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Harman Int'l Industries

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Introduction

Harman International Industries stands as a remarkable example of American ingenuity and enterprise, its story woven into the broader narrative of technological innovation, business acumen, and cultural evolution. From its humble beginnings in the early 1950s to its position today as a global leader in audio and connected technologies, the journey of Harman mirrors the changing landscape of the consumer electronics and professional audio industries. Founded by the visionary engineers Sidney Harman and Bernard Kardon, the company set out to make the enjoyment of high-fidelity sound accessible to a broader audience—a mission that would repeatedly drive breakthroughs in both engineering and business strategy.

The origins of Harman are deeply entwined with advancements in audio technology during a postwar America eager for new forms of entertainment and expression. The partnership between Harman and Kardon, formed on a modest investment and a shared dream, soon yielded some of the world's first compact Hi-Fi receivers, revolutionizing how people experienced music in their homes. Over the years, this spirit of innovation became embedded in the company's DNA, propelling Harman to the forefront of the industry and enabling it to weather economic challenges and fierce competition.

Central to the Harman story is a legacy of strategic vision—not only in the products it developed but in the way the company expanded its portfolio through acquisitions, diversified into new markets, and responded to shifts in consumer and professional demands. By acquiring renowned companies and brands such as JBL, Infinity, and Lexicon, Harman assembled a powerhouse of audio expertise that spanned from the home to the concert hall, and from the recording studio to the automobile. This expansion was not merely about size, but about strengthening the company's commitment to quality, innovation, and a relentless pursuit of excellence.

Harman's evolution accelerated in the digital era, as the company embraced new opportunities in automotive technology, connected devices, and software solutions. The acquisition by Samsung Electronics in 2017 marked a transformative chapter, providing Harman with the scale and resources to expand globally while allowing it to maintain its unique culture and leadership. The subsequent years have seen continued innovation, particularly in automotive systems, with Harman leading the charge in digital cockpits, advanced driver assistance, in-cabin monitoring, and cloud-connected services.

Yet, for all its technological achievements, Harman's story is also about its people and leaders—especially Sidney Harman, whose influence extended far beyond the

company walls into education, philanthropy, and civic engagement. His vision, values, and commitment to both technological progress and social responsibility remain embedded in Harman's culture and purpose.

This book traces the full arc of Harman International Industries, exploring its triumphs, challenges, and transformations. It offers insight into the company's enduring impact on the audio industry and beyond, a review of its present circumstances, and a look forward to its prospects in a rapidly changing, interconnected world. As we embark on this exploration, the story of Harman is not just the story of a company—it is a reflection of the ever-evolving pursuit of excellence, creativity, and progress in American business.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Founding of Harman Kardon

The story of Harman International Industries, or simply Harman as it is widely known, begins in the post-World War II era, a time of burgeoning innovation and an increasing desire among American consumers for high-quality home entertainment. Amidst this backdrop, two engineers, Sidney Harman and Bernard Kardon, laid the groundwork for what would become a global audio giant. Both men had honed their skills at the Bogen Company, a prominent manufacturer of public address systems, where they gained invaluable experience in audio technology and its applications. It was their shared vision, however, that truly set the stage for their future endeavors. They believed that high-fidelity audio, a realm often reserved for hobbyists tinkering with complex, multi-component systems, could and should be made accessible to a broader audience.

In 1953, with a modest initial investment of \$5,000 each, Sidney Harman and Bernard Kardon ventured out on their own, co-founding Harman Kardon in Westbury, New York. Their goal was clear: to simplify and enhance the audio experience for consumers. At the time, a typical home audio setup was a sprawling affair, often involving separate tuners, preamplifiers, and power amplifiers, all connected by a tangle of wires. Harman and Kardon aimed to integrate these disparate components into a single, user-friendly unit that would still deliver exceptional sound quality. This innovative approach was a significant departure from the prevailing industry standards and demonstrated their forward-thinking philosophy.

Just one year after its inception, in 1954, Harman Kardon unveiled its inaugural products, including an FM tuner and, more significantly, the Festival D1000. This monaural unit was a true game-changer, recognized as one of the world's first AM/FM compact Hi-Fi receivers. It ingeniously combined a tuner, preamplifier, and amplifier into a single, aesthetically pleasing chassis, a design that foreshadowed the integrated receivers commonly found in homes today. The Festival D1000 was a considerable success, particularly resonating with younger music enthusiasts who appreciated its ability to deliver high-fidelity sound in a more convenient and accessible package. Its introduction marked a pivotal moment, not just for Harman Kardon, but for the burgeoning high-fidelity audio industry as a whole.

The early success of the Festival D1000 affirmed the company's foundational principle: that superior audio could be both sophisticated and simple. Harman Kardon's focus was on producing high-fidelity performance within a single unit, a concept that, while not entirely novel (Scott Radio Laboratories had manufactured similar items in the late 1930s), was brought to new levels of refinement and market appeal by Harman Kardon. The company's commitment to wide bandwidth amplifiers also set it apart, as they understood that the full range of sound, including harmonics and overtones

beyond the typical human hearing range, contributed to a richer, more immersive listening experience.

In 1956, a new chapter began for Harman Kardon when Bernard Kardon decided to retire. Sidney Harman purchased his partner's share of the company, becoming its sole head. This transition, rather than slowing the company's momentum, only seemed to invigorate Sidney Harman's drive for technical leadership in Hi-Fi products. He remained steadfast in the original vision of making high-fidelity audio universally accessible, and under his singular leadership, Harman Kardon continued its trajectory of innovation.

Just two years after Kardon's departure, in 1958, Harman Kardon once again made waves in the audio world with the introduction of the Festival TA230. This groundbreaking product was the world's first stereo receiver, further solidifying the company's reputation as a pioneer in the rapidly evolving high-fidelity industry. The Festival TA230, much like its monaural predecessor, was designed with non-technical users in mind, aiming to make high-fidelity stereo sound widely available to the general public. This continued focus on user-friendliness and integrated design was a hallmark of Harman Kardon's early years and played a crucial role in popularizing quality home audio reproduction.

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