

# Portables drive up video-game sales

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Microsoft's Xbox 360 may have been having teething problems or major flaws, depending on who one talks to. But even as the software giant's latest video-game console's debut was riddled with issues late last year, one thing is for certain: There's no end in sight just yet for gamers' appetite for new products.

According to consumer researchers NPD group, annual U.S. sales of video games overall rose 6 percent in 2005 from the previous year to \$10.5 billion. That figure was higher than the \$10.3 billion in sales reached in 2002, which was until now the record high for the gaming industry. The latest sales figures include demand for consoles and portable players as well as software and accessories.

Particularly popular this time around were portable gaming devices, reaching over \$1.4 billion in sales, marking a whopping 96-percent increase from a year ago, NPD found in its latest report on the video-game industry released Tuesday. On the other hand, demand for fixed consoles such as the Xbox was not as strong, as sales actually fell 3 percent from a year ago largely as a result of shortages in hardware as well as delays in the release of much-anticipated software titles and consumers waiting to see what other consoles might be coming out on the market.

Still, industry analysts remain upbeat about demand for consoles, in light of new products that are lined up to be launched in a few weeks' time.

"The introduction of the Xbox 360 was a defining moment for the

industry in 2005. However, it goes without saying that the full impact of next generation consoles on the consumer market won't unfold until later this year when Sony and Nintendo's video game consoles hit U.S. retail shelves," said Anita Frazier, an industry analyst at NPD.

"The real story for 2005 was the incredible expansion of portable gaming," she added, pointing out that the new format has lured older gamers looking to be entertained whilst on the go into the market as well.

According to the research group, the best-selling software title for 2005 was Madden NFL06, followed by Pokemon Emerald, while Gran Turismo 4 came in at third place.

Games related to the Star War films proved to be popular too, with Star Wars: Battlefront II coming in at sixth place, Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith ranking in at eighth place and Lego Star Wars came in at No. 10. All Star Wars series were formatted for PlayStation 2, as was the No. 1 NFL game.

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