

The Master of the (Accessories) Universe

Written by Bob Snyder
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The Master of Accessories was next to me, standing on the ultimate accessory, a Segway, further emboldened by a red Porsche logo.

Noel Lee, president and CEO of Monster Cable, doesn't need a Porsche Segway to highlight his status. After all, Noel invented the category of cable accessories for audio. He needs the Segway for transportation because of a medical condition. And the Porsche logo serves to warn you that this is a man in motion, a man moving in High Gear down the autobahn of life.

"Come see this demo", invites the Head Monster, leading the way on the Segway, looking very much like a general mounted and heading for a mortar shooting demonstration. Noel is a natural leader, a good marshal to his troops.

We roll up to the front of a full technical demo where a Monster-ling has just finished a demo for some of France's top big box retailers. In the beginning of this Monster demo for me, Noel spots a mistake on one of the cable speed signs above the test equipment.

He interrupts the presenter, "The Hertz rate on that sign is wrong, isn't it?"

"Uh, that's what we've had up for the last three weeks," offers the presenter, squirming slightly.

"Well, it is wrong, isn't it?"

The presenter looks at the sign carefully, wishing he could change it instantly with some Jedi

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mind trick. “Uh, yes, I guess so,” he admits.

“Don’t guess. It’s definitely wrong. Get it changed”.

The presenter, in the middle of a trade show in Berlin, is stumbling...you can almost hear him thinking, “How I am I going to do this?” He stands, frozen and numb by his own non-action.

Noel is standing on the Segway as it powers slightly, rocking back and forth in a nearly negligible motion. If it was human, you might think the Segway was holding back on its patience. “Make a note now and get it changed right after the demo,” Noel suggests without any emotion. No anger, no edge in his voice...only firmness.

The demo goes on but you know, you absolutely know, that this sign will be changed. It will be changed-- not next show, not next week, not even sometime “soon”. You know it will be changed even before the next demo. You know, as Noel’s people know, that this fun-loving audio vendor, the guy that likes to hang with musicians, who likes to work with content like Disney: he becomes very, very serious when you’re talking business. In fact, he becomes a Monster.

As Head Monster, the Monster-lings around Noel know he takes no prisoners, carries no patience for slackers, and when something is “Wrong”...you change it “Now”.

What’s wrong now is the growing market for HDMI cables. A market filled with Lies, Damn Lies and Statistics-- and lots of competitors. Today hundreds of companies want their piece of the cable accessories market that Noel pioneered. From audio, from video, and from all sides, companies employ the very tactics that Noel practically invented against him, against Monster.

That opposition, the Hoard that would bring down the Monster, is going to have to wait. The Head Monster may have aged, but in accessories he is in his element. He is Rambo and this is his jungle. Just when you think you might hold a weapon that could help you poach some Monster business, Noel shows up wielding an entire arsenal. You might have an interesting

product, a special packaging, a great test, or even a video with which to sell against Monster. But Noel's got it all—the right product display, the right literature, the eye-popping video, the engaging demo, the perfect giveaway, an informative DVD, the right channel message, the succinct USP...

It's the scene from the Crocodile Dundee movie when a New York mugger pulls a penknife on the Australian croc hunter—and the Australian unimpressed says, "That's not a knife..." Then the man from the Outback pulls out his own hunting knife, a Monster of a knife and says, "That's a knife."

It's both the breadth and the elaborate detail of Noel's marketing prowess that have created the Monster. No one has dwelled on this before and all this comes to me as I stand surrounded by Noel's arsenal in his showroom at IFA. Noel doesn't just pull out a single blade to fight his competitors, he throws a dozen very large and sharpened blades against them all at once. If one doesn't cut you, the next will.

With the new battle lines forming around HDMI, the Head Monster is sharpening his blades again, for the umpteenth time. Bring it on, Hoard. The Monster is ready.

Noel wants to codify the entire HDMI cable industry, a Monstrous job if there ever was one. He's breaking HDMI cable speeds into speed bumps that show different levels of performance (and therefore clear price points). And this demo I've watched is the technical justification. Like most of Noel's weapons, it is honed to sharpness and you can see him using it to whittle down the resistance of the Big Box retailers.

Out of the hundreds of competitors, no one has tried to tackle the job of organizing the battle lines. No one, except the Head Monster. He's got the test equipment set up for the technical demo; he's got the literature; he's got the DVD; he's picked his packaging; he's got it all ready... The POP display, the front line of retail struggles, is already standing here: Monster HDMI cables hang on easy-to-grab pegs, clearly designated by logos (badges, really) that align with the speed bumps he has designated. All the details are in place.

The War to End All Wars in HDMI cable has now begun and Noel Lee is riding—once more--

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into battle.

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