

Executive Insights: An Interview with Joseph Stinziano, EVP Consumer Electronics & Enterprise IT at Samsung Electronics America

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Abstract

We discussed the current business environment and recent developments with Joseph Stinziano, the Executive Vice President of Consumer Electronics & Enterprise IT at Samsung Electronics America, Inc. He shares his experiences and insights from his career path, his vision of the skills necessary to succeed in today's business environment, as well as major trends in consumer electronics and some of Samsung's newest products. He discusses Samsung's IoT strategy, the connected life, and their approach to consumer engagement and customer experience management (CEM). He also has words of wisdom for executives, recent graduates, and current students.

Could you tell us about the path that brought you to your current position? Where there any key turning points, decisions that shaped your career that you can share with the readers of Rutgers Business Review?

I majored in engineering and while I received a good education, being a research engineer in a laboratory was not something that I really wanted to do. So, I bartended for a while and through that experience I met my first boss.

My journey from company to company was something that was well thought out but each time I've made the jump it was not always for the

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perfect role. I was okay with that because I was more interested in the company and the people that I was going to work with and work for.

I look back to when I made that first leap into sales, I remember feeling excited, concerned, and nervous about whether I made the right move. I remember thinking, I don't know if this is the right or perfect job. It wasn't maybe the perfect role and if I waited another six months maybe a different role would have come that might have been more appropriate, but in the end it didn't matter because it was the right company for me to go to, and I had gotten a role on the inside. Once you get your foot in the door, it is up to you and I like to think that if you surround yourself with the right people, you find the right mentor, and you find the right leader, you're able to truly manage your own career.

Speaking of the diploma, has your education at Rutgers helped you achieve career success? In contrast, are there any things you wish you learned at Rutgers that would have been helpful in your line of work?

I won't speak for my entire generation, because I think I'm not so a typical, but I wasn't as sophisticated as current students are. I didn't have this big career journey in mind when I started college. It was a dinner conversation with my father, who was a teacher. "You should major in engineering," he said. I said "okay." Then he said, "you should go to Rutgers" and I said "okay. I like both; can I head out now?" That was the whole conversation. So, when I started college, I wasn't thinking about a specific job. Now, my own children, colleges and careers are all that's on their minds; they are constantly trying to figure out a career path

Throughout my career, I have found that engineering and business education, or a MBA especially, is a wonderful combination and very strong in the business world. I was never fortunate enough to go back for my MBA. I think I am part of the last generation that can probably get away with that and keep advancing in business. But I certainly feel like I learned on the job. Rutgers provided great preparation and good networking too. It's fun acting as an ambassador for Rutgers whenever I'm out in the world and answer questions regarding the university and my experience there.

What is a typical work day for you like? Any set, essential routines or life hacks you can share?

I recently heard someone suggest that they are more productive when they go on the offensive early in the morning, rather than first starting their

day by replying to emails. Instead, they go on the offensive by first laying out the things that they want to get done that day, and then firing off their emails to make that happen. Only after that is complete do they then go into their inbox to check their emails, and allow themselves to get sucked down that path. I love that approach. I started practicing this a few months ago, and it's been amazing. I found myself to be much more productive and I feel more organized when I go on the offensive first, before I truly start my day.

How long do you stand on the offensive in the morning? Is it most of the morning or just one hour?

I stay on the offensive for at least one hour. I've found that that's about the right amount of time to get what I want done and ingest whatever I want to ingest from newspapers, online new sources, or social media feeds. Then I allow myself to get sucked into the day of emails and meetings.

Are you an early riser, or does all the socializing with customers take its toll eventually?

I am as likely to be in the office at 7 or 7:30 am, as I am to be walking in at 8:30 or 9:00 am. It depends on what's going on that day. Because we're a global company, our colleagues in Seoul are waking up at the time that most people here are going home. So, we tend to work a little bit later as well.

What are the most innovative products you've seen lately both at Samsung R&D and elsewhere?

I am very fortunate to be able to see, try, and test a lot of different products. My litmus test is when they ask "are you ready to send that one back?" If it easily goes back, then that tells you that product is just ok. Right now there are two new products that are never going to get out of my house. The first one is the Family Hub refrigerator. This is the refrigerator with the LCD touchscreen on the front that allows you do food management, family communication, and offers entertainment. This refrigerator helps make the connected home possible. We are an open ecosystem, an open environment at Samsung. The SmartThings app that is on the new Family Hub allows you to monitor and control connected devices throughout your home. If you have a Ring doorbell, if you have a video camera in the baby's room, if you have

monitors and sensors in your home, you can see them on the refrigerator screen. I can check out different things online from the fridge, and I can mirror my TV onto it when I get up to go to the kitchen. I do that a lot in the morning, watch the news in the morning on the refrigerator. I can listen to music. I can check recipes. Over the Easter weekend I cooked some lamb by following a new recipe right on the refrigerator screen. When I am shopping I can see what is inside my refrigerator from my mobile phone. So this is a product that actually aids my daily life. This is something that I find fascinating.

Another great new product is The Frame. At home, I have a gigantic TV and when it's turned off, it's just a black shiny thing in the room. So we have come up with the concept of The Frame, a UHD TV that displays art when the TV is turned off. It's different than a regular TV. It looks like an actual piece of art, it stays flush against the wall just like a picture and the remote actually controls everything. You plug something in to our OneConnect box and the TV senses it, whether it is a cable box, an Xbox, or a Blu-ray player, and our OneRemote can control them all. Each device is labeled so you can easily see which one is connected to which TV input, and you do not have to think and remember what was connected to HDMI 1 or Source A. There's even a little icon to identify many of them.

So things like this I find very fascinating because it is technology helping in the day to day life. It is one thing to try a product, like it, but use it occasionally. That's one kind of product. But these new products are incredible and make the day fun. Now, when I am traveling for work I can take a picture, send it to my Family Hub refrigerator and it pops up on the screen at home. Sometimes I get to go to nice places and I can tease my wife. When it was snowing at home and I was in Florida for work, I sent her a selfie in front of the palm tree and I asked if shoveling has started yet. You know, something only a spouse can do.

Can you tell us about "The Wall"? Do you think it is going to be just experimental or will there be a time where it will be affordable and available to the mass market?

Absolutely! The Wall will be available for the mass market in the future. Depending on what side of the table you are on, the beauty and the challenge of our industry is that it is very deflationary and that prices always come down in electronics. "The Wall," which we demonstrated at the 2018 Consumer Electronics Show (CES), captured consumers' attention, as well as that of the industry, because the technology is so cool. So, think of back in

the day to the old Times Square or Las Vegas billboards with the big bulbs. We have gotten that down now to where it is customizable in size and scalable for the home. So, you can buy a TV as big as you wish. We showed a TV at CES that was 146 inches. You can scale its size, you can make different shapes, and each little pixel is an RGB pixel. So, you've got the best picture quality, and it is customizable to your room. Yes, at the beginning, it will be expensive as most technologies are. It will probably start at the top of the pyramid. But we expect it will trickle down very quickly.

Any other products that are coming down the pipe that you can tell us about?

At CES, we made a very conscious effort to pivot from talking about discrete products to talking about the solutions in the ecosystem that are supported by these types of products. If we look at what's happening in IoT and the connected space, the products that have been successful are ones that solve one specific pain point for consumer. A company like Samsung has great potential to connect these dots in a meaningful way for consumers because we have in many cases the home appliances; We have the telephone. We have the TV. We have the laundry products. We have all these products that are in consumers' homes already. We have been working intensively on this issue and we made an acquisition several years ago of *SmartThings*, which is an open IoT connected home company. We have been embedding this technology over time because the cycles are fast, but the product development lifecycle is still there and it is several years in the making, from the beginning to the end. So now we're starting to see the fruits of this labor where this common technology is real, and we announced that we are going to have one single app and one single connected platform under *SmartThings* that will connect all of our products as well as hundreds of third party devices. So even in a company like *Samsung*, where we still have our vertically integrated business units, we have this very clear direction across the entire company – make products that support one cloud, one app, and make the environment across these devices very meaningful. We showed an example of this at CES. When you set up your TV, it connects to your phone and you can choose to have the apps already installed on your phone to be automatically installed on your TV, like Spotify, Facebook Video and Hulu.

We are only able to do that because we have the cloud as the great unifier, and it is taking different products, different APIs, different technologies, and putting them all together. So something like setting up a new TV used to be

a pain point for some consumers, and it is now a point of differentiation for us.

That is great because usually the perception is that iOS is for the simple user and Samsung basically goes after the power users. But it seems like you are going after Apple's bread and butter... What are the major trends shaping your industry? Do you see these trends persisting in the foreseeable future (i.e., are these changes here to stay)?

There are two things going on that I find very interesting. One is the connected home that I just discussed. But it is also your connected life, meaning the connected car when you're in the car, out of the car, in the home, out of the home. All these experiences have the potential to work together so Samsung also made a big acquisition of *Harman*. Along with *Harman* came many great technologies, people and capabilities. *Harman* has a very large automotive business and deep automotive OEM experience. We believed that by combining that opportunity and that market entry, with our software and hardware capabilities and our strategy to help consumers across the ecosystem, we have the opportunity to create this new kind of environment. Strategically, that is something that you can imagine down the road being a very important part of what we could do. Imagine you are listening to some music in your car, and you pulled into your garage. The sensor knows you're there, you're welcomed to the home, your audio system turns on, and you continue streaming that same song without skipping a beat. That's the kind of vision that we have for what could be possible when we start bringing these technologies together. I think it is very interesting how we can get past the single point of contact between the customer and their device, and create an ecosystem.

The other important trend is the omni-channel consumer and how consumers view brands and how they view their shopping experience. We used to try and describe consumers' shopping behavior as omni-channel. Now we just call it shopping as it became a universal way of shopping. But in the middle we needed to describe this behavior that consumers were exhibiting whereby they moved in and out seamlessly from their phones to their newspapers, and their old fashioned ways of looking at brick and mortar retail versus online, PC and tablet. They are just consistently and continuously engaging with brands, sometimes actively and sometimes passively, and I think that's an incredibly interesting journey that consumers are now on. How they shop and what they want to get out of each channel is very different. Manufacturers and marketing companies such as *Samsung*

have to make sure that they provide relevant information at the right time and provide opportunities to intrigue them, excite them, inform them, and service them in the right way. That is not easy to do. It requires a lot of planning, but when you do that right, it feels very comfortable and natural to the consumer. I think that's the key. It doesn't feel forced; it just feels natural.

Apple has been very good at building their brand equity, brand perception, and customer loyalty. There seems to be a conscious move from Samsung to build their own brand equity. Would you agree?

We have always been a brand that people have respect for. They trust the *Samsung* brand, they respect the *Samsung* brand, and they believe that we make great products. What we were missing a bit was that deeper connection and the more emotional response that some people have for some brands. We have made a conscious effort to try and overcome that gap with our consumers. Some of that is in how we communicate and not just being about speeds and feeds. We try to talk about how our products actually do enrich lives. It sounds a little corny, but it is real. When I come home and things are easier for me, when I've had a hectic day and that makes my life a little easier and if our products are able to aid in that in any way then that's real. That's something that we are starting to explore with our consumers. If you see some of the advertising we've done recently during the Olympics, for example it's definitely about making that emotional connection with consumers. But again, it has to be genuine. We show how technology aids consumers. We show people who are in recovery from an ailment and how virtual reality is helping them. That is real. That is authentic. That is genuine, and it is connecting the brand to the consumer in a way that's important to them, but it is also getting away from only talking about the speeds and feeds. But our brand is built on our heritage of performance and great products. We know and understand that and we don't want to lose that consumer. But at the same time, we want to deepen and broaden our relationship with consumers across categories and become that truly beloved brand.

You have worked in different companies and experienced a variety of organizational cultures. Can you please elaborate on the Samsung culture?

Every company has a unique culture, but I will say at *Samsung* the culture manifests itself more frequently than at some other companies. What I mean is in some companies you may set some aggressive goals and then move on

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to the next thing. At *Samsung* we set aggressive goals and then we create plans to go achieve them. Then we check on them, and we are very transparent and self-critical about our progress towards achieving these crazy goals. I think culturally that's been part of what makes us successful.

What do you see as the primary skills necessary for business school graduates that want to pursue a career in your industry? What would you consider the most important characteristic a recent graduate needs to have to succeed today?

The most important thing is a willingness to learn. They have to understand that they were hired for a reason, but that we know they are going to be coming up a learning curve. The biggest mistake I see folks make coming out of school and coming into a company like *Samsung* is trying to boil the ocean in their first 6 to 12 months of employment. We understand that they've been trained on how to think. Now we have to actually train them on the workplace and what's going on in the marketplace. They know how to operate the machinery, but they don't really know how to drive on the course yet. This openness and understanding is necessary. I've seen some undergrads that come to work at *Samsung* that understand this, they are open and they contribute. But I've also seen some that come in and try to demonstrate that they understand things too quickly and they're going to solve everything, and I think they get themselves in some trouble. So I think the most important thing is having a willingness to be open, to listen, and to be collaborative. With technology and personalities in the workplace today, you have to be collaborative, there is no choice. When I started in the workplace, I owned the very, very narrow sliver that I was responsible for. I was in sales. I was in product management. I owned that narrow sliver and I really didn't have to talk too much to the person who was to the left or right of me. I don't think roles like that exist anymore. In today's workplace we all have to work together. We all have to make sure that we know what's going on to the left and right of us, to make sure what we're doing is aligned with all colleagues to make the end product or service even better. People coming newly into the workforce have to understand that it is not just about being socially collaborative but it is about being collaborative in the workplace in all the work that you're actually doing. I would also encourage all graduates to find a role where they can learn and then ultimately make their mark on the company by making a difference, by taking on the hard projects. These are the things that can propel a career.

Any additional thoughts or words of advice for business school students?

It's important to understand what your north star is from a deeply personal and philosophical point of view, and not get too caught up in the tactical shifts of the day to day. For example, I was talking to a *Rutgers* student just before that knows he wants to be in law in a corporate environment. Okay, that's clear but broad enough. Don't get too caught up in exactly what type of company you go to, or exactly what function, or exactly what kind of adventure. As long as you feel it's bringing you along the path and you're not making a complete wrong turn from your north star, then don't overthink it.

Don't overthink some of the decisions you are going to make as I don't think you can make a wrong decision early on in your career. You can always learn from your mistakes, you can understand what you do well, what you like. Ultimately, I encourage everyone to just stay humble and hungry, be thankful for what you have, and be hungry for the next journey in the next chapter in your professional life. That's it. That's the fun part, looking forward to the unknown and embracing that a bit more.

Thank you for making time to talk to Rutgers Business Review.

Executive's Bio

Joe Stinziano is the Executive Vice President of Samsung Electronics America's Consumer Business & Enterprise IT Division, where he is responsible for overseeing sales and marketing for an array of best-in-class consumer electronics products in the TV and Home Entertainment, Audio, Home Appliance and Personal Computing categories. Since joining the company as Vice President of Sales in 2009, Joe has been credited with establishing Samsung as a market leader in technology innovations, delivering on the company's vision to reimagine the future with world-class technologies, products and design that enrich consumers' lives and contribute to social prosperity. Prior to joining the Samsung team, Joe spent three years as Senior Vice President at D&M Holding responsible for marketing, sales, channel management and the P&L for the Denon brand. Joe also spent almost 10 years at Sony leading the company's AV, Recording Media and HDD related businesses, and eight years at AT&T/Lucent where he worked in both sales and marketing in the consumer markets and products divisions. An avid sports fan and mentor to many within Samsung, Joe is passionate about developing the next generation of leaders, and inspiring his teams to embrace the company's fast-paced, high-performance culture. Joe is a staunch supporter of a number of charitable causes and is personally invested in supporting a range of local missions in his home state of New Jersey – from feeding the hungry and housing the underserved, to inspiring local youth to become tomorrow's business leaders. Joe also serves on the Board of

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Directors for Junior Achievement of New Jersey. Born and raised in northern New Jersey, Joe is an Alumnus of Rutgers University, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering. When he isn't doing what he loves at Samsung, Joe enjoys spending time with his wife and two children.

Interviewers

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