Qualcomm Nabs Microsoft's CES Keynote Slot

The company lucky enough to nab Microsoft's keynote spot at the 2013 Consumer Electronics Show is ... Qualcomm.

Paul Jacobs, chief executive of the wireless chip giant, will give the coveted pre-show keynote at CES [1], filling the slot Microsoft vacated late last year. Jacobs, who also gave keynotes at the 2012 and 2010 shows, will speak at 6:30 p.m. PT on January 7. The show officially runs January 8-11.

Qualcomm may not be the most obvious pick for the CES [2] keynote, but its selection is the latest sign of a shift within the technology industry. PCs have been waning in recent months [3] as mobile devices like smartphones and tablets [4] quickly rise in demand. Likewise, Microsoft has been scaling back its presence at CES while Qualcomm has been boosting its reach at the show.

Microsoft said a year ago [5] that 2012 would be its last show. The company at the time said it wouldn't give a keynote or have a booth because its product milestones generally don't align with the show's January timing. The latest version of Microsoft's operating system, Windows 8, comes out next week.

Many companies have reconsidered their presence at CES, which is a large and costly event whose onslaught of announcements creates so much noise some fear being drowned out. Companies who can swing it been looking at smaller, individual events where they don't have to compete with other news. And many have been looking to emulate the model made successful by Apple -- generating a lot of buzz for special events [6] that dominate the news.

Qualcomm, meanwhile, is a logical choice to fill the gap at CES as the show focuses more on mobile. Its chips power most of the world's smartphones, including the iPhone 5 [7] and new Windows Phone 8 [8]devices.

Qualcomm has also expanded into connectivity like WiFi through its acquisition of Atheros, and it also has been working with Windows PC makers on new devices that run on Windows RT, the version of Windows made to work with chips using ARM Holdings architecture.

"Qualcomm has mobile computing in its DNA, and we look forward to hearing Dr. Jacobs explore the promise of a world of complete interconnectivity -- a world that exists today, and his vision of a connected future for both the generation born with a tablet in hand, and the rest of us who are becoming more mobile each day," Consumer Electronics Association CEO Gary Shapiro said in a press release.

However, the choice likely comes as a surprise to some. Samsung, Amazon, and Google have all been mentioned as top contenders for the keynote [9], and they're all much better known companies than Qualcomm.

Qualcomm, like most chip companies, isn't exactly a household name. The company has been doing more marketing, however, including renaming the San Diego Chargers stadium [10] as "Snapdragon Stadium" for a couple weeks last year to draw attention to its mobile processors. And the company also is making a push for Intel's traditional market, pairing up with Samsung and Dell [11]to make PCs that run on the latest version of Window's operating system.

Jacobs, accordingly, plans to highlight a "born mobile" theme at CES [12]. Along with mobile being Qualcomm's heritage, the company says that as the mobile market reaches 25 billion connected devices -- likely by 2015 -- the industry will have overtaken the worldwide population.

"Mobile's reach is such that it is no longer just an industry or technology platform, but part of mankind's DNA," Qualcomm said. "We are being 'born mobile'."

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