LAS VEGAS - One HDTV trend that I could not overlook at the 2008 Consumer Electronics Show was the near absence of rear-projection televisions on the main show floor. Why? Because they're basically dead.

Among all high-definition television technologies, the rear-projection TV (RPTV) continues to offer the best overall value for the biggest HD screen sizes. However, if the 2008 retail predictions hold true, the already steady decline of RPTV retail sales will plummet by more than 50 percent by year's end.

Sony's recent announcement that it will discontinue its entire RPTV line in order to focus its manufacturing efforts exclusively on OLED (organic light emitting diode) and LCD flat panel display technologies was but one sign that the tide was quickly turning for this once popular TV technology.

On the CES show floor, the only manufacturer to announce new RPTV models was Samsung, and a tour through the company's booth space revealed a dominance of LCD and plasma televisions. JVC was another major television manufacturer that announced no new additions to its well-regarded RPTV lineup for 2008, but the company highlighted several new LCD TVs at an off-site showcase setup at a local hotel.

Mitsubishi, along with Samsung, are among the last manufacturers that offer RPTVs based on Texas Instruments' DLP (digital light processing) technology. Mitsubishi's RPTV division decided to pass on making a show floor appearance in favor of a one-day, invite-only event at a Las Vegas hotel where they unveiled an as of yet unnamed 65-inch laser-illuminated model that they claim will ship by the end of 2008, although information about pricing and the possibility of additional screen sizes was not revealed.

While the outlook for RPTVs is indeed bleak, Sony, JVC, and Mitsubishi have no plans to abandoned projection display technology. All have introduced new HD-resolution front projector models intended for home theater or presentation use.

But as flat panel displays increase in size and drop in price, the value offered by RPTV technology becomes less of an advantage. Couple this with the RPTV's narrow viewing angles and poor brightness uniformity, and modern flat panels are poised to put the final nail into this once-cherished display technology.

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