# Sony sees the online light

March 23 2006



Sony Computer Entertainment President Phil Harrison announced Wednesday the pending launch of the PS3's brand-new online service, currently dubbed the "PlayStation Network Platform," which will be the long-awaited and long-promised answer to Microsoft's popular Xbox Live service.

The way Harrison spoke during his keynote at the ongoing Game Developers Conference, you would have thought the new service was groundbreaking and innovative; instead it sounds like they will be copying a lot of the features and functions from Xbox Live, including the 360's popular new live marketplace functionality. But when Sony

gets into something, it goes big, so gamers will have a lot to look forward to now that they are fully embracing the idea of a uniform online experience.

"This will represent a fundamental shift in how we distribute games," said Harrison. "We'll be able to move away from the standard packaged media approach and will now have multiple streams of revenue." He cited examples like in-game advertising, episodic content, micro-payments and more.

"We believe the power of the network is obviously constructed by the number of people in that network. You can see it in sites like eBay and Amazon," said Harrison. "What makes those destinations popular is the user-created content. We have not had that two-way communication system applied to games yet, and we're excited about it."

One of the goals of the PlayStation 3 Network is to provide more diverse content to the users via its distribution system, whether it's movies, linear programming, music, games, etc. The network is set up to handle any type of content. "In terms of innovation, I want to push beyond the type of games that we currently see at retail outlets," said Harrison.

In other news, Harrison announced Sony will still support the PS2 long after the launch of the PS3; they see life cycles in 10-year spans and not the traditional five years. To help bolster this claim, they announced that the hit game "God of War 2" will be coming to the PS2 this fall.

Sony seems to be preparing to refocus attention on the PSP. Later this year the portable device will receive several new updates including a new software upgrade that will give the PSP a new Flash-based browser, but more importantly the next application update will include emulation software that will enable users to download and play original PS One games. Another update due later this summer will allow PSP owners to

boot their devices directly from their memory sticks.

This fall the PSP will also get two new hardware add-ons: a new camera that will turn the PSP into a video phone that will be accessible through VoIP protocols and a new GPS attachment that will turn the PSP into a portable handheld GPS system. There was no mention of the long-rumored PSP Hard Drive.

Speaking of hard drives, there is still no confirmation on whether the PlayStation 3 Hard Drive will be standard, and we'll have to wait for E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo, which will take place in early May) for more information. But Harrison did say, "The hard disk drive is a key feature of the PlayStation 3 not just for games, but also downloading music and watching movies."

At his keynote, it was announced that Sony would ship 1 million units a month worldwide and that they are not too worried about experiencing the supply problems that Microsoft had with the Xbox 360, says Harrison, "I think you can see from our history that Sony has been good about meeting consumer demand with supply. However, some people will be disappointed; it's inevitable with any consumer hardware launch."

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