for continued enjoyment. They can be reached at 352-735-8550 or by visiting www.homevideostudio.com/mtd