

Nintendo Revolution has parental controls

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Following video-game industry expectations, Japanese console maker Nintendo has announced that it will be including parental-control features in its upcoming Nintendo Revolution video-game console.

The feature will work in conjunction with the rating levels assigned by the Entertainment Software Rating Board. Parents will be able to choose a password for the system, then designate which games their children will be able to access without the password. The six ratings are as follows: EC (early childhood); E (everyone); E10(plus) (everyone 10 years of age and older); T (teen); M (mature) and A (adult).

"This is based on the ratings of the games," said Beth Llewelyn, senior

director of corporate communications for Nintendo of America, who explained that the ESRB ratings themselves would be encoded into the game software that the hardware will recognize and use.

"There's a wide variety of games," said Llewelyn. "A rating system lets parents know what is and isn't appropriate."

With video games cutting across a wide variety of demographics, what was once considered a mainstay of youth entertainment is now geared towards both children's and adult markets. According to a recently released study, the average age of a video-game player, or "gamer," is now 30.

"Parents should play very active roles in monitoring what their kids play and making decisions as to what's appropriate to their children," said Patricia Vance, president of the ESRB. "We provide a rating system so that parents have a tool available to them for virtually every game sold in the U.S. and Canada.

"If the parents have the ability to control the system itself by setting these parental controls, that benefits everyone," said Vance.

Parental-control elements are nothing new to the video-game industry, which has faced criticism in the past about content within video-game titles. A report released Tuesday from the National Institute on Media and the Family included a list of the "12 games to avoid" this holiday season. Titles such as "Doom 3" and "Resident Evil 4" were cited for violent content while "Blitz: The League" was criticized for including scenes in which football players hired prostitutes and engaged in drug deals. Undead-themed games such as "F.E.A.R." and "Stubbs the Zombie in Rebel Without a Pulse" drew attention for scenes of graphic cannibalism.

Lockout features for PC and console games have long allowed users to block or alter violent content. Easily accessed options might remove a controversial scene or change the color of a spurt of blood within a video game from a grittily realistic red to a blue or green.

Sony's Playstation 2 game console raised eyebrows upon its initial release for restricting DVDs that could be played by the unit. While entering a code could rescind the limitation, it was one of the first efforts of this kind on a game console. Parental-control options have been included with the recently released Xbox 360 and have been planned for Sony's upcoming Playstation 3 console.

"Most consoles already have parental controls built in," said Ben Bjarin, an analyst for Creative Strategies. "This is expected from Nintendo, given its historically younger target market, which is a good step and allows parents to be even more intrigued with a console their kids demanded.

"Password protection is the most logical and there were other ways to do this, but making it as easy as possible is key to them. The rating system for video games has gotten pretty good and they can even set it to control what DVDs are watched," said Bjarin.

When asked if children would be able to guess the password, Bjarin said this was possible but probably wouldn't be a concern with younger users. Still, parents might have to take the time to think of a more personal password than one that might be obvious within a family.

The Nintendo Revolution game console is due for release sometime in 2006.

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