



Brand Strategy and Ideas for Sony



By Geeta Sundaram

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Background

The reason for my attempting this brand strategy for Sony Corporation is that I think the company has been missing out on decades of growth that could have come from better capitalising on its acquisitions and its brand assets. I wrote a brand strategy and a brand campaign for Sony years ago, but lost them to termites at my parents' flat in Goa. Here then, is my attempt to recreate it

Besides, the consumer electronics industry that Sony used to dominate has changed dramatically in the past couple of decades and there are many new developments that all seem to point in a certain direction.

From what I remember reading in the news way back in the 1980s, Sony Corporation made a significant and large acquisition in the US by acquiring Columbia, a US giant in the television news broadcasting industry (CBS) as well as in movies and music. It was the heyday of Japanese economic and business hegemony, when Japanese cars were outselling American ones in the US; this acquisition helped to seal Japan's and Sony's place in the consumer technology and media industries.

Would we know it, from looking at how Sony has approached the entire business, as if they were destined to only make and sell TV sets? Sure, they had some great innovations, such as Akio Morita's Sony Walkman idea, followed by the Sony Discman, but these too were forgotten in a decade or so.

That Sony later diversified into cameras, audio systems, home theatres, laptop computers, mobile phones and also CDs as well as DVDs, ought to have told the company something very important: that consumers had plenty of leisure time and money to invest in superior entertainment tech devices, but more importantly that consumers would soon want them all in one elegant and easily portable form.

Mind you, that includes not just devices that Sony has been so preoccupied with, but the content and ways to consume it. It is tragic that the company has had all the marvellous content as well for almost four decades through the acquisition of Columbia, and just never cared to capitalize on it.

The market for consumer entertainment tech

In the 21st century, and ever since the launch of the iPhone, the world's first smartphone, the world of media consumption, movies and music has changed forever. I haven't delved deep into the various technologies and options that are available to consumers willing to shell out big money (Sony products don't

come cheap either) but I think what the internet and digital technologies have done is to make media and entertainment more accessible to a lot more consumers across the world.

Three salient features are important to note:

- It is the internet driving more of it
- It is global and 24x7
- It has increasingly become device unspecific, as in it works on all devices equally well and has, paradoxically, made the device itself not so important anymore, as Tim Cook and Apple are discovering these days.

Which should mean that it is not the device or hardware, but the software and the content that is all important today. Apple themselves realized the huge benefits of this decades ago, when they launched their iTunes store, although they first revolutionized the way people accessed and listened to music through the iPod. This, and the development of apps have been an integral part of the iPhone success story.

I am not an Apple person but when I look at competition for Sony, I have considered Apple to be their main competitor for many years. And it is precisely because of this recent development: news media, movies, music, gaming, etc. all coming together through the internet, and now increasingly being delivered in streaming form.

All of media and entertainment has become highly personalized, delivering exactly what you want, when you want it and where you want it. What a coup it would have been if the Sony Walkman had evolved into a smartphone-like device before the iPhone landed!

Therefore, if you ask me, Sony has not just missed out on capitalising on the content treasure trove; the company has also missed out on the internet.

Sony's businesses and their performance

On reading Sony's latest set of [corporate earnings](#) on their website, I discovered that the company has grown revenue by 14.49% and operating profit by 25.86% during the last fiscal year ended March 31, 2022.

However, the company's net profit fell by as much as 14.89%, due to a fall in financial income, growth in financial expenses and higher taxes this year compared to a tax credit the previous year.

Since one is looking at only fiscal years ended March 31, 2021 and 2022 in the same financial statement, one is not sure how much of these earnings were affected by the pandemic, both positively as well as adversely.

That said, I expected gaming to be a significant part of Sony's business compared to the other business segments and so it is. For the year ended March 31, 2022, gaming accounts for 32.63% of revenue and 28.78% of operating profit for Sony. This is followed by electronics products and solutions with 27.85% of revenue and 25% of operating profit and pictures with 14.75% of revenue and 18% of operating profit.

I also happened to notice that under assets, content assets account for more than property, plant and equipment at ¥ 1.34 trn, with yet more assets under the heads of rights-of-use assets, goodwill and other intangible assets.

All this goes to show that Sony is acknowledging and accounting for the content and intellectual property assets that they own, which is a pleasant surprise. Now, they need to leverage this in terms of the brand Sony.

How can Sony catch up?

It is not surprising that Sony was preoccupied with making devices, and with the technological innovations within those; most Japanese companies are obsessed with the manufacturing aspect of technology and innovation. Therefore, it is with some relief that I happened to hear the CEO of Sony, Kazuo Hirai, speak on CNBC soon after taking over from Howard Stringer a decade ago, that the company would now focus on key strategic areas for future growth:

- Imaging technologies
- Mobile
- Computing
- Gaming

The company also said that it would reduce its dependence on manufacture of TV sets. From this statement, I gathered that Sony is finally ridding itself of its TV millstone and is embracing digital technology as well as the internet. Of the last, I am still not convinced, though, since that would require Sony to shift focus to apps and services, which it hasn't done enough of.

That said, now that Sony is on the way to a digital future, the way forward for the company would be three-fold, in a broad strategic sense.

- To focus on the internet as the prime way of delivering media, news, entertainment

- Following from the above, an attempt to integrate media and entertainment content better under the Sony brand
- To focus on promising and cutting-edge product technologies of the future, such as new imaging technologies, as well as new cloud, AI, algorithms, and streaming capabilities.

In mobile phones, I thought Sony was right in buying out Ericsson's stake in the company, but it has once again failed to build on it or capitalize on it. I am not sure if Sony mobiles are not gaining traction because of their operating system (Windows?) as against the more dominant Android and OS iPhones. In which case, they ought to perhaps switch to Android and partner better with Google.

Target audiences for Sony

As a global consumer electronics and entertainment company, Sony has considerable brand equity around the world, I would imagine. However, the company cannot rest on it, and ought to quickly consolidate its position among the older audiences, as well as build the brand afresh with young audiences, people who have probably grown with the internet era.

The more important way, however, for Sony to look at its audiences is as creators and consumers.

Creators:

That's because Sony makes an enormous amount of imaging, audio and post-production equipment used by people who make content, whether music, still photography or films. This is an extremely important audience segment as users and key influencers in decisions to buy/use Sony or not.

Customers:

People who regularly consume news, music, movies, games and such content on various devices, and are cued in on the latest in the world of media and entertainment.

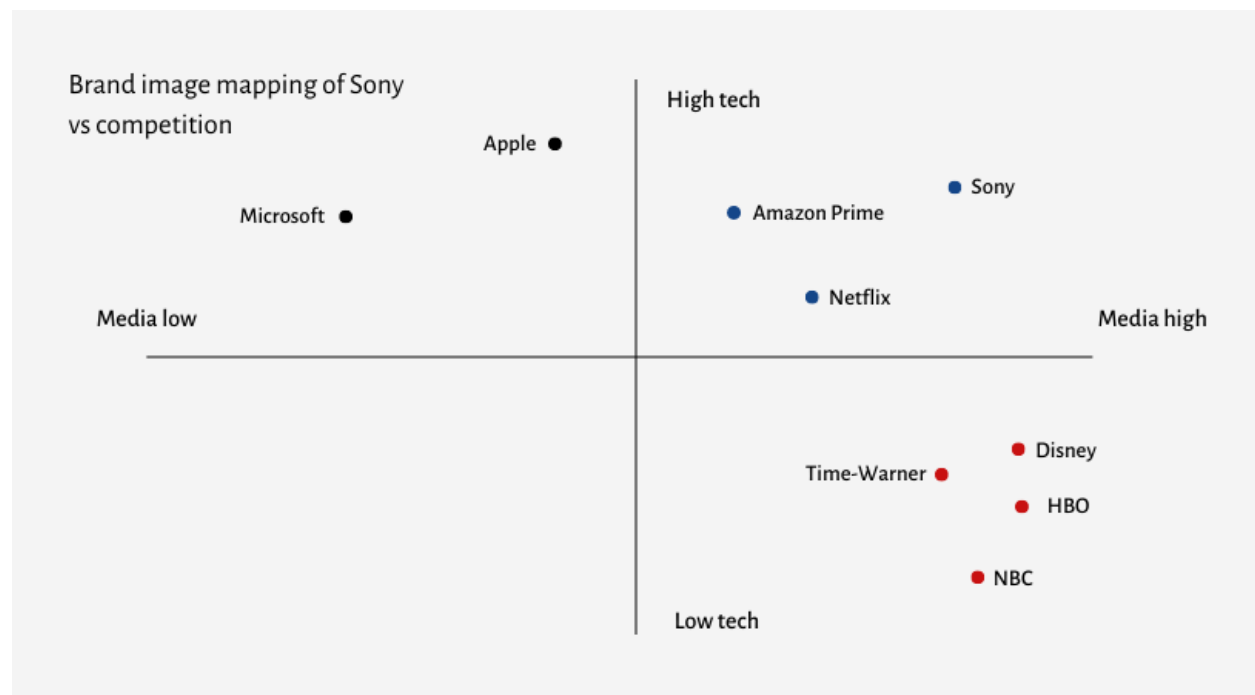
They would also be buyers of consumer electronics: digital still and video cameras, music systems, and TV sets. It is in this category that brands matter and still influence purchase decisions strongly. Not so much in what kind of content to consume and which streaming service to subscribe to, for the simple reason that media companies haven't really focused on building their brands yet.

Mapping the media and entertainment industry

The media and entertainment industry largely comprises two kinds of companies:

- Media companies and TV networks
- Tech companies making hardware and electronics devices as well as content

The larger section is composed of media organisations, such as Time Warner, HBO, Disney, Netflix and Amazon. The smaller section comprises just two companies right now: Apple and Sony. With Amazon and Microsoft the only tech companies that might develop the capabilities in tech to enter the second segment and grow it, though it's unlikely they're going to venture into tech hardware anytime soon.



Brand strategy for the way forward

It is clear, therefore, that if Sony wishes to become more competitive in the future of media and entertainment, they will have to focus as much on the service side as on the manufacturing side of the business.

To that extent, Sony will have to change people's perceptions of them as makers of consumer electronics or Trinitron TV sets, to a global media and entertainment company.

Sony ought to offer an integrated streaming subscription service of all its media content online, along with Play Station gaming. This will help to change perceptions in one stroke, and will make many aware of how big a force Sony is, in movie production and distribution as well as in music.

Such a streaming site will also attract content creators who can enter into a contract with Sony and upload and share their content. I recommend that the streaming service and website be branded SonyStream.

On the technology side, Sony ought to ensure great quality cloud-based services, intelligent algos, and great internet connectivity.

Separately, in hardware, Sony ought to overhaul its mobile phones and relaunch them. They ought to concentrate on making higher-end smart and connected TVs as well as innovating on imaging and audio technologies.

Brand positioning for Sony

With its core strengths still in media and entertainment technology, to which Sony can now add digital and internet technology and artificial intelligence as well as cloud, the company ought to position itself as a leader in the media and entertainment business.

Sony should stand for making magic in the world of media and entertainment with its edge in consumer electronics technology and its treasure trove of content.

Media Entertainment Technology = MET

Possible strapline for the Sony brand: MET magic yet?

Or, perhaps: Media and entertainment magic

Brand promise

Only Sony combines the best of technology and media content to bring you the ultimate media and entertainment experience.

Rationale

- The imaging, audio and gaming technologies Sony possesses and constantly innovates in
- The wide range and excellent quality of electronic products Sony creates for customers as well as content creators
- The treasure trove of media content that Sony owns and has access to, thanks to its partnership with Columbia, is for the world to enjoy

- Now all this available at one place through SonyStream on subscription plans

Tone and manner

As a media and entertainment giant, Sony should communicate with its audiences as a tech expert on media and entertainment. While most of its competitors who cluster together are from the media side of the business, and while Apple and Microsoft are from the tech business, Sony can differentiate itself by providing a fine balance of both.

This is because Sony understands the tech side of electronics and imaging really well and it has also been in the media and entertainment business the longest.

Important considerations in Sony's brand communications:

- Tech expertise and great media content balance
- Youthful and optimistic tone of voice, without trying to be Gen Z
- Portraying the combination of tech and media content as magical

Brand Campaign Idea

The brand Sony can be rebuilt for a new age, the one of convergence of digital technologies, of screens, and of news and entertainment. With this new brand positioning, Sony must communicate with its target audiences about how the company is integrating all of its expertise and offerings for the consumer to access easily and on the go.

The creative idea for the brand relaunch campaign is to help Sony be seen as the best in the field, through its potent tech and content capabilities, by combining them through magic.

The communication should comprise all media forms: television/video, digital/social, print, outdoor, and gaming itself.

In the film medium, the creative idea of Sony making magic with its tech and content expertise is communicated by portraying a realm that is somewhere between feature film fantasy and reality – you never quite know which it is. With the surprise being the Sony product/content contribution.

TV advert #1 (Derby distraction)

Film opens on a fine morning at a racecourse on Derby Day. Nattily dressed spectators and equestrian enthusiasts all chatting with each other, exchanging pleasantries while waiting for the race to begin.

The race begins in hushed silence, and then we hear the cheering of the crowd swell. The music is orchestral and dramatic.

We see one particular horse surge ahead and lead the race and its supporters seem to be cheering loudly for it. They look elated.

At the same time, we see supporters of the other horses look crestfallen and disappointed.

Meanwhile, the horse that is second in the race suddenly swerves to the edge of the racetrack and upsets the set of media cameramen who were busy capturing the scene on video. A huge "Oh No!" is heard across the crowd and people rush to the scene.

We cut to one of the cameramen who had been struck by the horse, trying to clutch to his Sony camera and lift himself up with others helping him.

He jests about it: "Some just don't like being second, do they?"

Viewers cheering the winning horse merely look amused and turn their attention to the race. There are many in the crowd filming the race on their mobiles or on their still cameras.

We pull back from the scene to reveal that all this was transpiring on a television screen, with an old couple watching it.

Suddenly, a young boy about 13 years of age runs in and grandma puts her arm around him.

Grandma: Come and watch this film. You'll love it.

Boy (smiling wickedly): I was there. Didn't you see me?

Grandma looks most puzzled.

Boy: Here, I even have pictures. Look, derby distraction!

He shows grandma and grandpa a set of photos he's taken at the Derby. Of the horse running amuck and the crestfallen faces.

Grandpa looks even more puzzled, and pointing to the TV set, asks "What was that... voice trails off.

Boy grins.

MVO: Always expect to be amazed by Sony's imaging, audio and gaming technologies.

Super: Sony

Media and entertainment magic

TV advert #2: (Island vacation)

Film opens on an exotic island and what looks like a family vacation. It's a bright, sunny day and a couple in their mid to late-forties and grown-up kids are taking a ride on a ferry to another island nearby.

There are a whole lot of families and couples on board, all busy looking out at the sea, or taking pictures of each other and the picturesque landscape, before they step out on to the shore.

Quick cuts of the family engaged in different activities on the island: son and daughter trying out para-sailing, mother enjoying a quiet swim while father decides to rest on the beach chairs set out under umbrellas.

Father decides to watch a show on his tablet and with his earphones in place, he is all set for a relaxed day.

This image of dad glued to his tablet screen stays fixed on screen, while all around, people are going about their holiday enjoyment activities in time lapse motion, as if a few days have passed in this fashion.

Until we see the number of people on the beach thinning out as well, and the skies getting darker as if a storm is approaching.

Suddenly, we see huge drops of rain falling on the tablet screen and we realise that were watching the same show as dad all along.

Dad jumps out of his beach chair, as he sees angry and upset faces of family all around him.

Dad: What's going on?

Mom: We're marooned, that's what.

Dad: Wow! Just like in the show, you mean?

Cut to mom's expression of exasperation.

Son and daughter (humouring him): Like, have an island all to ourselves?

Dad: Exactly!

MVO: Always expect to be amazed by Sony's imaging, audio and gaming technologies.

Super: Sony

Media and entertainment magic

TV advert #3 (Race-day)

Film opens on a Formula 1 race-track with several race cars vrooming and zooming. Enthusiastic crowds of spectators cheer the drivers loudly.

We go into one of the cars and see the race from its driver's or the dashboard point of view, taking in the twisty turns on every chicane. Other cars zoom past us once in a while.

What we hear in the background is race commentary, along with cheering crowds and the sound of cars burning rubber on the tarmac.

At one of those chicanes, a particular car skids off the track sideways and hits a tyre wall. Commentators exclaim about what an unfortunate accident it is that takes the race out of the driver's reckoning.

Suddenly, we hear the voices of other people over and above the commentators, as well as loud banging on a door.

Camera pulls back from the race scene to reveal that it was all taking place on a computer with a teenaged boy of around 18-19 years of age playing a video game.

He pauses the game and then we hear his parents more clearly from outside the teenager's room.

Dad: Son, dinner's ready. Didn't you hear mum?

Boy: In a bit, dad.

Cut to the door to the boy's room from outside. It has a poster that says: Leave your hang-ups outside and be sure to take them when you go.

Door opens and we see the teenager with a rather flushed face, sweaty and wet head and a towel around his neck, emerge.

Mum: What's that you were busy with?

Boy: Formula 1 racing. I almost overtook Max Verstappen.

Dad sniggers.

Boy decides to towel-dry his hair just then, as if to make a point to dad.

MVO: Always expect to be amazed by Sony's imaging, audio and gaming technologies.

Sign-off: Sony

Media and entertainment magic

Print brand campaign for Sony

In the print campaign meant to run in mainline international newspapers, as well as magazines, including Vanity Fair, Variety, Time and The New Yorker, Wired, The Verge, Tech Crunch, the creative idea is treated differently. Here, the attempt is to invite the reader into the world of Sony and share all the recent innovations and technologies that come together to create the magical world of media and entertainment.

Visually, the adverts strongly cue the world of media and entertainment and also have elements that suggest digital technology.

Print advert #1

Headline: Experience the best of imaging, audio and entertainment technology with Sony.

Body copy:

For decades, you've known us for true-to-life imagery, and that nobody brings together picture and sound with the clarity and fidelity that we do.

Allow us to bring even higher levels of technology to work for your pleasure as well as for your creative satisfaction. From the latest Sony mirrorless video camera, to our newest range of imaging technology that uses intelligent vision sensors with AI processing functionality, our Sony noise cancellation headphones, and the just launched 5-G Sony Xperia 1 IV that features a 4K HDR 120 fps camera with lenses from 80mm to 128mm.

Also, get ready for a seamless Sony experience of news and media updates from our colleagues at CBS, films and music as well as gaming on Play Station. All online and cloud-enabled and managed. Anytime, anywhere viewing and enjoyment made possible by Sony, the world's leading media and entertainment company.

Media, entertainment, technology. MET magic yet?

Sign-off: Sony

Media and entertainment magic

Print advert #2:

Headline: For movie-like gaming entertainment, your final station is Sony.

Body Copy:

Gaming enthusiasts know there's no greater thrill than Play Station, and we're on to the fifth generation of gaming technology now with PS 5. Not to mention the latest games and new seasons, adding to the challenge and enjoyment.

What's more, now you can enjoy a seamless Sony experience of gaming on Play Station as well as news and media updates from our colleagues at CBS, films and music. All online and cloud-enabled and managed. Anytime, anywhere viewing and enjoyment made possible by Sony, the world's leading media and entertainment company.

And you can expect even higher levels of technology to work for your pleasure as well as for your creative satisfaction. From the latest Sony mirrorless video camera, to our newest range of imaging technology that uses intelligent vision sensors with AI processing functionality, our Sony noise cancellation headphones, and the just launched 5-G Sony Experia 1 IV that features a 4K HDR 120 fps camera with lenses from 80mm to 128mm.

Media, entertainment, technology. MET magic yet?

Sign-off: Sony

Media and entertainment magic.

Print advert #3:

Headline: For the spectacle of cinema that helps us dream, picture only Sony.

For four decades we have regaled audiences around the world with our films from Sony Pictures and Columbia. Always entertaining, and fuelling your imagination.

You'll be thrilled to know that now you can enjoy a seamless Sony experience of films, music and gaming on Play Station as well as news and media updates from our colleagues at CBS. All online and cloud-enabled and managed.

Anytime, anywhere viewing and enjoyment made possible by Sony, the world's leading media and entertainment company.

And you can expect even higher levels of technology to work for your pleasure as well as for your creative satisfaction. From the latest Sony mirrorless video camera, to our newest range of imaging technology that uses intelligent vision sensors with AI processing functionality, our Sony noise cancellation headphones, and the just launched 5-G Sony Experia 1 IV that features a 4K HDR 120 fps camera with lenses from 80mm to 128mm.

Media, entertainment, technology. MET magic yet?

Sign-off: Sony

Media and entertainment magic.

Print advert #4:

Headline: For music that unites the world, none resonates like Sony.

Body Copy:

When you consider that we've been bringing you the best of music from all genres for several decades, you could say we speak the universal language.

Now you can enjoy the latest hits as well as the golden oldies with a seamless Sony experience of streaming music, films and gaming on Play Station as well as news and media updates from our colleagues at CBS. All online and cloud-enabled and managed. Anytime, anywhere viewing and enjoyment made possible by Sony, the world's leading media and entertainment company.

And you can expect even higher levels of technology to work for your pleasure as well as for your creative satisfaction. From the latest Sony mirrorless video camera, to our newest range of imaging technology that uses intelligent vision sensors with AI processing functionality, our Sony noise cancellation headphones, and the just launched 5-G Sony Experia 1 IV that features a 4K HDR 120 fps camera with lenses from 80mm to 128mm.

Media, entertainment, technology. MET magic yet?

Sign-off: Sony

Media and entertainment magic.

Print advert #5:

Headline: For live updates on news, sports and entertainment, live in the SonyStream.

Body Copy:

For decades, Sony has been at the forefront of technology, media content and distribution around the world. Now, we're delighted to bring you the ultimate single destination for you to access all of it.

With SonyStream, you can enjoy a seamless Sony experience of streaming music, films and gaming on Play Station as well as news and media updates from our colleagues at CBS. All online and cloud-enabled and managed. Anytime, anywhere viewing and enjoyment made possible by Sony, the world's leading media and entertainment company.

And you can expect even higher levels of technology to work for your pleasure as well as for your creative satisfaction. From the latest Sony mirrorless video camera, to our newest range of imaging technology that uses intelligent vision sensors with AI processing functionality, our Sony noise cancellation headphones, and the just launched 5-G Sony Xperia 1 IV that features a 4K HDR 120 fps camera with lenses from 80mm to 128mm.

Media, entertainment, technology. All on SonyStream. MET magic yet?

Sign-off: Sony

Media and entertainment magic.

Launch advert for SonyStream:

Headline: Movies, music, action all in one place!

Subhead: Live life in the SonyStream

Body Copy:

Having been at the forefront of technology, media content and distribution around the world for decades, Sony is now delighted to bring you the ultimate single destination for you to access all of it.

With SonyStream. Where you can enjoy a seamless Sony experience of streaming music, films and gaming on Play Station as well as news and media updates from our colleagues at CBS. All online and cloud-enabled and managed. Available on subscription plans that offer a variety of flexible combinations, depending on your tastes and preferences. Anytime, anywhere viewing and

enjoyment made possible by Sony, the world's leading media and entertainment company.

Movies, music, gaming, sports, news and entertainment. It doesn't get better than SonyStream. Dive right in.

Sign-off: Sony

Media and entertainment magic

SonyStream Website Home Page:

Headline (as part of looped video or gif):

Welcome to SonyStream.

Your ultimate destination for movie-like gaming, movies that help us dream and music that unites the world.

You've arrived at the final destination for everything to do with media and entertainment. SonyStream is where you can explore and stream movies, music, news, sports and media, as well as the latest games from Sony Play Station. All delivered through the latest in digital technology. All cloud-enabled and managed. All in one place. Right here, on SonyStream.

Check out the latest that's streaming

Music Movies News Sports Entertainment Gaming

Flexible subscription plans, so you can go with the flow

At SonyStream, we'd like you to get the most out of your monthly subscription plans, depending on what you might be in the mood for. You choose a combination of the above types of content and your monthly subscription fee includes just that. It's not ad-free vs with ads, over here. It's personalized to your tastes and preferences. You can also choose to go with a 3-month, 6-month or annual plan.

3-month dip

6-month dive

Annual swim

Digital Campaign for Sony

As a media and entertainment giant that is also big on technology, Sony ought to use the digital medium innovatively and effectively. Sony should explore if it possible to combine their different product areas in interesting ways in the digital medium.

The aim ought to be to ensure that people look out for a post/advert from Sony to see what they're up to next. And the idea is to engage and entertain viewers while announcing new products/releases.

If it's possible to turn clips from their latest movie releases into a game, or overlay their latest music release on a game, in ways that make for weird but interesting juxtapositions, that might be one kind of idea.

Another could be to announce new movie, music and game releases through online contests, where viewers on social/digital media have to guess the film/song/game and they win prizes, or the right guess is reward enough and they can share the contest with their connections.

Sony online club of customers

With Sony integrating all its product offerings and making them accessible to customers online through SonyStream, the company must also develop an effective customer engagement programme. This is in order to build a community of Sony customers and create a sense of strong brand identity with them and reward them for being loyal customers.

I recommend that SonyStreamers be the name of the online club of Sony customers, with whom Sony can also keep in regular touch through email communication and newsletters, perhaps on the latest developments at Sony, be they movie and music releases or new electronics products such as cameras, headphones, TV sets, mobile phones, etc.

SonyStreamers always get to know the latest releases first, and they even get to buy Sony content and products at special prices.

Media presence for Sony

Sony must also strengthen its media presence, through PR. The company must bolster their presence at film and music awards events, such as Academy Awards, BAFTA, Golden Globe, Grammy, etc. As well as film festivals such as Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Toronto, and music festivals from the Glyndebourne to Newport and Montreux, etc and ensure better media coverage through the year.

At the moment one gets the sense that Sony is very much a backroom company, content to create new technologies, new product innovations, even new content and let it find its way to people. This isn't good enough, I am afraid, and surely Sony can do better.

For example, if I hadn't visited the Sony website, I would never have known that Sony was launching its latest edition of Sony Experia mobile phone with a 4K HD camera, etc. on May 11, 2022. There was no mention of it in Indian newspapers or television news, nor on international TV channels even after launch day. To be honest, I didn't know Sony Experia mobiles were still around!

To start with, perhaps Sony can arrange for the launch of SonyStream website to be a global event, covered by international mainstream media as well as tech media and social media. Then, Sony leadership must engage with the media on a regular basis, sharing the latest on their tech, media and entertainment products and expertise.

With all these thoughts and ideas implemented well, Sony should once again become a bright beacon in the media, entertainment and technology landscape, worldwide.